

Commonwealth Update

DEREK INGRAM

ABSTRACT *After 12 years the Liberals lose power in Canada and the unknown Conservative leader Stephen Harper becomes prime minister. In Tanzania Jakaya Kikwete succeeds Ben Mkapa as president after peaceful elections. Days of race riots in Sydney are the worst-ever in Australia. Bombs and hostage taking plague the Niger Delta. Kenya's former anti-corruption chief produces from an Oxford college a devastating report on widespread corruption. As copper and tourism boom in Zambia the country is rated the fifth best for investment in Africa. A split in the opposition deepens the political crisis in Zimbabwe. The King of Lesotho launches the world's first free countrywide AIDS testing programme. India steps up funding for Commonwealth projects. And Pakistan allows Indian films to be shown for the first time in 40 years.*

Canada

Conservatives won a general election on 23 January 2006, ending 12 years of Liberal government. But it was again a minority government. The Conservatives were well short of the 155 seats needed for an outright majority in the 308-seat parliament. The new prime minister was 46-year-old Toronto-born economist and Alberta MP Stephen Harper, who had moved in recent months from the right of his party towards the centre. In the campaign he had promised lower taxes and better relations with Washington

The election—the first to be held in the harsh winter months since 1979—followed a 171:133 no-confidence vote in the House of Commons (28 November 2005) triggered by a public inquiry that found Liberal politicians in Quebec had taken kickbacks in return for government contracts. The spending scandal plagued Prime Minister Paul Martin for the whole of his 17 months in office, although the economy was buoyant, with unemployment near a three-year low, commodity exports booming and inflation relatively low.

The polling figures were: Conservative Party 124, Liberal Party 103, Bloc Québécois 51, New Democratic Party (NDP) 29, Independent 1. The Conservatives took 36% of the vote and the Liberals 30%. The NDP gained 11 seats. Turnout was 65%. None of the Tory seats was in Toronto, Montreal or Vancouver, Canada's three biggest cities. The biggest losers were the Quebec separatists. In Quebec province the Tories went from nil to 10 and the Bloc slipped from 53 to 51.

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Martin said he would step down as party leader. Author and human rights advocate Michael Ignatieff, who left Harvard University to stand as a Liberal MP, and won a Toronto seat, was immediately seen as a successor to Martin. One snag was that he had supported the US invasion of Iraq in the face of Liberal policy.

Party deputy leader Peter Mackay, 40, from Nova Scotia became foreign minister and Jim Flaherty from Ontario finance minister. David Emerson, industry minister in the outgoing Liberal government, crossed the floor and was appointed international trade minister. Mackay, whose father was in the Mulroney cabinet, was not seen as having much foreign affairs experience and the party had no clear foreign policies.

One of Harper's first acts as prime minister was to defend plans to send military ice-breakers to the Arctic. The USA, Canada, Denmark, Norway and Russia all claim parts of the Arctic. With global warming, the northwest passage linking the Atlantic and the Pacific could become a reality. Following the dispatch of Canadian warships to the area in August the USA said it considered much of the region international waters. On taking office Harper told the US ambassador: "The US defends its sovereignty, the Canadian government will defend our sovereignty. It is the Canadian people we get our mandate from, not the ambassador of the United States".

The government announced (24 November) that about 80 000 aborigines were to qualify for a share of the biggest payout in Canadian history—£1 billion to former pupils of 130 government boarding schools that were set up to 'Christianize' the children of native Indians. It was a new attempt to atone for a systematic effort to strip native children of their language and culture over 70 years. Phil Fontaine, national chief of the Assembly of First Nations, called the move the first step towards closure of a terrible, tragic legacy for the thousands "who suffered physical, sexual or psychological abuse". Most of the schools were closed in the 1970s. Many survivors are now pensioners and others died without getting any compensation.

Under the system set up at the start of the 20th century native children were often sent hundreds of miles to remote schools in an attempt to assimilate them into mainstream society. The children were forcibly separated from their families and forbidden to speak their language. Under the new deal a truth and reconciliation commission would be set up to promote awareness of what happened. Justice Minister Irwin Cotler said the abuse was the most disgraceful act in Canadian history.

Prime Minister Martin raised the issue of the illegal arms trade across the US border with Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice when she visited Ottawa in October. Canadians say half the guns recovered at crime scenes are smuggled from the USA. In 2004 border customs officials seized 1100 guns. In his election campaign Martin proposed an outright ban on handguns and tougher sentences for gun-related crimes. In Toronto two-thirds of 74 murders in 2005 had involved guns.

Ontario announced (18 October) a multi-million plan to restart two nuclear reactors that had been idle for a decade. Ontario has 18 of Canada's reactors and faced a power shortage. Environmentalists called the plan dangerous and uneconomic.

Canada hosted a fraught two-week UN climate change conference in Montreal at which an 11th-hour deal was reached (11 December) to tackle global warming. US

delegates had walked out, but the international storm that followed led to their being ordered back by Washington to sign a draft statement calling for international cooperation. The US turnaround followed attacks in foreign and domestic media and from other US politicians, including former president Bill Clinton. Britain was thought to have put pressure on President Bush to save the Kyoto treaty.

Jamaica

Local Government Minister Portia Simpson Miller, 60, was elected president of the ruling People's National Party (25 February 2006) and set to become Jamaica's first woman prime minister on the retirement after 14 years of 70-year-old P. J. Patterson. Her nearest rival, National Security Minister Peter Phillips, lost because his record on tackling violence was questioned. The next general elections will be held in 2007.

Trinidad and Tobago

Prime Minister Patrick Manning said (11 December 2005) that Trinidad had agreed with private investors to build six industrial plants valued at £4.2 billion. They included aluminium smelters, a petrochemical complex, an iron and steel plant and two urea ammonium nitrate plants.

Grenada

An action plan to revive the nutmeg industry was presented by Commonwealth Deputy Secretary-General Winston Cox to ministers at a meeting in St George's (25 January 2006). The industry was devastated by Hurricane Ivan in 2004. The plan was developed by the Commonwealth Secretariat, Indian Institute Spice Research, the Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute and the FAO.

The Bahamas

A writing haunt of Ernest Hemingway, the Compleat Angler Hotel, was destroyed by fire (13 January 2006).

Nigeria

The governor of oil-producing Bayelsa state, Diepreye Alamieyeseigha, skipped bail in Britain in November 2005 on charges of laundering £1.8 million. He had been arrested in September at Heathrow where his passport was confiscated. He was said to have absconded through the Channel Tunnel on a false passport and flown to Cameroon. President Olusegun Obasanjo, who had planned for him to be prosecuted in Britain, wrote a letter to British Prime Minister Tony Blair saying that, at the time of the war against terrorism, it was scarcely believable he could escape without detection. Protesters staged rallies in the state capital Yenagoa calling for the governor's impeachment and troops were deployed. The state assembly

impeached Alamieyeseigha and removed his immunity from prosecution. He was expelled from Nigeria's ruling party and faced 40 charges (20 December) of using foreign bank accounts to buy property in Britain, Nigeria and South Africa.

A series of incidents renewed the crisis in the Niger Delta in December and January. Six people died in an attack on a Shell oil platform in the Warri region, four sub-contractors were abducted from a rig and held hostage for 19 days, and a bomb wrecked a pipeline, killing 11. Shell pulled out 500 workers from platforms in the swamps and cut output by one-tenth. Agip facilities were also raided and nine people killed. Behind the attack was a group called the Movement for the Emancipation of the Nigeria Delta (MEND), which claims to be fighting for the rights of the Ijaw, the most populous tribe in the Delta. The spate of attacks alarmed the oil markets at a time of the standoff with Iran and were seen as part of heightened tensions ahead of the national census and the 2007 presidential election.

Pressure to raise oil output was endangering plans to end the practice of burning off unused natural gas by 2008. Flaring levels in Nigeria are higher than anywhere in the world. Friends of the Earth estimates that this causes more greenhouse gases than other activities in all of sub-Saharan Africa combined.

Nine British development charities said (7 December) they were dismayed that Britain was refusing to return £1.7 billion in debt relief paid to the Treasury by Nigeria early in 2005 to free itself of its international creditors. Britain said the intervention could wreck a deal with the Paris Club it had brokered to give Nigeria a fresh start. Under the deal Nigeria would repay £6.8 billion in return for £10.2 billion being written off by the Paris Club. The charities said Britain would be receiving from Nigeria twice as much as it was giving in aid to all Africa in 2005.

