

Commonwealth Update

DEREK INGRAM

ABSTRACT *In a year of major natural disasters earthquake hit one of the world's most inaccessible areas—northern Kashmir. Nearly 100 000 died. For the first time border posts along the disputed boundary were opened up. The removal of Indian Foreign Minister Natwar Singh over a report on the UN oil-for-food programme brought crisis to the Manmohan Singh government. The Sri Lankan Supreme Court ordered President Chandrika Kumaratunga to step down. Elections brought a Ramgoolam back to power in Mauritius. Zanzibar re-elected President Amani Karume and Helen Clark scraped home for a third term in New Zealand elections. Three eminent Commonwealth figures died—former prime ministers Eugenia Charles of Dominica and David Lange of New Zealand, and twice-president Milton Obote of Uganda. And Iceland teamed up with the Commonwealth to help fishermen in the South Pacific.*

Pakistan

An earthquake of 7.6 magnitude on 8 October 2005 devastated an area of 28 000 sq. km in the north, including some of the most inaccessible terrain in South Asia. The death toll rose to an estimated 87 000. Unicef said 17 000 children died in their classrooms. Some of the worst hit areas were along the disputed Kashmir border and the North West Frontier Province. The capital of Pakistan-controlled Kashmir, Muzaffarabad, and town of Balakot were 80% destroyed. For weeks afterwards people were stranded in the mountains without food and shelter as winter closed in. At least three million people were homeless. The UN said it was a worse disaster than the tsunami.

Huge international aid efforts were required in a year that had already brought the tsunami, repeated hurricanes in the Caribbean and other disasters such as the mudslides in Guatemala. The UN convened 60 countries in Geneva, but pledges for Pakistan fell far short of needs, some rich countries offering little or nothing. India offered £15 million. It also offered helicopters, but Pakistan refused to accept Indian pilots. Five border posts along the disputed boundary were opened up (7 November) to help humanitarian access.

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The UK came up with £33 million aid, second only to the USA, and responded to the call for Chinook helicopters. NATO produced 40 helicopters and the USA 24. The performance of Pakistani helicopters won high praise. Indian-controlled Kashmir was less severely hit, but still suffered 1300 people dead.

President Musharraf postponed the purchase of 80 F-16 jets from the USA (4 November) at a cost of £23 million each. The decision followed criticism that Pakistan had refused to cut its huge defence budget.

Two-phase elections to municipal councils were held over a week (18–25 August), setting the stage for provincial and national legislature elections planned for 2007. These were the first elections in Pakistan for three years and were held amid claims of vote-rigging. Clashes at polling stations killed 55 people. The MMS—an alliance of conservative religious parties—lost a lot of ground, with its share of the vote down from 76% to 23% in the North West Frontier Province. The Commonwealth sent an expert team of four led by Justice Anastasia Mason, chair of the Malawi Electoral Commission, to observe the process. It found that, although the polls were meant to be held on a non-party basis, the parties played a central role. The report said that for the next election parties should be officially integrated into the local government process. The team also found numbers of women in some provinces were prevented from contesting and voting. A record number of candidates was fielded—218 000, of whom 55 000 were women.

The Pakistani and Israeli foreign ministers met in Istanbul (1 August)—the first talks between the two, indicating a thaw in relations following the Israeli evacuation of the Gaza Strip. Later, during the UN General Assembly, Musharraf told the American Jewish Congress Israel could ‘extinguish’ motives for violence in the Middle East and make full diplomatic ties with Pakistan by giving Palestinians statehood.

A military court sentenced a soldier and four civilians to death (26 August) for plotting to assassinate Musharraf with car bombs on Christmas Day 2003. A soldier was also hanged for an earlier assassination attempt.

Women demonstrated in Karachi (16 September) calling for an apology from Musharraf for remarks he made to the *Washington Post* during the UN summit. He said rape was a “money-making concern” for women and that “a lot of people say if you want to go abroad and get a visa for Canada or citizenship and be a millionaire, get yourself raped”. Canadian Prime Minister Paul Martin complained to Musharraf on the sidelines of the summit. Human rights organizations protested, and in Pakistan so did the newspaper *Dawn*. Hundreds of women are raped or killed in the country every year in ‘honour’ attacks over such matters as extramarital affairs.

Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz met Afghan President Hamid Karzai in Kabul (24 July)—his first such visit. Afghan and US officials had criticized Pakistan for not preventing Taliban and al-Quaida insurgents sheltering in the wild areas of the North West Frontier Province and Waziristan. Aziz said 80 000 troops were deployed in the border areas.

In a meeting with US Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice (13 September) Musharraf said a 2400-km-long fence would be built on Pakistan’s border with Afghanistan. It would counter Afghan charges that Pakistan was letting Taliban

guerrillas use the North West Frontier Province and other areas to stop drug smuggling.

A new political party, the Pakistan Human Rights Party, was launched by former minister Julius Salik, a Roman Catholic and Nobel Peace Prize nominee. It would champion minorities and help the poor.

The National Assembly passed (18 August) a law requiring all *madrassas* (Islamic schools) to register with the state. They would be barred from promoting militancy and spreading religious hatred.

India

Natwar Singh was removed (7 November 2005) as foreign minister following a report into the UN oil-for-food programme written by former US Federal Reserve chairman Paul Volcker which named Singh and the Congress Party. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh took over the foreign minister's portfolio and ordered an inquiry by Supreme Court judge R. S. Pathak. Natwar Singh said the charges against himself and the Congress had no basis. The Volcker report said 2000 firms had made illegal payments to Saddam Hussein's government of Iraq.

Prime Minister Singh called (16 September 2005) for a reform of the Security Council to address the "gross imbalance of power" in the UN. The organization suffered a "democracy deficit" as it did not reflect the new realities. He added: "Until the UN becomes more representative of the contemporary world and more relevant to our concerns and aspirations, its ability to deliver on... its own charter and obligation will remain limited." India had campaigned hard with Japan, Brazil and Germany for an expansion of the five permanent Council seats.

Expansion of the manufacturing and service industries pushed growth of the economy to 8.1% in April–June—1% up on the forecasts. World Bank President Paul Wolfowitz talked with Prime Minister Singh in New Delhi and announced (21 August) that India would be lent £1.7 billion a year for three years to improve the infrastructure of the rural areas—irrigation, drinking water, sanitation, roads, access to electricity, telecommunications and housing.

BP agreed (13 October) to build a £1.7 billion refinery in Punjab with the partly stated-owned Hindustan Petroleum. It would handle 180 000 barrels a day when coming on stream in 2009.

On a visit to Udaipur (8 September) British Prime Minister Tony Blair endorsed President George Bush's decision to extend to India nuclear technology cooperation. India has agreed to separate its military and civilian nuclear programmes and to inspection by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). It is not required to sign the Nuclear Test Ban treaty. As current president of the European Union, Blair said a more intense relationship with India was long overdue. After three years of talks India announced Indian Airlines would buy 43 European Airbus aircraft worth more than £1 billion. Airbus had lost out to Boeing for a contract for 35 large planes for Air India.

India supported an International Atomic Energy Agency resolution that found Iran in 'non-compliance' with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Iran reacted strongly against India's lining up with the EU and the USA, but India said it acted in

Iran's interests and aimed "to avert a major confrontation" between Tehran and the international community.

Indian businessmen became frustrated with actions of the Congress-led government and its communist allies. Subir Raha, chairman of the Oil and Natural Gas Corporation, took advertisements in national newspapers (22 September) to complain about Petroleum Minister Mani Shankar Aiyar and ministerial meddling in company affairs. Rata Tata, chairman of the Tata Group, also complained that economic reform had been almost abandoned.

A new body set up by the Singh government, the National Manufacturing Competitiveness Council, released a national strategy (26 September) that said India must make it easier for companies to fire workers, cut down on pointless inspections, improve its infrastructure and overhaul its import duties. It said public sector companies must be given "full managerial and commercial autonomy".

Kolkata was coming to terms with the IT age. In four years West Bengal, long led by Marxist governments, had increased its share of IT revenues to more than 5% of the Indian total. Its target was 15% by 2010. IT Minister Manab Mukherjee said "We have to play the same capitalist games as everywhere else. We will use the gains to help our poor." In a new town outside Kolkata 48 companies had bought land. In the suburb called Salt Lake International Business Machines had created its second biggest base in India with 4000 software engineers.

