

# Commonwealth Update

DEREK INGRAM

**ABSTRACT** *In India President Bush makes a nuclear deal with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. After elections in the Solomons Honiara's Chinese business district is burned down. Australia holds a successful 18th Commonwealth Games as the New South Wales parliament becomes the first to abolish allegiance to the Queen. Jamaica chooses its first woman prime minister and the UK its first woman Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary. New Zealand appoints its first Maori head of the armed forces. Nigeria's Senate votes against a third term for the president. Zambia booms as copper prices soar. And a tortoise that belonged to Robert Clive dies in an Indian Zoo aged about 250.*

## India

On a three-day visit to New Delhi (1–3 March 2006) President George Bush agreed to allow India to buy nuclear technology and fuel from the USA to power its fast-growing economy. In 1998 the USA punished India for its nuclear weapons tests. Bush said: “Things change. It’s in our interests that India has a civilian nuclear industry to help take the pressure off the global demand for energy... there are no limits to Indo-US partnership.” In a televised address from the Red Fort he said: “India in the 21st century is a natural partner of the US because we are brothers in the cause of human liberty”. The agreement, which shook off India’s status as a nuclear pariah, now had to be sold to the US Congress. It faced opposition because India has not signed the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). But the International Atomic Energy Agency said it would strengthen the non-proliferation regime, combat nuclear terrorism and enhance safety. Under the deal India would list 14 of its 22 nuclear facilities as civilian and open them to international observers. It would continue a freeze on nuclear testing and the USA would give India civilian nuclear help. Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said: “History was made today”. The nuclear deal was one of a series of agreements that dealt with trade and agriculture, highlighting the US need to recognize India as a counterweight to China.

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Tens of thousands of Muslims and left-wing followers took to the streets over several days to protest against the Bush visit. Anti-US demonstrations spread to many parts of the country. Fifteen people died in bomb blasts in Varanasi, northern India. West Bengal Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee called the Bush administration the world's "most organized pack of killers". Just after Bush left Delhi Russia defended an intention to sell 60 tonnes of nuclear fuel to India—a step that caused concern in Washington.

Australian Prime Minister John Howard visited Delhi (5 March) and signed agreements on defence, trade, and 'strategic cooperation'. He refused an Indian request for uranium, saying Australia would maintain its policy of banning exports to countries that had not signed the NPT.

Under memorandums signed in Bangalore in May NASA agreed to provide scientific instruments for Chandrayaan-1, India's first unmanned Moon mission scheduled for 2008. The launch will be made from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre at Sriharikota, 100 km north of Chennai.

India planned to open its first overseas military base—in Tajikistan. Two squadrons of MiG-29s would be in Karkhor, a former Soviet base 60 miles from the capital.

Sonia Gandhi, leader of the ruling Congress party, resigned as an MP and as chair of the National Advisory Council following charges that she had violated the constitution by holding both posts (23 March). In doing so, she pre-empted an opposition campaign on the issue. Petitions to President Abdul Kalam had called for the disqualification of 40 other coalition MPs on similar grounds. The government adjourned parliament to introduce an ordinance to protect it from the loss of dozens of MPs. Gandhi then stood in a by-election in a family stronghold, Rae Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh, and won by 417 000 votes. Her campaign was spearheaded by her son Rahul, at 35 now being tipped as a future Congress prime minister.

Five regions went to the polls in April and May. The Communist parties were the biggest gainers. In Tamil Nadu, M. Karunanidhi, 83, of the DMK defeated the controversial actress-turned-politician chief minister Selvi Jayalalitha of the AIADMK. With Congress support, he became chief minister of Tamil Nadu for the fifth time. In West Bengal the Communist-run alliance won a seventh term. Communists under another octogenarian, V.S. Achuthanandan, also won in Kerala, ousting the governing Congress Party. Congress retained Pondicherry union territory and Assam, where it fell short of an outright majority and needed the support of a tribespeople party.

Prime Minister Singh told ministers from 13 states (13 April) that Maoist rebels were waging a war that represented the gravest threat to internal security in India since independence. India's failure to deliver social justice in its poorest regions had alienated people and helped the Naxalite movement's rebellion to spread. Maoist groups were said to be running parallel administrations in one in four of India's 600-odd districts and Maoist fighters in the country were put at 20 000. On the eve of Bush's visit to India Maoist rebels blew up a truck returning from a government-staged rally in Chhattisgarh state and killed 55 people—the worst attack in 30 years. Singh's warning came at a time when the instability in Nepal caused by the Maoists was causing great anxiety in Delhi. A special envoy, former minister Karan Singh,

was sent to Katmandu to tell King Gyanendra to restore multiparty democracy or risk losing his throne.

In the government's second budget (28 February) Finance Minister Palaniappan Chidambaram promised higher spending on health (22%), education (31%), roads and rural infrastructure. Growth for 2005–06 was forecast at 8.1% and India aimed to double its share of world trade to 1.5% within two years. The central bank set up (20 March) a panel to pave the way for rupee convertibility, a move abandoned in 2000 but now put back on the agenda because, said the prime minister, India's financial position has become "far more comfortable". After a High Court hearing (21 April) the way was also cleared for the privatization of Delhi and Mumbai airports. They would become joint ventures with a 26% government stake.