A new *sharia* law banning women passengers from travelling on mopeds produced violent clashes in Kano in December between police and moped operators. People were injured and 24 vehicles vandalized. Operators said they had been deprived of their best customers.

A DC9 carrying schoolchildren home from Abuja for Christmas crash-landed in Port Harcourt (10 December), killing 103 of the 110 on board, 75 of them children. In October a Boeing 737 crashed on take-off from Lagos, killing all 117 on board. President Obasanjo grounded the two private airlines involved.

Human rights campaigner Beko Ransom-Kuti, fierce opponent of military governments who suffered harshly in prison during the Abacha regime, died aged 65 (10 February). In 1995, as a member of the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, he helped produce the explosive and influential report *Nigeria: Stolen by Generals*.

Sierra Leone

The last UN peacekeepers left on 15 December 2005 at the end of a five-year mission which began when the country was still suffering a brutal civil war. At first the operation was disastrous, with Indian, Kenyan and Zambian troops rounded up by the insurgents. British troops intervened briefly and allowed the UN to regroup. The country is now peaceful. As the UN left, donors pledged £460 million (31 December) until the end of 2007 to continue rebuilding the country. Concern about growing corruption led to the sacking in November of Valentine Collier, head of the

Anti-Corruption Commission. Collier said he was innocent and being persecuted because of his stand against corruption by top officials.

Former British High Commissioner Peter Penfold appeared before the UN war crimes court in Freetown in February 2006 to argue that Sam Henga Norman, leader of the pro-government militia which fought the rebels, is not a war criminal but a hero. The prosecution accused him of, among other things, murder.

The Gambia

Captain Assan Sarr was dismissed as chief of the defence staff in November 2005 for physical assaults on soldiers and using insulting language. It was said he had subverted military discipline and decency. Past practice had been not to give reasons for such actions. Earlier, three members of the leading opposition National Alliance for Democracy and Development were arrested after an inquiry into a national security threat. President Yahya Jammeh, who took power in a coup in 1994 and won a second term of office as a civilian president in 2001, was seeking re-election in 2006.

Ghana

Opposition MPs walked out of a parliamentary debate (14 December 2005) on whether to take half of a £34 million loan from India to build a new presidential palace. MPs from the ruling New Patriotic Party were unanimously in favour, arguing that the president should not be based in Osu Castle, where slaves used to be kept; Osu should become a historical monument. The opposition National Democratic Congress said the money should be spent on priorities like tackling Guinea Worm and building better courts and parliamentary offices. The second half of the Indian loan is to supply electricity to rural areas.

Cameroon

Nearly 2000 researchers, healthcare workers and politicians met in Yaounde for a pan-African conference, the Multilateral Initiative on Malaria. It was the biggest ever international meeting on malaria (13 November 2005). Four-fifths of the delegates were from Africa. Of the 1.5 million annual deaths from malaria, mostly children under five, 90% are in Africa. Conference delegates were mainly sponsored by private industry, the EU, UN and scientific bodies.

Uganda

President Yoweri Museveni of the ruling National Resistance Movement was elected for a third term (23 February 2006) in the first multiparty vote for 25 years. He took 59.28% of the vote against his main rival Kizza Besigye of the Forum for Democratic Change who polled 37.36%. Turnout was 68%. The electorate also voted for 284 members of parliament. Several ministers lost their seats.

The campaign was relatively peaceful, but the arrest of Besigye on his return from four years' exile was followed by charges of terrorism and illegal possession of arms by a military court, and by others of high treason and rape in the high court.

Violence broke out in Kampala and lasted two days. Armoured vehicles appeared on the streets (15–16 November). Besigye was held until 2 January when a civilian court ruled that the detention order was illegal. In the run-up to the election he had repeatedly to interrupt his campaigning to appear in court. In Kampala, as Besigye held a press conference, shooting broke out when his supporters accused a driver of being a security agent. The driver shot into the crowd and two people were killed.

A strong Commonwealth observer group, led by former Botswana president Sir Ketumile Masire, was sent to Uganda. Its members were from 13 countries. They included T. S. Krishnamurthy, former chief election commissioner of India, Dr Victor Gbeho, the former foreign minister of Ghana, David Henry, chief electoral officer of New Zealand, John Musukuma, Secretary-General of the Southern African Broadcasting Association, and Mark Robinson, former British minister and later director of the Commonwealth Press Union.

As the polls closed the group's interim statement pointed to a number of flaws in the process—there were deficiencies in voter education; party agents were too far away to observe the checking of the register and identity documents; poor lighting, rain and power cuts made the counting difficult in many places; a significant number of names were missing from the register and seals were often not correctly applied—in several places not at all. But voters seemed to be free to vote as they wished; the group saw no cases of intimidation at the polling stations nor did they find any large-scale or systematic attempts to manipulate the voting process.

The International Court of Justice ordered Uganda to pay reparations to the Congo for plundering natural resources and for human rights abuses during the civil war there (19 December). Uganda sent troops into eastern Congo in 1998 to back Congolese rebels seeking to oust the government. The court said Uganda's intervention had led to the killing of civilians. Britain switched £15 million in direct aid to Uganda to indirect aid through the UN. Norway, Ireland, the Netherlands and Sweden also suspended direct aid. At the closing rally of his election campaign Museveni hit out at 'foreign meddlers' who tried to dictate Uganda's development projects.

Kenya

In a referendum (21 November 2005) voters rejected a new constitution—a heavy blow to President Mwai Kibaki, with 3.5 million saying No (57% of voters) and 2.53 million Yes. Kenya's population is 32 million. Weeks of highly charged campaigning were marked by sporadic violence and eight deaths. Kibaki said the government would "respect the wishes of Kenyans". Seven ministers in the coalition joined the No campaign. The draft constitution was a watered down version of a text that would have curbed the president's powers. The government dismissed opposition calls for an election and outlawed rallies. Raila Odinga, one of the seven rebel ministers, said it was unconstitutional to deny people freedom of assembly. Kibaki dismissed his entire cabinet, announcing a new one two weeks later (7 December) that was made up mostly of old friends and colleagues. Sixteen prospective ministers and assistant ministers refused to serve and coalition partner Ford-Kenya would not take part.

A 36-page dossier handed to the Anti-Corruption Commission by John Githongo, the former anti-corruption chief who had resigned a year earlier and gone to

St Antony's College, Oxford, ignited a major crisis in Nairobi. The leaked report said key ministers, top civil servants and businessmen had plotted to steal £153 million from the exchequer. It suggested Kibaki had full knowledge of ministers' involvement in graft but took no action. It contained allegations against the finance, justice and transport ministers and the vice-president. They were summoned to appear before the commission, which has wide powers but was seen as toothless in dealing with powerful figures.

Despite the allegations, the World Bank at first approved £68 million in loans to Kenya that included £15 million to fight corruption. Former British high commissioner Sir Edward Clay accused it of feeding "the pig of corruption". In a letter to Bank President Paul Wolfowitz, he said: "you . . . should not countenance the offensive contradiction between your own words on corruption and your officials' toadying to a thoroughly corrupt administration". Later the Bank delayed release of the loans.

UK International Development Secretary Hilary Benn held talks with Kibaki in mid-January that he said were dominated by the corruption issue. Britain had given Kenya £55 million for education and £3 million for drought relief, but was not giving Kenya direct budget support.

In early February three of the ministers named in the Githongo report—David Mwiraria (Finance) a longtime ally of the President, Kiraitu Murungi (Energy) and George Saitoti (Education) resigned, saying they were standing aside while inquiries took place. All denied any wrongdoing. In Githongo's report Mwiraria was said to be a player in the scandal under which a company called Anglo-Leasing and Finance was involved in £50 million contracts for a secure passport computer system and a forensic laboratory.

Vice-President Moody Awori, also named in the report, refused to resign, saying he had committed no crime. Eighty MPs demanded his dismissal.

After the resignations Kibaki reshuffled the cabinet (14 February), promoting Lands Minister Amos Kimunya to finance.

Police told 20 leading figures allegedly linked to the Goldenburg affair, including two of Moi's sons, officials and politicians, not to leave the country (13 February) and to surrender their weapons. One was Saitoti.

Former national security and transport minister Chris Murungaru was charged (17 February) with refusing to declare his wealth and how he got it to the Anti-Corruption Commission.

A report from Transparency International and the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (30 January) said that in the government's first two years in office it spent £7 million on luxury vehicles for the personal use of officials.