A law came into force nationwide in October giving Indians new rights to access government information and private sector material held by official bodies. Nine states already have freedom of information legislation, but the new law is stronger and said to be some of the most sweeping in the world, providing a weapon against corruption and bad governance.

Maharashtra state banned from 24 September the manufacture, sale and use of all plastic bags. It said they choked drainage systems in monsoon rains. Environmentalists were delighted, but the makers said 1000 plants would be shut and 100 000 people put out of work.

The Centre for Social Research said that 6300 women were killed in 2003 by their husbands' families and 50 700 treated cruelly by husbands and wives because of arguments over money. Many violent disputes are about dowry money. A Protection of Women against Domestic Violence Bill was introduced in parliament in August.

The deadliest outbreak of Japanese encephalitis for three decades spread across northern India in August–September. Flooded ricefields on the Gangetic Plains of Uttar Pradesh provide breeding grounds for the mosquitos that carry the disease from pigs to humans. The death toll rose above 1000.

Lal Krishna Advani, former deputy prime minister, agreed to step down as president of the opposition BJP in December, but remained leader of the opposition in parliament.

The government approved a £17.8 million plan for an early warning system for ocean disasters, such as the tsunami.

Prime Minister Singh inaugurated a two-day Commonwealth meeting in New Delhi on Development and Democracy (25–26 August). Politicians, representatives from the corporate sector, academe and civil society from eight Commonwealth Asian countries took part. They discussed ways of strengthening core democratic processes and institutions, accountability, and tackling corruption. Meetings are

planned for other regions—a follow-up to the report on Democracy and Development produced before the Abuja CHOGM under the chairmanship of Dr Singh before he became prime minister.

India and Pakistan

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and President Pervez Musharraf met at the UN World Summit (15 September 2005) and agreed not to allow acts of terrorism to impede the peace process. A statement said they were committed “to ensure a peaceful settlement of all pending issues, including Jammu and Kashmir, to the satisfaction of both sides”. Musharraf told the summit “our nations must not be trapped by hate and history”. In a meeting with President Bush earlier, Singh had accused Pakistan of facilitating terrorism. Musharraf’s spokesman on Indian TV reported Singh as saying Pakistan still controlled “the flow of terror” into Indian-administered Kashmir.

The two countries agreed to withdraw troops from the Himalayan battlefield on the Siachen glacier. But, said Indian Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee (28 September), Pakistan did not agree with an Indian demand that each mark its military position before leaving.

Two other positive developments took place in mid-2005. Muslim separatist leaders from Indian Kashmir crossed the ceasefire line and went to Muzaffarabad (2 June). They got a rousing welcome. India and Pakistan agreed (30 August) to free hundreds of civilians held in each other’s jails and to provide better consular access to prisoners. Many were fishermen and others who had wandered across the poorly marked borders and were accused of spying.

Singh held talks in Delhi (5 September) with a delegation led by chairman Mirwaiz Omar Farooq, of the moderate faction of the separatist group, the All-Parties Hurriyet Conference. In September the Delhi government cleared for release 50 people detained in Jammu and Kashmir for links with militant groups.

Pakistan successfully tested a ground-launched cruise missile (11 August). India was not notified, but Pakistan said the agreement on formal notification did not require it.

Bangladesh

The government introduced a two-day weekend from 10 September 2005 to cut rising costs caused by increased oil prices and a crop shortfall. Civil servants would have to work an extra hour on normal working days. The idea was to reduce use of transport, cut fuel bills and ease pressure on foreign exchange needed to import oil. Some private companies said they could not afford to follow the public sector and refused to implement the change.

The Asian Development Bank agreed to loan Bangladesh £24.4 million to stimulate commercial activity in agriculture. About 28 000 small-scale farms would get help.

The Tata Group of India unveiled a plan to make its largest foreign investment in Bangladesh—£1.4–1.7 billion in fertilizer, steel and power plants. Experts reported that the additions to Bangladesh’s infrastructure would greatly improve the country’s

trading position by boosting exports of finished steel and easing power shortages. They said Tata's presence could add 1.9% to nominal gross domestic product growth.

Bangladesh and India agreed to reduce their claims for water from the Teesta river which flows between the two. Water ministers of the two countries said new talks would start at once on sharing its waters. Bangladesh and India have 50 rivers in common, but the only sharing agreement involves the Ganges river. Indian Water Resources Minister Priya Dasmunshi also said India would not now link the Ganges and the Brahmaputra in a multi-million pound project which environmentalists oppose. The two countries agreed to share more advance information on flood forecasting.

Indian troops fired on hundreds of Bangladeshi soldiers and workers to stop a river embankment being built near the border (20 August). Gun battles between border guards went on for more than 24 hours.

Sri Lanka

The Supreme Court ruled (26 August 2005) that President Chandrika Kumaratunga must leave office by late December. Constitutionally she could not serve a third term, but she had argued that a year left over from her first term entitled her to stay in power until late 2006. The court decision brought to an end a dynastic era in which her family had governed on and off since the mid-1950s.

The country went to the polls peacefully on 17 November. The ruling Sri Lanka Freedom Party retained power and Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapakse, 60, was elected president with more than 4.8 million votes—just over 50% of the popular vote and only 180 000 ahead of opposition leader Ranil Wickremasinghe of the United National Party. Turnout was 75% in the south and west, but in the north and east almost no Tamils voted. In Jaffna only 0.014% of 700 000 registered voters turned out.

In an anti-privatization campaign Rajapakse took a hard line on talks with the Tamil Tigers. Afterwards he said he was ready for talks but wanted a new peace process that would not tolerate 'terrorism'. He named a hardliner, Tattasiri Wickremnayake, 73, as prime minister, and a 25-strong cabinet that left out the Sinhala nationalist JVP and the Buddhist monk party. In the new cabinet Anura Bandaranaike, brother of Chandrika Kumaratunga and expected to become prime minister, was made tourism minister.

In a statement from New York (19 September) donor countries—the USA, EU, Japan and Norway—urged all sides in the upcoming election not to undermine the peace process following the assassination of foreign minister Lakshman Kadirgamar. The EU banned members of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam from visiting member states.

The government reversed a decision to lower the age of consensual sex from 16 to 13. Under current law sexual relations with a girl under 16 are treated as rape, whether consensual or not. A flood of calls from incensed citizens changed the government's mind.

Tamil-language TV news presenter Relangi Savaraja and her husband were shot dead in a Colombo travel agency by unidentified gunmen (12 August). She worked for a state-owned corporation, but she and her husband were also reported to be members of a political party that was rival to the Tigers.

Maldives

Mohammed Nasheed, chairman of the newly registered Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP), and 131 other people were arrested in four days of unrest (12–15 August 2005) during demonstrations held to urge the release of political prisoners. About 300 police had been held in a military training camp for refusing to use strong tactics against the demonstrators. Nasheed was charged with terrorism for allegedly inciting violence against the president.

A month earlier, in the wake of the introduction of multi-party democracy, President Abdul Gayoom announced a major cabinet reshuffle “to inject new dynamism into the government and to keep pace with constitutional reform”. Pro-democracy campaigner Gasim Ibrahim, said to be the wealthiest businessman in the Maldives, became finance minister.

Tan Sri Musa Hitam, former deputy prime minister of Malaysia, visited Maldives (23–24 June) as the Commonwealth Secretary-General’s special envoy. He met President Gayoom and the party leaders to extend Commonwealth support for the moves to multipartyism.

At a meeting of the MDP in mid-July all but 17 of the 1217 people elected Gayoom as party leader. The party claims 25 000 members. Four other parties were newly registered. Gayoom has ruled for 25 years. He is the longest serving leader in Asia.

Malaysia

Former deputy prime minister Anwar Ibrahim won £660 000 in libel damages (18 August) against an author who alleged sexual impropriety and incompetence played a role in his downfall in 1998. The judge said there was no substance to the book. Anwar, held in jail for six years for corruption, said he was vindicated and it was a matter of honour and truth.

Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi declared a haze emergency (11 August) as the air pollutants index rose above the 500-point level in Kuala Selangor and Port Klang—the worst such crisis since 1997. Kuala Lumpur was also affected. The pollution was again caused by forest fires in Sumatra.