Another report, dealing with the so-called Goldenburg scandal and handed over to Kibaki around the same time, recommended that former president Daniel arap Moi, now 81, should face investigation. The scandal, dating back to 1990–93, involved £400 million paid as state subsidies for gold and diamond jewellery exports in the 1990s. It was alleged the exports were non-existent.

The worst drought in 22 years was helping to turn vast areas of northern Kenya into a land of yellow dust, threatening the lives of 3.5 million farmers and herdsman. The crisis was blamed on government neglect and lack of investment in basic infrastructure, such as health, water and education, rather than on the lack of rain. When Kibaki declared the food shortages a national disaster at the new year, many

of Kenya's 50 000 prisoners gave up their annual new year's lunch so that the food could go to starving Kenyans. In February the UN and Kenyan government appealed for £126 million in food aid, although Kenya remains a food exporter and forecast a large maize surplus for 2006.

A five-storey building being constructed in the middle of Nairobi collapsed (23 January) with 280 building workers inside. Twenty died. The owner was arrested.

A fearless pioneer of African wildlife film production, Joan Root, was shot dead in her home in Naivasha, 55 miles from Nairobi (13 January). A number of killings directed at white settlers had occurred in recent years. Root, who was 69, often filmed from a hot air balloon. She was a strong conservationist and Naivasha had been disturbed by ill-feeling between foreign investors and the local population, mainly over access to the pasture and the lake's shore—an area of great beauty. Two men were arrested after the murder.

Tanzania

Jakaya Kikwete, candidate of the ruling Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) party, won 80.28% of the vote in presidential elections (14 December 2005). There were 10 candidates. Polling was peaceful. Kikwete became the country's fourth president, succeeding Ben Mkapa at the end of his second five-year term, which had seen inflation reduced from 30% to 4% and growth raised to 6.4% since 2000.

Kekwete, 55, had been foreign minister for 10 years. In parliamentary elections held simultaneously, CCM won 206 of the 232 elected seats and the main opposition party Civic United Front (CUF) won 19. Of the other 16 parties seven candidates won seats. Sixty new MPs would be sitting in the National Assembly for the first time. The CCM, now 44 years in power, gained ground with CUF holding only its seats in Zanzibar and losing the two it had held on the mainland.

Kekwete named Edward Lowassa as prime minister and boosted the number of women in the cabinet from four to seven, with 10 women deputy ministers. Zakia Meghji became finance minister and Asha Rose Migiro was the new foreign minister. In his inaugural speech Kekwete pledged to fight corruption by reviewing all government contracts.

The mainland elections had been briefly postponed because of the death of a presidential candidate, but polling in Zanzibar went ahead as scheduled (30 October), though in less tranquil circumstances. Clashes between police and CUF activists took place over three days. Thirty people were injured. President Amani Abeid Karume was re-elected with 53.18% of the votes against 46.07% for CUF candidate Seif Sharif Hamad. There were four other candidates. The CCM also held its majority in the legislature with 30 seats against 19 for CUF. Hamad rejected the results, but CCM and the electoral commission denied claims of fraud.

A Commonwealth group observed the elections. It said there was violence at some polling stations and noted some flaws: in some places people with voters' cards were allowed to vote even though they were not on the register; results were often not posted in public as they should have been; the media was biased towards the CCM; and the collation was not transparent enough. The team said, "overall this was a good election day", but added that the judgment as to whether the process taken as a whole was credible was difficult to make, because there was a "mixed picture".

The US embassy refused to attend Karume's inauguration "because of serious irregularities observed".

Mozambique

South Africa announced a new inquiry into a major mystery of the apartheid era—the death in a plane crash near Maputo in 1986 of Mozambique's first president, Samora Machel. The original inquiry blamed pilot error, but Mozambicans suspected the white South African government had used a decoy beacon to cause the crash. South African President Thabo Mbeki said the crash still needed a satisfactory explanation and Machel's widow Gracia, now Mrs Nelson Mandela, had long wanted an inquiry.

Parliament rejected an attempt by the opposition Renamo party to remove the image of a machine-gun—a symbol of the independence war—from the national flag. The ruling Frelimo party said the time was not right, although the newly adopted constitution called for a change of flag within a year. Frelimo did not like any of the 169 alternatives proposed so far.

A retrial of Portuguese Anibal dos Santos Jnr, convicted in his absence of planning the murder of top journalist Carlos Cardoso in 2000, ended in a sentence of 30 years' jail. Cardoso was investigating an £8 million major bank fraud. Dos Santos escaped to South Africa and Canada. After serving his jail term he would be deported to Portugal.

Mauritius

Dutch and Mauritian scientists found the well preserved bones of 20 dodos in a swampy area on the southwest of the island. They are believed to be 2000 years old. No complete skeleton has ever been found in Mauritius of the flightless bird, which is believed to have become extinct in the 17th century. In 1755 a set of bones was destroyed in a fire at an Oxford museum.

Malawi

The long-running rivalry between President Bingu wa Mutharika and Vice-President Cassim Chilumpha came to a head when Mutharika said (9 February 2006) he had dismissed Chilumpha for seriously undermining the government's integrity. Chilumpha is an ally of ex-president Bakili Muluzi, who picked Mutharika to run as the United Democratic Front (UDF) candidate and succeed him. After becoming president, Mutharika quit the UDF for blocking his anti-corruption campaign. Chilumpha remained in the UDF. The cabinet agreed with Mutharika's dismissal action, but a judge ruled that he could not sack his deputy until a constitutional court decided whether he had the power to do so. In November a court had adjourned a corruption case against Chilumpha, alleging that when he was a minister six years ago contracts were awarded to companies that supported the government.

The political quarrel angered foreign donors because it was paralysing government at a time of food shortages. In January flash floods in the south displaced 40 000

people, sweeping away houses, livestock and crops. The floods came as Malawi suffered the worst drought for a decade.

Forty people were at a service in a church in Mzimba when lightning struck it (18 December). Eleven of the congregation died and eight were injured.

Zambia

In the World Bank publication *Doing Business 2006* Zambia was rated the fifth best African country for investment after South Africa, Namibia, Botswana and Tunisia. Tourism Minister Kabinga Pande said a million tourists were expected between now and 2010 when Zambia hosts the soccer World Cup finals. A South African group announced a £176 million investment in Zambian tourism. In 2005 the Zambian kwacha strengthened by 30%. Inflation was 17.2%. The target was 15%. The economy was boosted at the end of 2005 when Japan wrote off the remaining £407 million debt owed by Zambia, the USA wrote off £163 million, and France the £45 million it was owed.

Opposition parties and civil society groups held protest marches to demand changes in the electoral laws and constitution. They said the laws limited citizens' right and were inadequate. President Levy Mwanawasa had wanted to postpone reform until 2008, but a government spokesman said (22 January) the laws would be amended ahead of the elections.

First president Kenneth Kaunda, now 82, said he had been approached to stand again as president but he had no intention of returning to politics at any level. He said he would be visiting his old friend Robert Mugabe, adding: "The West has no right to condemn him on the land issue".

Zimbabwe opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai and a 10-member delegation were expelled after three days in Zambia (1 February). The reason was unclear, but immigration authorities said some of the group presented false identities.

China is to rehabilitate the Victoria Falls Bridge so that it can open to heavy traffic, which has grown steadily between Zambia and South Africa. It would be usable by January 2007. The bridge was commissioned by Cecil Rhodes and completed in 1905.

Zambia was one of six countries facing a food crisis because of drought. The UN said 12 million people in the region needed food aid. In November Mwanawasa declared a national disaster. Some 80 000 Angolan and Congolese refugees were in particular need.

Zimbabwe

Only 15% of voters turned out (27 November 2005) to elect the Senate, which President Robert Mugabe had revived under a constitutional amendment earlier in the year. He had abolished the house in 1990. Its successor would approve or reject bills passed by the lower House of Assembly, but had no veto. The ruling ZANU (PF) won 19 of the contested seats. Another 24 seats were unopposed, giving the party 43 of the 50 elected seats. Mugabe would nominate six members and traditional chiefs 10, giving the government 59 of the 66 seats. The creation of the Senate had deeply split the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC)

led by Morgan Tsvangirai, who called for an election boycott. MDC secretary-general Welshman Ncube disagreed and in October the national executive narrowly voted to fight the elections.

The dissident faction went ahead but won only seven seats. After the election Tsvangirai said the MDC differences had become irreconcilable and any long-standing hopes nurtured outside Zimbabwe of getting Mugabe to set up a transitional government seemed farther away than ever.

Zimbabwe avoided expulsion from the IMF by paying £5.2 million to the IMF and eliminating its arrears under the Fund general resources account that went back to 1999.

In his state of the nation address (6 December) Mugabe promised to address the country's chronic power shortages and, as he did so Harare was hit by widespread power failures. He promised to identify new energy sources. Zimbabwe imports 30% of its electricity from neighbours. In November Air Zimbabwe grounded its eight aircraft for a day because it ran out of fuel. Mugabe blamed its troubles on mismanagement and corruption.

Judge Benjamin Paradza who had made several rulings against the government and been arrested in 2003, failed to appear in court for sentencing and was said to have escaped to South Africa on a lorry and then sought asylum in Britain. Since 2001 10 judges had left the country.

Sixty desperate Zimbabweans were feared drowned as they tried to cross the flooded Limpopo river to South Africa at the end of January. Thousands of Zimbabweans were trying to cross the border every week. In 2005 nearly 100 000 were deported back. Between two and three million were now living in South Africa.

Leo Mugabe, MP nephew of the president and one of the country's wealthiest men, was charged in court, together with his wife, with fraud and smuggling flour out of the country (20 October). They were freed on bail and had their passports taken.

A report adopted in December by the African Union's Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, meeting in The Gambia, showed concern over "the continuing violations and the deteriorating of the human rights situation in Zimbabwe, the lack of respect for the rule of law and the growing culture of impunity".

White farmer Don Stewart, 68, was murdered by intruders at his home in Ingwerati, west of Harare, in November—estimated to be the 18th killed since 2000. Only about 300 white farmers are believed to be still on their land in Zimbabwe.

Studies carried out in eastern Zimbabwe by scientists at Imperial College, London, found a striking fall in HIV among the young. Samples taken in 2003 showed a drop from 23% to 20.5% compared with a survey in 1998. The team found that only 27% of 17–19-year-old men had had sex, compared with 45% in the earlier survey. The figure for women aged 15–17 was down from 21% to 9%. In sub-Saharan Africa only Uganda has shown such a change in sexual behaviour.

Zimbabwe withdraw from cricket Tests until 2007 (18 January). The decision came two weeks after the government took control of Zimbabwe cricket and followed a meeting between the interim board chairman and the International Cricket Council chairman. All Asian and white members of the board were removed "for their racial connotations". A tour of the West Indies was reduced to a one-day series.

South Africa

In a major policy change President Thabo Mbeki announced (8 January 2006) plans to spend £37 billion over five years on the country's poor. In his six years in office he had restrained public spending. Now he said every citizen would get access to clean water, electricity and sanitation to provide jobs that would halve the 26% unemployment by 2014.

To boost foreign investment the government had begun to abandon some of the conditions governing the commercial relationship between foreign business, South African business and black workers and shareholders. The sensitive plan was to back down on some of the Black Economic Empowerment conditions introduced 11 years ago to boost growth.

In his state of the nation speech opening parliament (4 February) Mbeki announced plans "in line with international norms and practices" to regulate conditions under which foreigners buy land. In the past three years the property market has grown nominally as fast as anywhere in the world so that speculators have driven up prices and sabotaged land reform programmes aimed at restoring white-owned farmlands to blacks. Mbeki said the state would "play a more central role in the land reform programme, ensuring that the restitution programme is accelerated".

South Africa became the first African country to authorize same-sex marriage. In a landmark ruling the Constitutional Court ordered (1 December) that the definition of marriage be changed from a "union between a man and a woman" to a "union between two persons". Parliament was ordered to amend the marriage laws within a year. In the rest of Africa homosexuality remains largely taboo. The South African constitution, one of the most liberal in the world, outlaws discrimination against gays and lesbians.

Jacob Zuma, who had been dismissed as vice-president in June following corruption allegations, was charged in a Johannesburg court (6 December 2005) with raping a 31-year-old woman in her home in November. She was a long-time acquaintance and AIDS activist. Zuma declared his innocence and was freed on bail. When he appeared in the High Court (13 February) presiding Judge Bernard Ngoepe stepped down "to protect the judiciary". The defence said Ngoepe might be biased as he had issued search warrants for Zuma's offices in relation to the corruption charges due to be heard in July. When a new judge, Jeremiah Shongwe, was named, a new problem arose—Zuma had fathered a son by Shongwe's sister 29 years ago. Zuma remained No 2 in the ruling African National Congress and retained a wide popular following. His supporters saw him as a victim of a political conspiracy. The ANC national executive firmly rejected such claims. An emergency meeting (7 December) suspended Zuma from the ANC, but stopped short of sacking him. He said he would remain party deputy leader.

On the 10th anniversary of the creation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission its chairman, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, said too many human rights abuses from the apartheid era had escaped justice. President Mbeki asked "an uncomfortable question... whether as South Africans, black and white, we are under the same flag and under the same anthem marching separately—even pretending at times that the other does not exist".

The South African Broadcasting Cooperation stopped transmission of a 90th birthday interview with former president P. W. Botha. The programme was made by an independent company. Botha has been silent for more than a decade and, unlike his successors, F. W. de Klerk and Nelson Mandela, has published no memoirs.

Fifty years after apartheid wiped off the map the township of Sophiatown, on the edge of Johannesburg, 500 former inhabitants gathered at the site of what was once known as the Harlem of South Africa and held a celebration (11 February). Sophiatown was the home of people like Hugh Masekela and Miriam Makeba, a centre of jazz, and the multiracial arts scene. One morning in 1955 2000 armed police moved in and razed the homes of all non-whites.

President Mbeki opened (10 November) at Sutherland, 217 miles northeast of Cape Town, the largest telescope in the southern hemisphere. It is 82 tonnes, cost £11.5 million and took five years to complete.

Botswana

After 20 years of free education, fees in state secondary schools were reintroduced in January 2005—part of a cost-cutting exercise because of falling revenues. Education Minister Jacob Nkate said the new fees were a pittance, but teaching unions said parents would be deterred from sending their children to school. The fees affecting 170 000 children between 11 and 18 were to be between £21 and £49 a year.

Lesotho

In a carnival of colour before an audience of 4000 King Letsie III launched the world's first free countrywide HIV testing programme (1 December 2005). He said AIDS must be openly acknowledged and called on all citizens to take the test for the sake of their country. He added: "It is decimating our adult population, leaving in its wake thousands of orphaned children". Funerals had become a regular part of daily life. At the launch people queued outside tents for tests and the world's largest paediatric AIDS clinic was opened. Support came from a Texas pharmaceutical giant and the programme is being coordinated by the WHO and the Lesotho health ministry.

One-third of Lesotho's 1.7 million population is thought to be infected. Since 2000 life expectancy had dropped from 52 to 34. The British-educated King, 42, succeeded his father King Moshoeshe, who was dethroned in 1990. Moshoeshe, restored in 1995, died in a car crash a year later.

Gunmen shot Foreign Minister Monyana Moleki in the arm outside his home (29 January) only hours after he was defeated by Prime Minister Pakalitha Mosisili in a vote to be leader of the ruling party.

Swaziland

Events marking World AIDS Day were cancelled by royal decree a day before because it would clash with a traditional ceremony to mark the start of the month-long harvest festival. Prime Minister Themba Dlamini was due to speak. In Swaziland 38% of adults are HIV positive and up to 56% of young women.

Petrol bombs were thrown in mid-December at courts, and the houses of police officers and a government spokesman. Sixteen people, mostly members of the banned Pudemo party, which wants to end the absolute rule of King Mswati III, were arrested and charged with treason. Pudemo leader Mario Masuku said they would not be distracted from the path “we have taken to have Swaziland liberated”.

Commonwealth Secretary-General Don McKinnon was in Swaziland for the adoption of the new constitution, which the Commonwealth had over a long period helped to draft in the face of problems presented by the country’s still-feudal structure. He said: “The Commonwealth has always emphasized that the attachment of the people to their culture and tradition is not in any way incompatible with the principles of democracy. We believe that people can remain true to their cultural heritage while also embracing democracy and popular participation in government.”

Namibia

Teams working on a new sewage plant at Eenhana, near a former South African military base, stumbled on a mass grave in November 2005. Mechanical diggers uncovered hundreds of bones. They were believed to be of SWAPO guerrillas killed in the last round of fighting with the South Africans in 1989—known as the Nine Day War. Smaller graves are reported all over the area. President Hifikepunye Pohamba visited the site and led a tribute to the dead of Eenhana.