Police of Terengganu state raided the commune of the so-called Sky Kingdom (3 July), arresting 21 sect members for having documents contrary to Islam. Earlier the authorities had ordered the demolition of the sect’s eccentric buildings, one shaped like a giant teapot. Fifty masked raiders attacked the Sky Kingdom and its leader Ayah Pin went into hiding.

UK High Commissioner Bruce Cleghorn and other European diplomats walked out of a conference of the Malaysian Human Rights Commission when former prime minister Mahathir Mohamad attacked UK and US double standards on human rights and terrorism (9 September).

Singapore

Outgoing US ambassador Frank Lavin criticized the country’s restriction on free speech at a farewell meeting in October 2005. The government, he said, would “pay an increasing price for not allowing full participation of its free citizens”. It was rare

for a US official in Singapore to deliver such a rebuke. Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said he did not believe Singapore should adopt an “idealised form” of liberal democracy.

Lee warned (18 September) penalties would be increased for anyone who used the internet to inflame racial hatred. The Sedition Act, introduced by the colonial government 57 years ago, was used for the first time to arrest two Singaporeans accused of making racial slurs on internet message boards. For insulting the Muslim Malay minority, one was jailed for a month, the other for a symbolic day. The internet is the last largely uncensored medium in Singapore.

S. R. Nathan, 81, was declared president (17 August) for a second six-year term. The elections commission said no suitable challengers had come forward. Wee Kim Wee, fourth president and the last to be elected by parliament, died (2 May) aged 89.

Brunei

The UK Court of Appeal ordered Prince Jefri Bolkiah, younger brother of the Sultan and former finance minister and chairman of the Brunei Investment Authority, to disclose details of how he still funded a profligate lifestyle of £275 000 a month (6 September 2005). In 2001 he had been ordered to return to the state all assets bought with misappropriated Authority funds; something like £3 billion had been raised on items of his property. Afterwards he had claimed his resources were exhausted.

The National Development Party was registered as a political party from 31 August—a further step towards gradual reform that began with the revival of the Legislative Council in 2004.

Hong Kong

Eleven pro-democracy politicians were among 60 legislators invited for a two-day visit to the mainland (25 September 2005). Led by Chief Executive Donald Tsang, they were taken to four cities and met Zhang Dejiang, Communist party secretary of Guangdong province and a politburo member, although only for 90 minutes at the end of the trip. They demanded the political ‘rehabilitation’ of Tiananmen Square protesters and rapid democratic reform in Hong Kong. The 11 included Leung Kwok-hung, Martin Lee, Lee Cheuk-yan and Emily Lau, who called for an end to one-party rule in China. Pro-democracy politicians had been barred from crossing into the mainland for 10 years. Tsang said the trip was “a very good start”.

The popularity of Tsang, who took over in June, was shown by a poll conducted by Hong Kong University that found 62% of people trusted the administration, the highest number since the return to Chinese sovereignty in 1997. Eight months earlier the satisfaction rating was 41%.

The Court of Final Appeal overturned (5 May) the conviction of eight members of the Falun Gong spiritual sect for obstructing and assaulting police at a demonstration. Falun Gong, banned and suppressed in the mainland, remains legal in Hong Kong and the case was seen as a test of the judiciary’s independence.

The £1.8 billion Disneyland resort on Lantau Island—five years in the building—opened its doors (12 September) expecting to attract six million visitors in its first

year. One-third would come from China. The ticket price (£25) is nearly two weeks wages for the average Chinese mainland family. Under a 1999 deal the Hong Kong government paid £1.2 billion for reclaiming land and providing infrastructure.

Commonwealth Pacific Fund

Commonwealth Secretary-General Don McKinnon and Prime Minister Sir Michael Somare of Papua New Guinea launched at the Pacific Islands Forum summit in Port Moresby an £11.5 million investment fund for the Pacific Islands (27 October 2005). The so-called Kula II Fund is the second to be set up in the region under the Commonwealth Private Investment Initiative. Similar funds have been set up to support and promote commercially viable private enterprises in three other Commonwealth regions. Small island states have special difficulty accessing international capital markets at reasonable cost.

Papua New Guinea

Prime Minister Sir Michael Somare accused Australia (15 September 2005) of trying to “impose its will” on Papua New Guinea and to control the Pacific region. He said he did not have a good working relationship with Foreign Minister Alexander Downer, who never consulted him on local issues.

Police Minister Bira Kimisopa responded to a scathing report by the US-based Human Rights Watch detailing extreme physical violence by the police, such as the gang-rape of young girls in custody. He admitted incidents and said: “That’s something we are not proud of...we’re going to change that culture...we’re working extremely hard.” The report (31 August) said children were routinely beaten and kicked, knifed and even shot by police officers. Its researchers called on Australia to intervene to make the police more accountable. Australia was sending a group of its own police officers who would provide training. The report praised one development—the recent setting up of juvenile courts.

An earthquake of 7.3 magnitude hit near the New Ireland region (9 September) 60 miles underground. No damage was reported.

Nauru

Australia said in October 2005 that it would remove almost all the asylum seekers it was holding in its offshore processing centre on Nauru. Over four years 1200 people, mostly Iraqis and Afghans, had been detained on the island. The last two to be held, regarded as security risks, would be deported. Australian Prime Minister John Howard said the detention centre would stay open as an important part of his government’s immigration policy. The policy had been an outstanding success and the flow of people was down to a trickle.

Tonga

Public service workers went on strike in late July 2005 and paralyzed most services until 5 September. Under a settlement with the government demands for pay

increases ranging from 60% to 80% were largely agreed. Also conceded was a demand for a royal commission on democratic reform of the constitution. After the strike 10 000 protesters took to the streets—the largest demonstration in Tonga's history. They presented a petition calling on King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV to dismiss Prime Minister Prince 'Ulukalala Lavaka Ata and his entire cabinet. The King received the petition just after returning from undergoing medical tests in New Zealand.

Fiji Islands

A Promotion of Reconciliation, Tolerance and Unity Bill stirred controversy in mid-2005. It proposed to set up a Reconciliation and Unity Commission and a Promotion of Reconciliation, Tolerance and Unity Council. Two main provisions caused the problems: amnesty for 'political crimes' committed during the May 2000 coup and compensation for victims. It was argued that the aim had been to free those already convicted and stop investigations and trials of perpetrators still to be charged.

Maciu Navakasuasua, a legislator now in Australia who was jailed for his part in the coup staged by George Speight in 2000, was reported to have claimed (20 September) that Speight was only a front man and the organizer was the indigenous Nationalist Tako Lavo Party.

Solomon Islands

A newly formed Reconciliation and Rehabilitation Task Force for Guadalcanal Province met (9 September 2005) and planned to heal the consequences of the ethnic conflict in Guadalcanal island and its aftermath.

A new political party, the Solomon Islands Social Credit Party, was set up with former prime minister Manasseh Sogavare as its president. It blamed excessive government borrowing for the poor economic situation.

Australia

The government announced (8 September 2005) new security laws to toughen citizenship procedures. These would enable federal police to use electronic tracking devices to follow terrorism suspects and to hold them for up to 14 days without charge. State leaders agreed to back the laws if Prime Minister John Howard promised they would be reviewed after five years. The changes were prompted by the London tube bombings of 7 July. In October Howard said he would double the staff of the main intelligence agency to counter domestic terrorism. He said: "London drove home to us that it could have happened here". He called a meeting of 14 Islamic leaders to co-opt moderate members of the 350 000 Muslim community to fight domestic extremism. Australian Muslims total 350 000. Two Australians died in the Bali restaurant bombings on 1 October.

The Senate was recalled (3 November) to rush further security law changes through parliament following a statement from Howard that he had details of an imminent terrorist attack. Five days later 17 people, including a Muslim cleric who supported Osama bin Laden, were arrested and charged after raids on homes in

Sydney and Melbourne. Police said they had disrupted a ‘catastrophic’ operation. The new laws made it easier for police to arrest suspects believed to be in the early stages of planning an attack.

Defence Minister Robert Hill began talks in Manila with the Philippines to allow Australian soldiers to train and hold military exercises, particularly in counter-terrorism, with Filipino troops. Philippines Defence Secretary Avelino Cruz said (18 October) similar agreements were being discussed with Malaysia and Singapore.