Pohamba visited Germany on a state visit at the end of 2005 to discuss development cooperation. But a deal was postponed because of unfinished business—the claim of the Herero people for compensation for killings that followed the failed uprising against the German colonialists in 1904. The Herero say Germany committed genocide; of 65 000 Herero only 15 000 survived. Germany offered an apology and a multi-million dollar development deal. But the Herero Genocide Committee said the German response on reparations was still too vague.

India

Natwar Singh, who had been suspended as foreign minister but remained a minister without portfolio after being named in the Volcker UN oil-for-food report, quit the cabinet (7 November 2005) because persistent opposition pressure was blocking parliamentary business. Congress Party leader Sonia Gandhi promised (14 November) to punish anyone found guilty of benefiting from the UN programme in Iraq. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh appointed 10 new ministers in his first cabinet reshuffle (29 January) since he took office. Petroleum Minister Mani Shankar Aiyer was replaced by Murli Deora, a Congress leader from Maharashtra state, who has strong ties with Washington. Aiyer, who supported the Iran–Pakistan–India pipeline opposed by the USA, went to youth and sports affairs. The prime minister retained the foreign ministry.

Aiyer signed an agreement with China in Beijing (12 January) under which India and China would cooperate in securing crude oil resources overseas. He said it would help end “mindless rivalry”. India had recently lost to Chinese rivals in acquiring fields in Angola, Nigeria, Kazakhstan and Ecuador.

US ambassador David Mulford warned India (25 January) that Washington's deal on nuclear energy cooperation could be overturned if India did not vote to refer Iran to the UN Security Council. Later Washington explained that Mulford was describing how the US Congress might react to Indian opposition.

India's GDP rose to 8% year-on-year to September 2005—stronger than expected. A December survey of the world's top 40 company investors by AT Kearney showed that India could eclipse the USA and become the second fastest-growing recipient of foreign direct investment during the next three years.

A cautious package of economic reforms, liberalizing foreign direct investment rules, was launched (24 January). Top item was consent to permit 51% foreign investment in single-brand retail operations. Big retail groups like Wal-Mart and Tesco were disappointed by the limited relaxation. The move came on the eve of the World Economic Forum in Davos. Until now international retailers had been able to operate in India only through franchise arrangements with local partners. By contrast, China had thrown its high streets open to foreign investors. India sent a high-powered team of 80 to Davos, where the growth of India and China was a dominant theme.

Parliament sacked 11 members—six of them from the opposition BJP—caught on film taking cash for asking questions. One was in the upper house. It was the biggest single expulsion since independence in 1947.

In Bihar state elections the 15-year rule of Railways Minister Laloo Yadav came to an end (22 November) with a landslide defeat for his Congress-led coalition. Yadav had been charged with embezzling millions of dollars in a long-running corruption case. In February Delhi had imposed direct rule. The election produced a coalition led by the Janata Dal, an ally of the opposition BJP.

Former BJP prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, 81, stepped down from electoral politics (30 December) and Lal Krishna Advani resigned as president of the BJP. Rajnath Singh, former chief minister of Andhra Pradesh, succeeded Advani.

The long-drawn out moves to privatize major Indian airports caused days of strikes by 22 000 workers in Delhi, Mumbai and Calcutta. Prime Minister Singh intervened to hold talks in a bid to end hold-ups that were threatening the modernization of 30 airports. The government said there was no question of backing down.

A study in *The Lancet* (8 January) said that over 20 years the births of up to 10 million girls in India might have been prevented by selective abortion. The number of girls and boys born to couples already having a son were about equal, but the adjusted sex ratio for a second girl where the first baby was a girl was 759 for every 1000 boys. Where families had two girls it was 719 for every 1000.

Delhi had its first winter frost and snow for 70 years (8 January) as cold weather swept in from the Himalayas, killing 100 people in 24 hours. In Uttar Pradesh more than 100 people also died. Earlier (18 December) refugees from floods that had killed 400 people in southern India panicked at a Chennai relief centre. Rumours had spread that handouts of food vouchers were to end. In the stampede 40 people died.

Gunmen fired into a crowd as people left a conference at the Indian Institute of Science, killing a retired professor and wounding four other people (29 December). Police said Kashmiri rebels were responsible.

Riots took place in central Delhi (4 January) because an investigation had been ordered into a multi-million pound herbal medicine empire owned by one of India's

most revered gurus, Swami Ramdev. Government laboratory reports were said to have shown that drugs made by the yogi, who hosts a popular TV programme, had revealed traces of human bones ground up to make pills.

Buddhadeb Bhattacharya, Communist Chief Minister of West Bengal, said (28 December) just before he flew off to Singapore to woo investors that his government would soon ban rickshaws. He added: "We cannot accept that a man pouring sweat and straining every sinew, has to pull another for a living. It's human indignity." Calcutta is the last place in India where rickshaws exist in any numbers. It has about 18 000 pullers.

The Ministry of Information began (6 January) the auctioning of FM radio licences. BBC Worldwide, the BBC's commercial arm, quickly acquired FM licences covering seven of India's biggest cities—Mumbai, Delhi, Bangalore, Chennai, Calcutta, Ahmedabad and Pune. The BBC had also bought a 20% stake in Radio Mid-Day West, which aimed to become one of India's leading radio stations.

The All India Muslim Personal Law Board, which includes leading clerics from all over India and claims to represent 140 million Muslims, issued an edict in February that Muslim women should not work with men in call centres and other jobs.

Conservation groups meeting in Delhi (30 January) called on the government to ban a common cattle medicine diclofenic, identified as the cause of a new ecological disaster—the near-extinction of vultures within a few years. Biologists believe 99% of Indian vultures could have been poisoned since farmers started giving livestock the drug as a painkiller in the 1990s.

A World Wildlife study in January showed that the freshwater Gangetic dolphin, first declared a protected species 2000 years ago in the reign of Emperor Ashoka, had become extinct in the main tributaries of the Ganges. They would disappear from the entire river system unless the heavily polluted waters were cleaned.

Hundreds of wildlife experts with radio collars and hi-tech cameras began (5 January) to scour West Bengal's Sunderbans in the most thorough census of tigers so far undertaken. The last census in 2003 estimated a population of 250–380 in Indian Sunderbans. A century ago India had 40 000 tigers—a figure now believed down to 3700.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and opposition leader L. K Advani attended the opening in Delhi by President Abdul Kalam of one of the biggest Hindu temples of modern times. It is as long as a football field, 12 stories high, cost £26 million and is dedicated to religious tolerance.

Karnataka's chief minister said Bangalore would revert to a near pre-colonial name, Bengaluru, on 1 November—the state's 50th anniversary.

The West Bengal government approved (16 November) the privatization of the Great Eastern Hotel, Calcutta, which had been owned by the state since the 1970s. The hotel, a favourite of the Raj, was once called by Mark Twain "the best hotel east of Suez".

Wartime British cabinet documents released in January included shorthand reports by deputy cabinet secretary Sir Norman Brook that showed Winston Churchill was prepared to let Mahatma Gandhi die on hunger strike while in British hands in 1942. Viceroy Lord Linlithgow said he was "strongly in favour of letting [Gandhi] starve to death". Others, such as Lord Halifax and Sir Stafford Cripps, took an opposite view.

K. R. Narayan, 10th president of India and the first to come from the so-called downtrodden Dalit caste, died aged 85 (9 November).

Pakistan

A huge variety of international aid workers continued through the harsh winter to bring help to the 250 000 survivors of the October 2005 earthquake scattered across the vast, inaccessible Kashmir–Northwest Frontier area. Heavy snow often brought down the flimsy tents and many people died of cold. In airlift operations three planes crashed and a Red Cross helicopter disappeared. After the UN complained of a weak response, donors at a conference in Islamabad (31 October) responded to pleas from UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and took the total of aid pledged beyond Pakistan's target of £3.4 billion.

President Pervez Musharraf claimed (3 December) that Abu Hamza Rabia, a top al-Qaeda commander, had been killed at a 'safe house' near the Afghan border by missiles fired from an unmanned Predator aircraft. Rabia was believed to have masterminded the 2003 assassination attempts on Musharraf. Following the attack 12 people died when a bomb exploded in a market in South Waziristan, near the border.

On the eve of a visit to Washington by Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz to forge US ties, missiles fired, again by a Predator, killed 13 people and several al-Qaeda operatives at Damdola, near the Afghan border. At least 10 000 protestors from liberal and Islamic groups joined an anti-US protest in Karachi (15 January). Effigies of George Bush were burned and demonstrations elsewhere followed. One hundred lawyers chanted "Death to America" in front of the supreme court in Islamabad. President Musharraf said (20 January 2006) he had told the USA there must be no more air strikes on Pakistani territory, adding that the only Taliban and al-Queda left in Pakistan were a few dozen hiding in the mountains.

More evidence of a rising anti-American tide came when protests against cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad published in Danish newspapers brought 70 000 people on to the streets of Peshawar over three days in mid-February. Western-linked businesses were ransacked and McDonalds, Pizza Hut and KFC restaurants attacked. Two people died. Other riots took place in Lahore, Multan, Karachi and Faisalabad.

A suicide bombing and riots left 32 dead on a holy day in Hangu, west of Islamabad (9 February), and five more in Harat.

One-third of the 12 000 *madrassas* in Pakistan failed to comply with the registration of all Islamic religious schools by the end of 2005 as ordered by the government after the London suicide bomb attacks. Leaders of the *madrassas* said they would defy orders to expel foreign students. Officials were required to inspect the schools regularly to ensure no students were being trained to use weapons. The UK had asked for a ban on recruiting foreign students.

India and Pakistan

In two days of talks Indian foreign secretary Shyam Saran and his Pakistani counterpart, Rikaza Mohammad Khan, renewed the commitment to carry forward

the peace process (18–19 January 2006). A few days earlier President Musharraf said he was disappointed by the lack of progress. There had not been much response from India to his ideas for resolving the Kashmir issue. He also accused India of fomenting insurgency in Baluchistan.

As 2006 began Pakistan lifted a 40-year ban on Indian films. *Sohni Mahiwal*, a classic 1984 Bollywood movie based on a Punjabi love legend, was chosen as the first. The move would lead to joint film productions and greater cultural cooperation. The ban dated back to the Kashmir war of 1965. Since then cinema audiences in Pakistan had plummeted. From 1300 cinemas in the 1970s Pakistan now has only 270. In the 1970s it made 300 films a year. In 2005 it made only 18. Pakistanis, however, have watched for years the latest Indian films aired by cable networks.

India and Pakistan agreed to resume a second cross-border train service—between Munabao, India and Khokrapar, Pakistan. It had ended 40 years ago.

India announced (3 February) it had completed tests and was ready to deploy its latest nuclear-tipped missile, the Agni-III (Fire). This can carry a one-tonne conventional or nuclear warhead.

Bangladesh

People living along the Bangladesh–India frontier were becoming increasingly concerned as India speeded the building of a 2500 mile, 12ft wire fence to seal the border. Bangladesh is not against the idea of the fence, which in most cases is well inside Indian territory. But many people living on the border were beginning to find themselves in a no-man's land. Some are on the wrong side of the fence in a narrow strip of land between Bangladesh and the barrier. The £600 million fence is intended to keep out illegal immigrants, Islamic terrorists and arms smugglers and to stop human trafficking. India says 20 million Bangladeshis are in India illegally. Building began in 1999 and was to finish in 2006.

A rally of 100 000 in Dhaka (22 November) called on the government to resign because it was fostering the rise of hardline Islamists. Violence was growing. Two suicide bombings in Chittagong and nearby Gazipur, which killed eight people, were believed to be the first such attacks in Bangladesh. In mid-November two judges were killed by a bomb in Jhalaikati. In December 13 people were killed in Islamist bomb attacks. In one case children scavenging for food found a ticking time bomb under a bus.

Sri Lanka

In the wake of the election of Mahinda Rajapakse as president, the Tamil Tiger rebels issued an ultimatum to his government to come up with a political settlement within a year. He said (26 November 2005) the past four years of the peace process had miserably failed to meet the humanitarian needs of Tamil refugees displaced by the war and the tsunami. He was ready for immediate talks to review the 2002 ceasefire, but said the solution to the ethnic conflict lay with a unitary state. A spate of violence followed his assumption of power. Rebels ambushed and killed 13 sailors in Mannar (23 December) and on Christmas Day Tamil politician Joseph Pararajasingham, 71, was shot dead as he received Holy Communion at midnight Mass in Batticaloa. Two

days later 10 army officials were killed by a landmine in the rebel region. A naval gunboat was destroyed by a suicide bomber (7 January), killing 13 sailors. Another nine sailors died when a landmine blew up a bus. A roundup of 1000 suspected separatists took place in Colombo (2 January)—the largest since 2002.

By now the renewed violence had cost more than 130 lives and the Norwegian-led monitoring mission suspended its work. Despite all this, in Geneva the Tamil Tigers and government held their first direct talks for three years. At first the government demanded a new ceasefire, but pressure from the USA, Japan, the EU and Norway forced a climb-down. It was agreed (24 February) to resume talks in April.

Sri Lanka's reconstruction a year after the Tsunami had killed 36 000 people was reported to be slower than in other countries of the Indian Ocean rim. In the first weeks cooperation between the government and Tamil rebels was unprecedented, but political wrangling brought it to a halt. A success story was the restoration of the coastal railway line 57 days after 1000 people had died in a train hit by a wave.

The report of the Commonwealth expert team sent for the elections, which was led by former Mauritius president Cassam Uteem, called for creation of an independent election commission to consolidate the independence, transparency, accountability and effectiveness of Sri Lanka's electoral administration. Secretary-General Don McKinnon said the commission needed to be backed up by real power to take on such issues as the need to regulate campaign finance and to tackle bias in the media. Money was needed to set up a permanent, continuous and computerized registration system. McKinnon promised experts to help.

Maldives

Foreign Minister Ahmed Shaheed accused parliament (15 December 2005) of delaying the drafting of a new constitution. President Abdul Gayoom had wanted it in place by December, but, said Shaheed, long debates had involved "a lot of filibustering but little work". The country was not certain whether it wanted an executive presidency or Westminster-style democracy. Now the government was seeking help from the Commonwealth with the drafting. Commonwealth Secretary-General Don McKinnon had already sent special envoy Musa Hitam, former deputy prime minister of Malaysia, to advise in June.

Gayoom freed and pardoned two dissidents, Ahmed Ibrahim Didi and Naushad Waheed, jailed for 15 years for alleged treason (21 February). Two other prisoners had been freed in 2005 and a third had escaped to Switzerland. The three had been held for writing articles in an underground newsletter. Amnesty International, which is pressing for a constitution that protects prisoners from torture and 'grossly unfair' trials, said the human rights situation in Maldives was still bad. Five other people were being held unfairly. One was photojournalist Jennifer Lateef, daughter of the exiled founder of the Maldivian Democratic Party, who was said to be serving her 10 years in appalling conditions.

Gayoom said in a BBC broadcast (25 December) that, if another tsunami struck the country, an early warning system would do little to help. Higher buildings were needed since the highest point in the 1900 islands is only about two metres above sea level. The December 2004 tsunami damaged 53 of the 199 inhabited islands. Twenty were destroyed and 12 500 people displaced.

A Commonwealth Service Abroad Programme (CSAP) volunteer, Dr Joseph Job of Nigeria, stayed on in Maldives after a year-long stint helping the 1000 people of Mulak Island rebuild their lives. He is one of 23 CSAP volunteers who went to Maldives after the tsunami. Several others were staying on.

Malaysia

At the annual summit of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) leaders showed they had run out of patience with Burma's military regime (12 December 2005). They called on it to free opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi from house arrest and speed democratic reform and said Burma's 'roadmap to democracy' was an embarrassment. On calls to expel Burma from ASEAN Malaysian Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar said there were no provisions for such action against a member. The summit agreed to begin drafting an ASEAN Charter that could create a common market. After the meeting the first gathering was held of the East Asia Summit—a new 16-nation body seen as trying to constrain China's growing economic and political power.

Monsoon storms in North Malaysia caused the worst flooding in 30 years. Six people died and 25 000 became homeless.

Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi refused to tone down the power of the Islamic justice system. He had been urged to amend an article of the constitution to give non-Muslims more rights.

Malaysia said in January that it would go ahead with building the controversial crooked bridge across half the strait it shares with Singapore—an idea first proposed by former prime minister Mahathir Mohamad. Malaysia wants to replace the causeway linking it to Singapore with a bridge because the former hampers access to ports on the Malaysia side. But the span is short and needs to be high and therefore crooked.