Negotiations with China got under way in August 2005 for a safeguard agreement allowing Australia to export uranium. Foreign Minister Alexander Downer said (17 October) that, provided the material was not used militarily, Australia might even be prepared to let China explore for and mine uranium. The opposition Labor Party is opposed to opening any new uranium mines. Australia has 40% of the world’s known uranium reserves, but only three mines are operating, partly because of a ban on new mines. It has only one nuclear reactor. Sales of mining rights to China could be extremely lucrative to Australia.

Former prime minister Bob Hawke said (27 September) the geology of Australia would make it the ideal place to store the world’s nuclear waste. The funds generated could be used to improve the lives of Aborigines or to tackle environmental problems. Health minister Tony Abbott called the idea “visionary”.

In August the country abandoned Greenwich Mean Time and adopted a new national standard based on the atomic clock. Australians would henceforth adjust their chronometers according to the ultra-precise vibrations of a caesium 133 atom—Coordinated Universal Time (UTC). New Zealand, Singapore, the USA and most of Europe are already on UTC.

Australian doctors Robin Warren and Barry Marshall won the Nobel prize for medicine (3 October) for discovering that bacteria—not stress and poor diet—cause peptic ulcers. Lord May, Australian president of the Royal Society in London, said it was “one of the most radical and important changes in the last 50 years in the perception of a medical condition”.

John Brogden, 36, Liberal Party leader in New South Wales, resigned (29 August) after he had called the Malaysian-born wife of former state leader Bob Carr “a mail-order bride”. Carr had demanded Brogden’s removal and Liberal Prime Minister John Howard condemned the comments. Brogden apologized and said he had acted dishonourably. Two days later he walked into his electoral office in Sydney, slashed his wrists and collapsed.

An inquest on prime minister Harold Holt, who died 38 years ago just 22 months after he had become prime minister, decided (2 December) he had drowned in heavy surf. Holt disappeared swimming off Cheviot beach, near Melbourne. He was officially declared drowned on 17 December 1967, but the police file remained technically open. In those days no inquest could be held if a body could not be found—a law changed in 1985. After Holt vanished many stories were put about—one that he had been a Chinese spy and sought political asylum in a Chinese midget submarine.

The giant poisonous cane toads introduced from Hawaii in 1935 to kill beetles and which have since spread in their millions across north Australia were found to be vulnerable to the ultra-violet lights used in discos—partly because of the swarms of insects the lights attract. In the first months of 2005 large numbers of toads were caught in this way and trapped.

Heritage Minister Ian Campbell handed back to China 10 000 fossils, including dinosaur eggs and ancient turtles, that had been illegally exported (30 September). Some dated back 230 million years. The fossils had been seized after a request from China in 2003.

The Parliamentary Services Department in Canberra banned security guards from using the word 'mate' in addressing politicians and visitors. They were told to say 'sir' or 'madam'. Within hours Prime Minister Howard said 'mate' must be reinstated—and it was. Howard said barring the classic Australian greeting was 'absurd and ridiculous'.

A single lightning strike killed 68 cows as they huddled under a tree in northern New South Wales.

For Australian cricketers and their fans 2005 was a year many will not easily forget. England took back the Ashes for the first time since 1987 in what many regard as one of the greatest series of Test matches since the rivalry began in 1887.

New Zealand

Prime Minister Helen Clark held on to power for a third term in a close general election (17 September 2005). Her Labour Party took 50 of the 122 seats with 41.1% of the vote while the National Party, led by former central bank governor Don Brash, took 48 seats with 39.1%. Labour nearly doubled its share of the vote since the 2002 election, mostly at the expense of the smaller parties. Brash had promised tax cuts, an end to privileges for the Maori minority and better relations with the USA. The newly formed Maori Party took four of the seven seats reserved for people of Maori descent—all from Labour. The party was launched because of Maori feelings that the principles of the 1840 Waitangi Treaty were being betrayed.

Clark formed a government after negotiating a formal coalition with the Progressive Party, which held one seat, and agreement with two small parties—New Zealand First (seven seats) and United Future (three seats)—to back her government in critical votes. Winston Peters, head of New Zealand First, which is anti-immigration, became foreign minister but without a seat in the cabinet. Clark said Peters would not handle refugee or trade issues. His party supports Labour's anti-nuclear stance and its commitment not to send troops to Iraq and Afghanistan.

David Lange, Labour prime minister 1983–89, died (13 August) aged 63. He offended the Reagan administration by refusing to let nuclear-powered or nuclear-armed ships into New Zealand ports—a policy that stands to this day. He also opposed French nuclear testing in the Pacific and was prime minister when the French bombed the Rainbow Warrior in Auckland harbour.

Caribbean

Three prime ministers and other key political party and civil society leaders from 12 Commonwealth countries and UK overseas territories in the Caribbean met in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago (25–27 July 2005), to discuss how governments and opposition parties can work together to strengthen the democratic process. A similar meeting for African countries was held in Maputo in 2004 and another such exercise was planned for the Pacific.

Dominica

Dame Eugenia Charles, first woman prime minister in the Caribbean, who led Dominica from 1980 to 1995, died (6 September 2005) aged 86. She came to fame internationally in 1983 when she invited President Ronald Reagan to put US troops into neighbouring Grenada, after the murder of its prime minister Maurice Bishop. She was at that time chairman of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States and afterwards appeared on television alongside Reagan. She was dubbed the Caribbean's Iron Lady.

Jamaica

Prime Minister P. J. Patterson's People's National Party government became the first in the Caribbean to make an agreement with Venezuela on a plan to supply oil to countries throughout the Caribbean at below-market terms. Under the deal Jamaica would pay £22 a barrel compared with £33 on the world market. Payment would be in goods and services and through low interest loans. Only two Caribbean countries did not join the venture—Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago. President Hugo Chavez said Venezuela—the world's fifth largest oil producer—was meeting the “call of conscience”. Its output is 3.1 million barrels a day.

The UK announced it would give Jamaica an extra £750 000 over three years to help fight crime (1 October). The funding was for more international police officers.

Trinidad and Tobago

Prime Minister Patrick Manning announced (1 September) that by 2020 Trinidad would adopt Spanish as an official language, so as to compete more effectively in Latin American markets. Spanish lessons would be compulsory in schools and civil servants would have to speak basic Spanish within five years. English has been the sole official language since colonization in 1797. Currently, only 1.4% of the people speak Spanish.

Ten thousand people marched through Port of Spain in protest at government failure to tackle the crime wave (23 October). The so-called Death March lasted seven hours and at one point 305 people dressed in white lay down in front of parliament to symbolize the number killed so far in 2005.

Manning asked the London Metropolitan Police and the FBI for teams to help deal with the crime surge. By October more people had been killed than in the whole of 2004. Full-page newspaper advertisements by 400 businesses held Manning personally responsible for the crime rise. He said the drug trade had created a criminal elite to corrupt public institutions.

Within a few weeks devices three times exploded in rubbish bins in the centre of Port of Spain. The first, near Parliament (12 July), killed two people and injured 13.

Grenada

A category three hurricane, Emily, did £100 million damage (13–14 July)—a new blow after the enormous losses from Hurricane Ivan in 2004.

St Lucia

Banana exports, once known as 'green gold', fell from 132 000 tons in 1992 to 42 000 tons in 2004. The number of farmers has fallen from 10 000 to 1800. Globalization and changes in the European market are blamed. The World Trade Organization (WTO) declared illegal (1 August) a new EU tariff on bananas favouring Latin American producers at the expense of small Caribbean exporters.

Bermuda

The island's leading purveyor of authentic Bermuda shorts closed down in July 2005. The island's traditional dress, it seems, was on the way out. Community Affairs Minister Dale Butler said his formal rig, shorts and black socks, raised eyebrows when he wore it at the last Olympic Games. Opinion polls showed young Bermudians thought shorts looked silly on males over 12.

Cayman Islands

The People's Progressive Movement (PPM), led by Kurt Tibbetts, defeated the ruling United Democratic Party (UDP), led by McKeever Bush, in elections to the Legislative Assembly (11 May 2005). In the 15-seat house the PPM held nine and the UDP five seats. The elections had been delayed for six months after Hurricane Ivan. The UDP defeat was said to be because the government had downplayed the damage to protect tourism and the financial sector.

Stuart Jack was appointed to succeed Bruce Dinwiddie as governor (24 July 2005).

Turks and Caicos Islands

When Richard Tauwhare was sworn in as governor (11 July 2005) he was, at the request of Chief Minister Michael Misick, the first to wear a business suit rather than traditional ceremonial dress.