Singapore

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said in his New Year message that in 2005 Singapore's economy grew by 5.7%. In the fourth quarter it surged—7.7% up on a year ago. The government proposed to give low income-earners a bonus of up to one month's salary.

Despite pleas from Canberra, a convicted Australian drug smuggler of Vietnamese origin, Nguyen Tuong Van, 25, was hanged at Changi prison (1 December 2005). Australian Attorney-General Philip Ruddock called it "barbaric". Lawyers, family and civil rights activists had campaigned for weeks to save the smuggler. Australian Prime Minister John Howard said the execution would damage relations between the two countries. Nguyen was caught at Singapore airport carrying heroin between Cambodia and Australia to pay off his twin brother's debts. He gave Australian police information that led them to arrest another drug smuggler. Singapore Prime Minister Lee made a concession to a personal request from Howard: Nguyen was allowed to hold hands with his mother and brother as he said goodbye to them. Howard asked that they should be able to hug each and said he was disappointed by Singapore's "clinical response". In Canberra hundreds held a candlelit vigil at

parliament and church bells rang out in Melbourne. A UN report in 2004 found Singapore executes a higher proportion of its population than any other country—13.57 per million population against 4.65 in Saudi Arabia and two in China.

Hong Kong

Tens of thousands of people took to the streets (4 December) to demand universal suffrage. Among the marchers was Anson Chan, the much-respected former head of the civil service after the 1997 handover to China. She said there were moments when “you have to stand up and be counted”. Chief Executive Donald Tsang said reforms must proceed step by step. It was proposed to double the size of the 800-member committee of Beijing-backed elites that chooses the Chief Executive and to enlarge the 60-seat legislature by 10 members, five of them directly elected. Tsang said his proposals went as far as China and its allies in Hong Kong would allow. Pro-democracy legislators said this was only tinkering. In a late-night session (21 December) the Legislative Council voted 34 for and 24 against both reforms. Tsang said he would not now offer an alternative before elections in 2007. The defeat was seen as a serious blow to Tsang, who had enjoyed a popular honeymoon since taking over as chief executive.

Papua New Guinea

An earthquake of 6.1 magnitude hit the northern coast (8 December 2005). Another of 6.8 magnitude and six miles deep hit the New Britain region two days later. Earlier, in September, a 7.3 magnitude earthquake hit New Ireland. In each case there were no casualties.

Sir William Skate, prime minister from 1997–99 and architect of the peace deal between the government and the rebel island of Bougainville, died (3 January 2006) aged 52.

Vanuatu

More than half the 10 000 inhabitants of Ambae Island fled their villages when Mount Manaro volcano began to blow toxic gas and ash 10 000 feet into the sky (27 November 2005)—its first eruption for 10 years. Four ships stood by and many people were moved off the island.

Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer sent a delegation in late November threatening to cut aid unless Vanuatu governed itself better. It complained about the reappointment of officials charged with serious offences, censorship and interference in the judicial process. Australian aid in 2004–05 totalled £14.5 million.

Tonga

Fred Sevele, long-time advocate of more democracy, became acting prime minister (12 February 2006). He succeeded on the resignation of ‘Ulukalala Lavaka Ata which had followed calls for the royal family to allow more democracy. Sevele is one

of a few politicians elected rather than appointed by the King. Prime ministers are traditionally from the royal family or nobility.

After a decade of negotiations Tonga became the 150th member of the World Trade Organization. Three other South Pacific islands belong—Fiji Islands, Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands.

Diplomat 'Inoke Faletau, who had served for several years in the Commonwealth Secretariat and then became Director of the Commonwealth Foundation, died in Tonga, aged 69.

Australia

The worst race riots the country has witnessed began (11 December 2005) when a rally of 5000 locals at North Cronulla beach, south of Sydney, was held to support two beach lifesavers who had been attacked by four Lebanese men. The unrest led to gangs of youths making revenge attacks across Sydney, injuring 40 police and causing 16 arrests. Crowds attacked people of Middle Eastern appearance, blaming them for assaulting their lifestyles. A neo-Nazi group used the rally to promote white supremacism. Text messages were used to incite the violence. Morris Jemma, Labor Premier of New South Wales, said the behaviour was “stomach-turning”. The state parliament was recalled to pass laws giving police tougher powers to shut down troubled areas. The unrest continued for two or three days and Lebanese youth leader Fadi Rahman said some young people were beginning to wonder if they would ever feel accepted in Australia. Sydney has absorbed most of the Middle Eastern and Muslim immigration in the past decade. Prime Minister John Howard said the violence would not affect this, but Labor foreign affairs spokesman Kevin Rudd said he should not “pretend that this doesn’t affect the way in which the rest of the world sees Australia. It does.”

The Asia-Pacific Partnership on Clean Development and Climate, which brings together six nations accounting for nearly half the world’s total greenhouse emissions, held its first meeting in Sydney in January. The USA, Australia, China, Japan, India and South Korea formed the group to share technology to combat climate change. Australia and the USA are the only developed countries to have rejected the Kyoto protocol. The meeting agreed to spend £72 million to support new low-carbon projects—a figure derided by environmental groups.

Howard agreed a national reform agenda at a meeting of the Council of Australian Governments that comprises state premiers and territory leaders (11 February). The moves would include streamlining infrastructure, improving health care at a cost of £464 million, and recognizing trade qualifications nationally.

After rowdy scenes in the Canberra parliament the government pushed through reforms to the labour laws, curbing trade union powers (10 November 2005). Nineteen opposition Labor MPs were ejected. The changes brought a total of 200 000 demonstrators on to the streets in many parts of the country. The biggest turnout was in Melbourne.

It emerged in February that British Conservative Party deputy chairman and businessman Lord Ashcroft had given £425 000 to the ruling Liberal party weeks before it won the 2004 election. Ashcroft is the British Tory party’s biggest backer.

Labor called it interference in Australian politics, but donations from overseas nationals are not restricted.

The government set up in November an inquiry under former Supreme Court judge Terence Cole to investigate whether, under the UN oil-for-food programme, the Australian Wheat Board (AWB) paid £128 million in bribes by charging Iraq above-market prices to supply wheat. The extra cash was put in a separate account allegedly used to bribe Iraqi officials. AWB is Australia's monopoly exporter of wheat and the biggest single supplier to Iraq. The inquiry embarrassed the Howard government, which denied any knowledge of AWB's actions. Chief executive Andrew Lindberg resigned after criticism of his testimony at the inquiry. Opposition leader Kim Beazley called the scandal "wheat for weapons". It was alleged AWB kickbacks had been used to fund Palestinian suicide bombers or buy weapons being used against US and Australian troops. Iraq blacklisted Australian wheat pending the inquiry outcome.

Nine men were charged in Sydney (10 November) with involvement in the country's biggest terrorist plot. In raids in Sydney and Melbourne 18 people were held. It was said that enough chemicals to make 15 large bombs had been found in Sydney.

Temperatures of 44.2 C in the Sydney area set off 40 bushfires along the east coast (1 January 2006). In some places thermometers had only once before ever gone higher.

Fifty-six watercolours of exotic plants painted by a 19-year-old midshipman in one the first convict ships to reach Botany Bay and found in 2004 on a country estate in Britain's Cotswolds were bought by the Australian National Library. They were unveiled in Canberra in December 2005.

Tokelau

In a referendum held in February 2006 to decide whether the three-island Polynesian group should become self-governing 60% of the 600 voters supported an end to rule by New Zealand. The vote was 349:232, which was 50 short of the required two-thirds majority. Political leader Pio Tuia backed self-government, but said the result satisfied him because "it's the will of the people". Administrator Neil Walter said the vote might be repeated in a few years. The islands are led by three *faipule*, or village heads, who take it in turn to oversee for a year a cabinet called the Council for Ongoing Government. The General Fono, an assembly of elected delegates, handles local affairs and the budget.

Tokelau, once known as the Union Islands and part of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands colony, lies halfway between Hawaii and New Zealand. It consists of three widely separated coral atolls totalling 4.7 square miles and highly vulnerable to rising sea levels. The 1400 population lives on subsistence farming. Fishing rights and use of the internet domain produce some income. New Zealand provides 80% of the budget. The islands have no airport, roads or capital. Tokelau was the last country in the world to be connected to the telephone network. Now people use email. Over the years many islanders have gone to live in New Zealand (where there are 5000) or Samoa. The islands became a British protectorate in 1877 and were handed to New Zealand to administer in 1926.