Guyana

Home Affairs Minister Ronald Gajraj resigned (27 April 2005), although he had been exonerated by a presidential commission set up to investigate allegations that he directed a death squad blamed for assassinations. The US State Department, EU and Inter-American Development Bank all questioned the commission's findings.

Canada

The first report of an inquiry by Justice John Gomery (1 October 2005) criticized former prime minister Jean Chretien and several aides for letting millions of dollars earmarked for an anti-separatist campaign in Quebec in the 1990s be channelled to the ruling Liberal party and friendly agencies. Prime Minister Paul Martin, finance minister in the 1990s, was exonerated. He said the Liberals would repay £530 000 to the government. Ten people named in the report would be banned from holding

party membership. The opposition said the report proved pervasive corruption among the Liberals. Martin promised to call a general election within 30 days of the final report.

Jack Layton, leader of the New Democratic Party (NDP), said (7 November) his party could no longer support the minority Liberal government. His decision put the government in an increasingly precarious position.

David Dingwall, head of the Royal Canadian Mint, resigned after disclosures that the expenses of his office had reached £300 000 in 2004.

Following the summer spat with Denmark over the uninhabited rock called Hans Island, two Canadian warships were sent in August to the far northern Arctic port of Churchill. It was the first naval visit there for 30 years. Canada aimed to display its territorial sovereignty over parts of the Arctic it believes are within its borders. Big issues are involved: global warming, for example, may make the North-West Passage passable for ships for the first time.

A report by former Attorney-General of Ontario Marion Boyd in December 2004 recommended that Islamic law should be used in the province to settle issues such as divorce and child custody. Reaction was strong and gathered strength in the months that followed. Women's rights activists marched in protest in 11 cities, including Toronto, Ottawa, Waterloo, Montreal and Victoria, and in several European cities such as Stockholm, Amsterdam, Paris and London (8 September 2005). After lengthy study of the report Premier Dalton McGuinty firmly rejected the proposals. He said: "There will be no Sharia law in Ontario. There will be no religious arbitration in Ontario. There will be one law for all Ontarians." Acceptance would have made Ontario the first Western jurisdiction to allow the use of Sharia, although it has allowed Catholic and Jewish faith-based tribunals to resolve family disputes on a voluntary basis since 1991. The 2001 census showed Canada has 600 000 Muslims.

The Supreme Court ruled (29 September) that British Columbia could sue the tobacco industry to recover health care costs resulting from smoking. The ruling was expected to set off lawsuits in other provinces that could cost the industry tens of billions. In British Columbia alone the figure could run to £4 billion.

The Supreme Court in Ottawa ruled unanimously that Canadian provinces could sue tobacco companies for the health costs of smoking. The decision cleared the way for claims that could total £33 billion.

After a visit to China Natural Resources Minister John McCallum warned the USA (16 October) that oil exports from Alberta to China could reach 450 000 barrels a day within six years unless Washington climbs down in its trade dispute over Canadian timber exports to the USA. The Alberta sands oil is the largest known deposit of hydrocarbons in the world. Petro-China has already signed up to take 200 000 barrels a day across the Pacific. A pipeline is planned to link Alberta with a terminal at Kitimat on the Pacific coast. The long-standing timber row is over tariffs imposed on more than £3 billion of imports from Canada.

After disagreement over the issue of temporary employees the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) locked out union members of the Canadian Media Guild (15 August). More than 5000 people were involved, including journalists and technicians. TV and radio schedules were filled with repeats. Managers read newscasts. Eventually the management backed down on its strongest demands and an agreement was ratified by 88% of the union members. The lockout

led to a debate as to whether CBC television should be so commercially driven. The lockout ended on 10 October.

The Liberal Party (LPC), led by Gordon Campbell, was re-elected for a second term in a British Columbia general election (17 May), but its majority was down from 75 seats in 2001 to 13.

Nigeria

The 19-member Paris Club of creditor nations agreed a debt relief deal with Nigeria worth £10 billion (20 October 2005). It said it was impressed by Nigeria's economic programme. A strong factor in Nigeria's case for relief was the fact that large sums of money it received were lent to corrupt military dictators. Nearly £20 billion is owed to the Club. In September Nigeria said it had recovered £257 million found in Swiss banks linked to Sani Abacha. It was still searching for funds in other countries, including the UK, Luxembourg, Liechtenstein and Austria. The Paris Club deal was quite separate from the plan agreed by the Group of Eight leaders at their July summit in Scotland, under which some African countries would see their debts wiped clean.

The Swiss Justice Ministry ordered banks in Switzerland to return to Nigeria £170 million in funds seized from accounts linked to Abacha. The government had delayed repayment until it was guaranteed that the funds would go towards development projects. A second instalment would follow.

Ijaw leader Mujahid Dokubo-Asari, self-styled Lord of the Creeks, was arrested in Abuja for alleged treason following a newspaper interview calling for the break-up of the country. Within hours more than 100 militants stormed the Idama oil plant operated by Chevron in the southern Nigeria delta and forced it to close (22 September). In Port Harcourt hundreds of supporters of the Ijaw leader roamed the streets and burned tyres to block major roads. The arrest was seen as part of a government drive against 'oil bunkering'—siphoning oil from Delta pipelines into private barges by night. The oil is sold on the black market. Bunkering is said to account for 10% of Nigeria's oil output. Asari defends bunkering, saying "We own the oil—the thieves are the people in Abuja". The Chevron plant reopened within days.

Just before his arrest British police held at London airport (15 September) Diepreye Alamiyeseigha, governor of oil-producing Bayelsa state. They said they found £1 million in cash in a house he owned. He appeared in a magistrate's court accused of laundering £1.8 million found in cash and in bank accounts. He was denied bail. He had been under investigation by Nigeria's anti-corruption body for three years, but under Nigerian law he is immune from prosecution while in office. In 2004 Governor Joshua Dariye of Plateau State was arrested in London and questioned about £1 million, but he was given bail and went back to Nigeria.

Orji Uzor Kalu, governor of Abia state, accused President Olusegun Obasanjo of receiving commissions for oil contracts and holding illegal foreign bank accounts. Obasanjo agreed to be investigated by the anti-corruption body which he set up in 1999 as part of his pledge to fight corruption. Kalu, who said he would run for president in 2007, was also under investigation by the same body.

Nuhu Ribadu, head of the anti-corruption Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, told the BBC (17 October) his agency was pursuing certain state governors who have been “stealing with impunity”. Since the commission was set up there has been no significant conviction.

Tension developed in August between Obasanjo and his Vice-President Atiku Abubakar, who was seen as a candidate to succeed when Obasanjo completes his second term. Leaders of the ruling People’s Democratic Party called on Atiku to stay loyal or resign.

Thousands demonstrated in Lagos (14 September) in protest against subsidy cuts that have led to a 30% rise in fuel costs. Among them were Nobel prizewinner Wole Soyinka and the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Lagos.

Nigeria withdrew its 120-strong police contingent from the peacekeeping mission in Kinshasa, Congo. Spokesman Haz Iwendi said 10 officers had been accused of sexually harassing local women and “when one is contaminated, the whole bunch is contaminated. We have contingents in 19 countries and we want to send a message that if one finger collects oil the whole hand is stained”.

In October Obasanjo was active in his West African peacekeeping role. He met the 22 presidential candidates in Liberia’s first post-war election (7 October), subsequently won by Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, who became Africa’s first woman president. Then he went to Senegal (21 October) to mediate in its border feud with The Gambia.

Obasanjo’s wife Stella died suddenly (22 October), aged 59, after a cosmetic operation at a clinic in Marbella, Spain. She was transferred to a hospital but died on the way. She had seemed in good health. The president was that night dealing with a national tragedy—the crash of an airliner after taking off for Abuja from Lagos in a storm. All 117 on board were killed. They included several government and ECOWAS officials.

Sierra Leone

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan set up an Integrated Office (UNIOSIL) from 1 January 2006. It would help conduct the 2007 elections, set up a human rights commission, and coordinate moves against movement of small arms, human trafficking and smuggling.

The Gambia

President Abdoulaye Wade of neighbouring Senegal suggested building a tunnel under The Gambia, which is only 35 km wide, as one way of solving the escalating crisis between the two countries. He claimed China had offered to build it. The Gambia has a stranglehold on the best routes between the north and south of Senegal and the crisis developed because of increased ferry charges. Both economies were being hit.

Ghana

For its 20 million people Ghana has only 1500 doctors. Two-thirds of young doctors have been leaving the country within three years of graduation. Doctors as well as

nurses were heading for the UK, USA and Canada. The problem was highlighted (27 June 2005) at the British Medical Association conference in Manchester by Dr Victor Dedjoe, assistant general secretary of the Ghanaian Medical Association, who had been invited to address the conference. He got a standing ovation. BMA chairman James Johnson said that since 1999 Ghana had lost more nurses than it could train. He told the delegates: “This isn’t live aid. It’s reverse aid”.

Cameroon

The National Academy of Sciences in London was told (27 September) that without emergency intervention Lakes Nyos and Monoun are set for potentially devastating explosions, releasing clouds of carbon dioxide that could wipe out entire communities around their shores. In 1986 a cloud of gas engulfed villages near Nyos and killed up to 1500 people. Four years ago engineers installed pipes to suck CO₂ from the lake bottoms and release it harmlessly into the air. Now a team of scientists had warned that each lake must have four more such pipes by 2010 to avoid another catastrophe.

A 10-year survey by scientists from Kew Gardens, UK, discovered 200 hitherto unknown plants, including species of coffee, orchid and fig. The team said the finds in the Kupe-Bakossi region contained a greater diversity of species than at any other site in tropical Africa.

Uganda

The International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for Joseph Kony, leader of the rebel Lord’s Resistance Army and four other members (5 October 2005)—the first to be issued by the Hague-based court since it began functioning in 2002.

Colonel Kizza Besigye, leader of the opposition Forum for Democratic Change, flew back to Uganda (26 October) after four years of self-imposed exile in South Africa. Besigye, formerly Museveni’s personal doctor, was expected to run in the April 2006 elections. Museveni, now 18 years in power, had said he would not run again as president, but an amendment to the constitution allowed him a third term.

A new coalition of five parties, the Parties Forum, was set up in preparation for the March elections. Its leader was Emmanuel Tumusiime.

Milton Obote, first prime minister after independence in 1962, died in a Johannesburg hospital (10 October 2005) aged 80. He was given a lying-in-state in the Kampala parliament and a state funeral. President Yoweri Museveni spoke of the need for reconciliation in Uganda, although attempts at reconciliation between the two men failed during Obote’s exile in Zambia. Obote was overthrown for the second time in 1985 by Museveni, having been ousted by Idi Amin while he was absent at the Commonwealth heads of government meeting in Singapore in 1971. He returned to power when Tanzanian troops invaded Uganda and overthrew Amin in 1979.

Tanzania

Amani Karume of the ruling Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) was re-elected President of Zanzibar in elections (30 October 2005) with 239 832 votes (53%)

against 207 773 (46%) for Seif Sharif Hamad of the opposition Civic United Front (CUF). CCM also held its majority in the 50-seat legislature with 30 seats against 19 for CUF. Hamad rejected the result and said the voting was rigged. Clashes took place on election day. Tear gas was fired and some unrest continued for three days. But the extreme violence of previous elections was absent. The security forces deployed 30 000 troops on the semi-autonomous islands. The Zanzibar electoral commission said the vote was free and fair.

The Tanzanian presidential, parliamentary and local elections were scheduled to take place on the same day as the Zanzibar election, but one of the vice-presidential candidates, Jumbe Rajaab Jumbe, of the Chadema party, died and those elections were postponed until 18 December.

Mozambique

A pioneering exercise in promoting accountability and effectiveness in governance was carried out in Maputo (27–29 July). It was a workshop attended by 23 Mozambican ministers, 11 deputy ministers, 20 permanent secretaries, and 14 presidential and ministerial advisers. President Armando Guebuza and Prime Minister Luisa Dias Diogo were also there. Among the facilitators were Sir Lloyd Sandiford, former prime minister of Barbados, Sir Nicholas Montagu, former chairman of the UK Inland Revenue Authority, and Neil Walter, former permanent secretary in the New Zealand foreign affairs ministry. The event was organized by the Commonwealth's Secretariat's Governance and Institutional Development Division and funded by the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation.

Kenya

Former president Daniel arap Moi rejected (29 August 2005) the draft new constitution two months before the November referendum. He said it would cause animosity and mistrust. Five ministers broke ranks with President Mwai Kibaki and called for a No vote.

Diplomats from 25 countries made a statement in Nairobi (28 September) condemning politically motivated violence, which they said was marring the referendum campaign. They said: "We expect a process that is informative, free, transparent and peaceful that permits freedom of press association and respect for human rights".

A South African-led consortium, Rift Valley Railways, won the right to run the Kenyan and Ugandan railways for 25 years from March 2006. It beat a rival bid from an Indian company.

Environmentalists vowed to stop a government decision to downgrade the status of Amboseli National Park to a reserve. The move would take management of the park and £2.5 million a year gate receipts from the Kenya Wildlife Service and hand it to the Masai-led local council. Amboseli, a fragile ecosystem, lies at the foot of Mt Kilimanjaro, Africa's highest mountain. The move aimed to win political support in the November referendum from the Masai, who have for long wanted to graze their cattle on land reserved for wildlife. The notice, slipped out quietly in

the government gazette (29 September), was spotted by conservationists. They formed a united front to take court action against the government.

Kenya Wildlife Service began moving in August 400 elephants one by one from the Shimba Hills National Reserve south of Mombasa to Tsavo East, the country's largest wildlife park 220 miles away. It is the first time such an operation has been attempted anywhere. The Shimba ecosystem can support only 300 elephants and now has 700. The £1.8 million operation, two years in the planning, involves 100 staff, lorries, trailers and vast containers, tranquilizer darts and sedatives for the seven-hour journey.

Mauritius

Navin Ramgoolam, leader of the Mauritius Labour Party, replaced Paul Berenger as prime minister after National Assembly elections (3 July 2005). The Mauritian Socialist Movement (MSM) and Mauritian Militant Movement (MMM) coalition handed over to the Social Alliance (SA) of five parties. The SA won 42 of the 70 seats against 24 for the MSM–MMM. Ramgoolam was prime minister from 1995 to 2000. He is the son of Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, prime minister from independence in 1968 until 1982.

Malawi

As James Morris, UN World Food Programme director, said (6 October 2005) that 12 million people in six countries stretching from Zambia to Lesotho would be at risk of starvation by January, it emerged that Malawi was worst hit. The country was gripped by severe drought with HIV/AIDS affecting 15% of the population. President Bingu wa Mutharika went to the UN to explain Malawi's plight. In mid-October he declared the whole country a disaster area. His political position remained insecure. Opposition MPs continued to press for his impeachment. Recent spending had included £264 000 on a limousine. On a four-day visit to Scotland in November Mutharika used a speech to the Scottish Parliament to defend himself against corruption allegations.

Mutharika dismissed Irrigation and Water Development Minister Gwanda Chakuamba (7 September). He was appointed only in July. After dismissal he called Mutharika "a brute" and a "drunk" and was arrested for slander. Chakuamba challenged Mutharika in the 2004 presidential elections but later joined his party.

Action Aid and the World Development Movement accused the UK of paying "phantom" aid to the poor by spending £700 000 of a £3 million democracy project in Malawi on hotel bills and meals for workers from US consultancies. It was a joint project with the USA. Pens, notebooks and other equipment were flown in from Washington because US aid rules said such items had to be bought from American firms. Hilary Benn, International Development Secretary, admitted mistakes on the project, which involved setting up parliamentary committees to scrutinize the work of government.

The IMF approved (5 August) a three-year arrangement under the Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility for £34 million.

Zambia

As copper prices soared to new levels because of demand from Russia, China and India—it reached up to £2400 a tonne in November 2005—Zambia continued to be plagued by problems in its main industry. Ndeni petroleum refinery closed because of lack of the cleansing agent naphtha, hitting output from the Konkola copper mines.. Preident Levy Mwanawasa sacked energy minister George Mpombo for flying to a Paris conference instead of tackling the fuel crisis. His succesor was Felix Mutati.

South African Airways began operating in Zambia—a move expected to boost tourism. Its managing director told a launch party in Lusaka that the company had been encouraged to invest because of the steady growth of the Zambian economy. But British Airways cancelled its only freight flights to Zambia because of the cost of fuel in Lusaka. It carried 40 tons of vegetables and flowers a week—one-third of the total. France was stepping up its investment in the country—in a new cement plant and a power project to rehabilitate Kariba and Victoria Falls.