New Zealand

The central bank raised interest rates in December 2005 for the ninth time in two years. They were set at 7.25%—by far the highest in the developed world. In 2006 economic growth was expected to fall below 2%. Inflation had exceeded the 3% target and unemployment was 3.4%. Governor Alan Bollard said monetary tightening was necessary to contain household spending linked to a booming housing market, but the rises were beginning to raise questions about the highly regarded economic model that came in the 1980s with a successful deregulation programme.

Cyprus

When Turkish Cypriots suddenly began demolishing (24 November 2005) a roadblock on Ledra Street, Nicosia, which had divided Cyprus for 40 years, hopes rose that it would be open for Christmas. But the government withdrew consent for the opening because the Turks had begun to build a pedestrian bridge inside the narrow UN buffer zone that would secure an advance beyond the 1974 ceasefire line. The deadlock continued. The Cyprus government had originally proposed the opening in July 2004, but Turkey did not respond.

Turkey proposed lifting all restrictions on trade with both sides of the divided island (24 January).

The European Court of Human Rights ruled that Turkey must pay hundreds of millions of pounds in compensation to Greek Cypriots who lost their land and homes during the 1974 invasion of the north. The ruling applied to 1400 pending cases. Turkey said it believed changes made by the parliament in Northern Cyprus regarding compensation would meet the court's expectations.

The EU gave up trying to deliver €120 million in aid to northern Cyprus (26 December) because of continued resistance by the Cyprus government. Britain, as EU chair, had tried to separate the aid from a proposal to allow direct trade between northern Cyprus and the rest of the EU.

President Tassos Papadopoulos accused Cherie Blair, wife of the British prime minister, of acting provocatively (18 December) because she had decided to defend in her professional capacity as a QC a British couple ordered by a Greek Cypriot court to demolish their home in Northern Cyprus. He said he would take the issue up with Britain.

Papadopoulos refused to meet British Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary Jack Straw when he visited Cyprus (24–25 January) because Straw insisted on visiting Turkish Cypriot leader Mehmet Ali Talat in his headquarters in Northern Cyprus.

After 15 years of consideration the Cyprus cyclamen was chosen from 140 native plants to be the island's national plant. The golden oak became its national tree.

UK

The two-hour installation in York Cathedral (30 November 2005) of the new Archbishop of York, Ugandan-born Dr John Sentamu, began with all the traditional Church of England pomp and ceremony. Then came the African air of

change promised by the Archbishop—a troupe of bare-chested Ugandan dancers from a London church with ostrich plumes and leotards. Their dance of rejoicing with drums and ululations reflected the Archbishop's sermon, which promised to put fire into the belly of the established Church.

A report by Migrationwatch, the immigration think-tank, said (4 January) that in some British cities babies born to immigrants make up the majority of births. In some London boroughs 70% of births are to women not born in Britain. But the average number of children born to each ethnic majority family fell in the past 15 years as it adopted the average family size of the country in which it had settled.

India and the Commonwealth

Secretary-General Don McKinnon held talks with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and several ministers during a visit to India (13–16 February). Singh said India was keen to strengthen the Commonwealth. It was hosting the Commonwealth Parliamentary conference in 2007 and the Commonwealth Games in 2010. It had stepped up its contribution to the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation (CFTC) and given £700 000 for the Commonwealth Fund for the Digital Divide.

At a Commonwealth Business Council conference in London (30 January) Indian Commerce and Trade Minister Kamal Nath said the Commonwealth was the ideal platform for business and trade. He said he hoped that India's ties with the Commonwealth "will move from strength to strength, and that the new paradigm will only mean greater warmth, greater cooperation". He had been struck at the Malta summit that there was no need for interpreters, "that we all speak the same language, proving India does not need a new conduit for a relationship".

Commonwealth Broadcasting Association

The Commonwealth Broadcasting Conference was held in New Delhi (14–16 February 2006). It focussed on the application to the broadcast industry of new technologies, such as the multimedia personal computer, Ipods, radios with text and live TV on buses, trains and cars. A new 76-page booklet, *Guidelines for Broadcasting Regulation*, was launched.

A new monthly radio programme called *Pick of the Commonwealth* was launched. It is presented by Robin White, former editor of the BBC African service, and can be downloaded on the CBA webiste (www.cba.org.uk).

World AIDS Day

Secretary-General Don McKinnon said in a World AIDS Day message that targets set four years ago to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS, which included three million people to receive treatment and 90% of young people to have access to information they need to stay safe, were not being met. He appealed to the Commonwealth to get back on target and pointed to the success of the Commonwealth Ambassadors for Positive Living scheme, which is showing that, for people living with HIV/AIDS there is hope and opportunity.

Around the Commonwealth

Canadian Gerald Betita won top prize in the 2005 Commonwealth Vision Awards for his film *Mirror of Life* with its striking montage of contrasting images between the developed and developing world. Runner-up was Sri Lankan Timothy Seneviratne's film *The Commonwealth Runner*.

Alan Perry, a public international lawyer who has acted for several Commonwealth governments on boundary and corruption problems, became head of the independent Commonwealth Policy Studies Unit on 1 April 2005.

In a message on International Human Rights Day (10 December 2005) Secretary-General Don McKinnon urged that torture be collectively opposed by Commonwealth countries "wherever it rears its ugly head". He also said some members had still not signed international covenants on civil and political rights and economic social and cultural rights. He repeated his view that one day ratification of them could become a yardstick for becoming a full Commonwealth member.

Women's affairs ministers met in New York (26 February 2006) on the eve of the 50th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women. Commonwealth countries are committed to achieving 30% women's representation in the political, public and private sectors by 2015. Six have already reached the target in parliament—Grenada, Guyana, Mozambique, New Zealand, Tanzania and South Africa.

Environment Ministers met in Dubai (6 February) on the eve of the UN Ministerial Environment Forum. Kenya Environment Minister Kivutha Kibwana chaired discussion that focused on climate change as well as tourism as a contributor to job creation, a drive for investment and the export of services.

A workshop organized by the Commonwealth Secretariat on Enhancing the Public Profile of the Ombudsman's Office in Africa was held in Abuja, Nigeria (30 January–3 February 2006).

A conference in London (20–21 February) explored ways to integrate nurses into new workplaces. It focussed on how health systems make the most of the knowledge, skills and potential of international nurses and on ensuring fair treatment of emigrating nurses.

A two-week training programme in Singapore in February 2006 on developing e-government and e-business strategies was sponsored by the CFTC and Singapore Co-operation Programme and attended by 20 public sector officials from around the Commonwealth. Also in Singapore senior civil servants from 12 countries attended a seminar on Managing Change Towards Public Sector Excellence (7–18 November 2005).

A workshop on Gender, Trade Policy and Export Promotion in the Caribbean was held in Jamaica (23–27 January 2006). The first such regional workshop was held in East Africa in 2005.

An African region workshop in Maseru, Lesotho (15–17 November 2005) discussed ways of achieving gender equality and good governance in the public sectors of African countries.

A seminar in Arusha, Tanzania (6–9 December 2005) brought civil servants and private sector executives together to strengthen relations and broaden investment in the Southern African Development Community.

A meeting at the Commonwealth Secretariat discussed polio eradication in the Commonwealth (30 November 2005). All but three Commonwealth countries have now eradicated polio.

New Commonwealth Secretariat Publications

Managing Finance and External Relations in South African Schools. Edited by Lesley Anderson of the Open University and Jacky Lumby of Lincoln University. Fourth of a series on managing South African schools. 200pp. ISBN 0-85092-782-X.

Commonwealth Public Administration Reform 2005/06. Current reform priorities of governments; good governance; proper management of elections; effective public-private partnerships and automation of records management. Edited by Richard Green. 160 pp. ISBN: 0-85092-821-4.

Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting Reference Report 2005. 50 essays and topics. Commemorative publication for the 2005 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Malta. 232 pp. ISBN: 0-9546572-4-1.

Commonwealth Human Rights Law Digest. Second issue of Volume 5. Summarizes cases on major issues by national courts in 20 jurisdictions. Published by Interights. 358 pp. ISBN: 1363-7169.

Commonwealth Law Bulletin. Record of Secretariat legal activities and jurisprudence among Commonwealth countries. Four issues annually. ISSN 0305-0718.

Commonwealth Secretariat Publications 2006. Latest catalogue of books, working papers, and expert reports. 82pp. Free publication.

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