Zimbabwe

Parliament adopted (2 September 2005) a 22-clause bill amending the constitution to create a 65-seat Senate, an institution abolished in 1987. In the new House 15 senators would be appointed by the president. Other legislation would put private schools under state control and ban civil servants from joining trade unions. It would also cancel freehold title to real estate and bar those stripped of their land from appealing to the courts. Landowners would be barred from receiving compensation. One clause gives the government powers “in the national interest” to stop people leaving the country.

A serious split developed in the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) over whether to contest elections for the new Senate. In October the MDC national council voted 33-31 in favour of contesting. Party leader Morgan Tsvangirai said he did not recognize the decision. He said he had used his casting vote to rule against participation. Party deputy secretary general Gift Chimanimire told MDC provincial councils to nominate candidates for the election. Tsvangirai ordered them to ignore these instructions. Deputy leader Gibson Sibanda accused the leader of having “wilfully violated” the MDC constitution. Party secretary-general Welshman Ncube favoured taking part in the senate poll and was among several senior members who stayed away from a national council meeting (5 November).

The IMF executive board deferred until March 2006 consideration of Zimbabwe’s expulsion from the Fund (9 September). It said the decision gave Zimbabwe a further opportunity to strengthen its cooperation “in terms of economic policies and payments”. Just before the meeting Zimbabwe repaid £163 million in arrears. Finance Minister Herbert Murerwa welcomed the respite and said he was sure a further £95 million arrears would be paid by March. Only one country has ever been expelled from the IMF—Czechoslovakia in 1954.

Deputy Agriculture Minister Silvester Nguni told the Zimbabwe Farmers Union (1 November) that many of those given land since 2000 had not the faintest idea about farming and this has led to food shortages. Many were doing “nothing” on their farms.

The government blocked a £16.6 million UN drive to provide food and medicine to Zimbabweans hit by the destruction of urban slum housing, but blankets, clean water and some food were distributed to 168 000 of the most vulnerable people. Unicef said 250 000 children were homeless.

In September government supporters seized five farms still owned by white farmers. About 500 remain, from the 4500 in 2000. The governor of the Reserve Bank, Gideon Gono, spoke out against farm seizures (12 October) days after government figures showed annual inflation had soared by one-third in one month to 359.8%. He said: "If you invade a coffee, tea, coal, wheat or fruit farm you...undermine the productive capacity of this economy, therefore causing inflation...the nation should rededicate itself to responsible behaviour".

The state-owned *Herald* said (22 August) the most recent census taken in August 2002 showed that fewer than 50 000 white people remained in the country. Since then the figure had continued to drop. Before independence in 1980 the figure was 293 000.

Fuel prices doubled twice in 10 weeks and 10 coal-fired locomotives were recommissioned because of the fuel shortage. In rural areas ambulances had begun using cattle to pull them.

President Robert Mugabe presided over a UN conference in Harare on food safety in Africa (3 October). He had offered to host the conference and 47 African nations sent 170 representatives. Mugabe defended the confiscation of white-owned farms and blamed food shortages on droughts and "weak food safety control systems". He accused the West of dumping genetically modified crops on the developing world. The opposition Movement for Democratic Change condemned the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and World Health Organisation (WHO) for giving Mugabe a platform.

Only days later Mugabe was given a platform at the FAO 60th anniversary celebrations in Rome. He called Blair and Bush international terrorists and compared Blair to Mussolini. US and British representatives said they were outraged at his behaviour.

The 2005 UN *Human Development Report* said average life expectancy in Zimbabwe was estimated at 36.9 years. Only Swaziland, Botswana and Lesotho had higher rates of mortality in the under-40s.

UK Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary Jack Straw and Culture Secretary Tessa Jowell wrote to the International Cricket Council (ICC) calling on it to review the fixtures programme in the light of Zimbabwe's "brutal crackdown on some of its most vulnerable citizens". They also asked the ICC to waive fines levied against countries which refused to play Zimbabwe (22 August).

Members of Zimbabwe's football team, the Warriors, which won the Confederation of Southern African Football Associations tournament (14 August), were to be handed 18 residential plots of land as a reward. The plots were where the slum clearance had taken place. Some of the team had been affected by the demolitions.

South Africa

President Thabo Mbeki called on the USA and EU to end farm subsidies within three years. He was speaking at the Clinton Global Initiative meeting in New York

after the summit of world leaders at the UN. He said the meeting had achieved no breakthrough on trade, producing only “empty rhetoric”. He asked how serious the developed world really was about addressing poverty.

Parliament passed a bill (1 November 2005) creating a State Diamond Trader “to promote equitable access to the local beneficiation of the Republic’s diamonds”. Producers would be required to offer the new trader a percentage of all diamonds produced. The bill could end the supremacy of de Beers’ London-based Diamond Trading Company (DTC). Representatives of the small polishing and cutting industry welcomed it because black people have no access to diamonds. Many granted licences are idle for want of rough stones. Anglo-American, which owns 45% of de Beers, said the law could end the DTC. De Beers announced (8 November) it would sell 26% of shares in its South African operation to black investors—“the most significant change in ownership since its formation in 1888”. In parliament in May the deputy minerals and mining minister expressed “exasperation and disappointment” with De Beers, saying its board was “lily white and male-dominated”.

Jacob Zuma, former deputy president and still deputy leader of the ruling African National Congress, appeared in court in Durban (11 October) on corruption charges. More than 2000 trade unionists sang and danced outside the court in a show of support. No pleas were entered and the court was adjourned for more investigation. In August police had raided his Johannesburg home and removed boxes of material.

General Secretary Zwanzima Vavi of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) attacked Mbeki (26 September) for “failure of leadership” in dealing with HIV/AIDS. He called it a “betrayal of our people and our struggle”.

For the first time since the end of apartheid a newspaper was censored. A court suspended publication of an article in *The Weekly Mail and Guardian* alleging that a state-owned petroleum company had paid large sums of money through an intermediary to the ruling ANC. The financial newspaper *Business Day* said police were stationed at the *Mail and Guardian’s* printing plant before the court ruling was made.

The Constitutional Court ruled (9 September) that a criminal case could be reopened against Wouter Basson, the chemical and biological warfare specialist of apartheid days, then nicknamed Dr Death. He was acquitted of numerous charges in 2002, but the government had argued that the judge was biased against the state.

Controversial mining magnate Brett Kebble, 42, was shot dead at the wheel of his car in the wealthy Melrose suburb of north Johannesburg (27 September). A month earlier he had been forced by shareholders to resign from three interlinking mining companies. He had close ties with the ruling African National Congress and authored black empowerment schemes for businessmen in the diamond and gold sectors.

Failure of two years of talks in September led to the compulsory purchase of a farm in Lichtenburg. It was to be handed over to descendants of its original black owners and whites feared it could mark the end of willing seller/willing buyer land reform policy. The government target was for the transfer of 30% of agricultural land to black owners by 2014, but 11 years after apartheid only 3% had been transferred. In South Africa 20% of farmland is owned by blacks and 80% by whites, although 77% of the population is black and 11% white.

After a three-month trial in Phalaborwa white farmer Mark Scott-Crossley, 37, was sent to jail for life for killing a black employee and throwing him to a pride of

lions. The man had been sacked for running a personal errand in work hours. Another employee was given 15 years for being an accomplice. The case made a strong impact in South Africa. The main labour union said the case showed black workers were being treated as badly as in the apartheid days.

A two-day annual Soweto wine festival was inaugurated on 2 September—centenary of the township. More than 80 wineries showcased 500 wines. It was another sign of the social transformation of Soweto from apartheid days only 10 years ago when wine was taboo in black families and beer drinking was confined to vast beerhalls.

Botswana

Police arrested 21 people as they tried to enter the Kalahari game reserve (26 September 2005). The demonstrators included Roy Sesana, a leader of Bushmen taking court action against the government to seek the right to live in the reserve, which is larger than Switzerland. Survival International claims the government wants to clear the reserve of its inhabitants to open up diamond production., but the government says it wants to consolidate remote communities in areas where they can receive public services. Most of the residents accepted payments to relocate, but 200 remain. In an effort to eject them in September they were refused radio licences.

Swaziland

King Mswati III signed a new constitution (26 July 2005) in the royal kraal at Ludzidzini. Two royal committees, headed by his brothers, had collected the views of Swazis and put them into a draft. The King said he was sure most Swazis supported the new constitution. However, the Swazi system of governance was not much changed. Ultimate power stayed in the King's hands.

The King halted (19 August) a four-year campaign to enforce chastity among teenagers. He had hoped to halt the spread of HIV/AIDS, but government figures showed that nearly one-third of 15–19-years-olds now carried the virus. Swazi girls had been told to wear a tasselled scarf as a badge of virginity. Now they were ordered to converge on the palace and deliver the tassels to be burned. The change had followed criticism of the King's own behaviour in continuing the tradition of taking a new bride each year. His aides said the ban had been imposed to discourage casual relationships, not marriage. A month after it was lifted Mswati took a 17-year-old as his 13th bride.

Cyprus

After a month of talks the 25 EU member governments agreed (21 September 2005) on the chief demand of Greece and Cyprus by calling on Turkey to move towards normal relations with Nicosia. It was felt that talks could now open that would eventually lead to Turkish membership of the EU. But Austria stayed unhappy about the prospect and Cyprus did not like the terms of an Anglo-French declaration emphasizing the need to support UN efforts to reunite the island. It had also complained that Turkey still bans its ships from docking at Turkish ports, despite a Turkish customs union with the EU.

In an encounter in the margins of the UN General Assembly in New York in September Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey told President Tassos Papadopoulos of Cyprus that Turkey had no intention of making concessions to secure the start of the EU negotiations. EU foreign ministers opened accession talks with Turkey in Luxembourg on 3 October as scheduled. Three weeks later US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice talked with Turkish Cypriot leader Mehmet Ali Talat in Washington. The Greek Cypriots were displeased, but Washington said the move signalled no change in US policy of non-recognition of Turkish Cyprus.

A Cypriot Boeing 737 airliner crashed near Athens (14 August) on its way from Larnaca to Prague, killing all 121 aboard.

Malta

The House of Representatives unanimously approved the treaty providing for an EU constitution (6 July 2005)—the 12th country to do so. Referendums in The Netherlands and Germany had rejected it in May and June.

UK

The Asylum and Immigration Tribunal ruled in a test case (14 October 2005) that a Zimbabwean asylum seeker would be at risk if he was sent back to Harare—even though in his asylum hearing he had been shown to be dishonest and fraudulent. His deportation was halted and hundreds of failed Zimbabwean asylum seekers were set to stay in Britain. The judges said they were alarmed at the lack of interest shown by Home Secretary Charles Clarke and the Home Office in what happened to those sent back. A British mission to Harare was strongly criticized for not finding any new facts. Immigration Minister Tony McNulty said the judgment left the whole asylum and immigration system open to abuse.

New figures (20 October) showed net migration into the UK in 2004 was 233 000—up 72 000 on 2003. Those from India, Pakistan and African Commonwealth states made up 113 000 and from Australia, New Zealand, Canada and South Africa 41 000.

Commonwealth Law Conference

Judges and lawyers from every member country attended the 50th Commonwealth Law Conference in London (11–15 September 2005).

At a meeting of Commonwealth Law Ministers in Accra (17–20 October). Commonwealth Deputy Secretary-General Florence Mugasha said the Commonwealth should focus not only on issues of international interest to its community but collaborate in pioneering new legal frameworks in areas such as counter-terrorism, money laundering, asset repatriation and anti-corruption.

Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG)

CMAG met during the UN General Assembly meeting in New York (17 September). The main business was to review developments in Pakistan since it last met in February. Its statement expressed concern at the slow progress being

made in democratization. It repeated that the holding by the same person (President Pervez Musharraf) of the offices of head of state and chief of army staff was “incompatible with the basic principles of democracy and the spirit of the Harare Commonwealth principles, as well as CMAG’s expectations”. Until the two offices were no longer combined in the same person, the process of democratization would not be irreversible. Musharraf was again urged to give up one of his offices “certainly no later than the end of the current presidential term in 2007”.

In 2005 CMAG consisted of the foreign ministers of Nigeria (chair), Samoa, The Bahamas, Canada, India, Malta, Sri Lanka and Tanzania.

Commonwealth Links with Iceland to Help Pacific

The Commonwealth linked up with Iceland to help fishermen in the South Pacific. In April 2005 it signed an agreement with the Icelandic foreign ministry to help conserve fish and prevent coastal environmental degradation. In June a joint mission visited the region to discuss help. The initiative is unique. Geoffrey Martin, the Secretariat’s strategic partnerships adviser, said: “It is surprising Iceland and the Pacific Islands authorities have not collaborated on this before”. Now the Commonwealth has made the link.

Around the Commonwealth

The annual meeting of finance ministers took place in Barbados (18–20 September). Looking ahead to the Hong Kong WTO ministerial conference in December, they pointed to the need for a major breakthrough and called for “an ambitious, successful and comprehensive outcome of the Doha Development Agenda, in particular the removal of agricultural subsidies”. They wanted the USA to take firmer action to right its fiscal and balance of payments deficits. Professor Jeffrey Sachs, who conducted the Millennium Review for the UN Secretary-General, presented his findings to the ministers.

Commonwealth foreign ministers met in New York (16 September). On their agenda were the Secretary-General’s good offices missions in such places as Swaziland, Zanzibar and Cameroon and the upcoming WTO meeting in Hong Kong. The Commonwealth ministerial committees on Belize and Guyana also met again in New York.

Permanent secretaries from nine African countries attended a study programme in Singapore (1–17 August) in support of the New Economic Programme for Africa’s Development (NEPAD). It aimed to look at infrastructure for national development and examined Singapore as a model.

Courses on human rights promoted by the Human Rights Unit of the Commonwealth Secretariat were held in India during 2005 with the commitment of four universities in Mumbai. Two courses for police officers were held at an open university in Nashik, India, in July.

The 20th birthday of the Commonwealth Secretariat’s Debt Recording and Managing System (CS-DRMS) was marked by its installation in the international department of the Finance Ministry of China. Forty-four Commonwealth countries

use the programme. Now it has been translated into French it is implemented by 11 non-Commonwealth countries.

A regional workshop was held in Samoa to help enhance the maritime boundaries delimitation negotiation capacity of the Pacific island states.

Dr Mark Collins, director, appealed for every Commonwealth member country to become a member of the Commonwealth Foundation. Currently 44 of the 53 Commonwealth states belong. The largest of the non-members is South Africa. Others are: Bangladesh, Fiji Islands, Antigua and Barbuda, Maldives, St Kitts and Nevis, Tuvalu, Vanuatu and Nauru.

Specialists, planners and researchers from five West African countries and from South Africa and Tanzania met in Accra (16–18 October) to discuss how to mitigate the impact of HIV/AIDS on public health workers. Professor Agyemang Badu Akosa, President of the Commonwealth Medical Association, spoke of the diminishing number of skilled people. Many are burnt out with work overload. In most districts of Africa one person may double as medical superintendent of the district hospital and as health services director responsible for the health of 100 000 people.

Education ministers from 20 Commonwealth, African and European countries met in Freetown (14–16 November) to discuss progress on such issues as teacher migration, universal completion of primary education and eliminating gender disparities. Neighbouring countries like Liberia and Equatorial Guinea attended.

Commonwealth meteorologists met in Exeter, UK (14 June) to work out ways of mitigating the effects of climate change.

New Commonwealth Secretariat Publications

The Commonwealth Yearbook 2005. Reference guide to Commonwealth. Information on all 53 member countries. The annual publication of the Commonwealth Secretariat. 468 pp.

Commonwealth Finance Ministers Reference Report 2005. Covers MDGs, financing for development, banking and financial services, public and private investment initiatives, trade and development. 152 pp.

Breaking with Business as Usual—Perspectives from Civil Society in the Commonwealth on the Millennium Development Goals. Views of activists, researchers and academics based on papers from NGOs in 14 Commonwealth countries. 92 pp.

Competing with the Best: Good Human Resource Practices in Caribbean Tourism. First of a series of annual handbooks by the Caribbean Tourism Organization. 92 pp.

Resource Material for Multi-grade Teaching. Published in collaboration with the Association for the Development of Education in Africa. Seven-module guide. Part of the effort to help countries achieve universal primary education by 2015.

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