Ahead of a World Trade Organization (WTO) meeting in Rio de Janeiro India, together with Brazil and South Africa, agreed (31 March) to set up a free trade area. India's trade with Brazil has surged by 170% in two years.

A joint Indian–Canadian study said HIV infections in the four southern Indian states had dropped by one-third over four years. The states, which account for 75% of India's 5.1 million people infected, lead India's AIDS prevention campaign.

Survivors of the 1984 Union Carbide factory disaster in Bhopal called off a week-long hunger strike (17 April) when the prime minister promised to clean up the disused chemical factory, provide fresh drinking water and build a £13 million memorial to the dead. In the disaster 3500 died and since then another 15 000 have died of cancer and other diseases. Clean-up cost estimates range from £14 million to £280 million.

The Bar Council said (18 April) judges would no longer have to be addressed in court as 'my lord' or 'my lordship'—terms from British days. 'Your honour' or 'honourable court' could be used instead. Lawyers could also address the court as 'sir'.

A fire in a crowded tent at a consumer electronics fair in Meerut, Uttar Pradesh, killed 45 people (10 April) and 47 died when a bus carrying a wedding party veered off the road near Sarupeta, Assam and plunged into a lake (21 April).

A commission inquiry headed by a former Supreme Court judge found that Indian independence fighter Subhas Chandra Bose did not die in a Taiwanese plane crash in 1945. The body of Bose, whose Indian National Army (INA) fought against British rule from Japan and Burma, was never found. The findings of the inquiry, set up by the BJP-led government in 1999, were rejected by the Congress-led government which delayed publishing the report (17 May) for six months. The commission concluded Bose was dead (he would now be 99), but that ashes kept in a Japanese temple were not his.

When Rajkumar, 77, one of India's best-known actors who made 200 films, died thousands of fans could not view his body. They rioted and four died.

A property case first lodged 173 years ago came back to court in Kolkata in March 2006. It concerned the ownership of land, historic buildings and temples that Robert Clive, the governor-general, ruled should remain in the custody of Raja Naba Krishna Deb, a Bengali royal. When he died ownership was divided among the family. It has been contested ever since.

A giant Aldabra tortoise that was Clive's pet died peacefully in Alipore Zoo, Kolkota, on 22 March 2006, aged about 250. It was called Adwaita (Bengali for 'the Only One') and was one of four presented to Clive by British sailors from Seychelles. The shell would be carbon-dated and preserved.

## **Pakistan**

After India President Bush went on to Pakistan. Before he arrived a suicide bomb yards from the US consulate in Karachi killed an American diplomat and three others, and injured 52. Bush met President Pervez Musharraf in Islamabad (4 March) as pro-Taliban militants and Pakistani troops fought a five-day battle to control Miran Shah, capital of North Waziristan tribal agency. Musharraf accused President Hamid Karzai of neighbouring Afghanistan of being "totally oblivious" to events in his own country.

As Bush arrived opposition politicians, including former cricketer Imran Khan, were detained to prevent them protesting against the USA. Security concerns dominated the visit, which produced little of substance. Bush pressed Musharraf about the elections scheduled for 2007, saying: "The President understands these elections need to be open and honest". Musharraf said: "I am following constitutional norms where I have been allowed to wear this uniform until 2007. Sustainable democracy has been introduced... and will prevail... beyond 2007." Asked if the USA would offer Pakistan a civil nuclear deal, Bush said: "I explained that India and Pakistan are different countries with different needs and different histories". A joint statement at the end of the visit was vague, talking about expanding economic ties and exploring ways to meet Pakistan's energy needs. During the talks Bush told Musharraf he must improve his intelligence gathering to defeat Al-Qaeda.

A few days later Pakistan said a nuclear deal between India and the USA would cause the collapse of international agreements to prevent the spread of weapons of mass destruction. Foreign Minister Khurshid Kasuri said: "The whole nuclear NPT will unravel. It's only a matter of time before other countries will act in the same way."

After the Bush visit the Pakistani cabinet gave its air force the go-ahead (12 April) to buy up to 77 F-16 fighter aircraft from the USA, costing about £2 billion, but when Kasuri visited Washington later he said the purchase would be scaled down to help pay for relief costs of the 2005 earthquake. They would now buy only 18 new and 36 used aircraft. At the same time it was announced that Pakistan would buy an unspecified number of J-10 fighter jets from China. Officials said when Musharraf and Kasuri visited China later in the year they would discuss more defence supplies—believed to be 35–40 fighters in addition to 150 being jointly produced by Pakistan and China. They pointed out that the two announcements were made together: "If the US once again blocks deliveries... the pipeline from China would continue". It was a matter of "trust, trust and trust".

A few days after the Bush visit Musharraf said in an interview with the London *Guardian* (28 April) that he was not Bush's poodle. He was not fighting terrorism for the USA or Britain—"I am doing it for Pakistan". He pledged to hold free and fair elections, adding: "It is ironic I am sitting in uniform talking of democracy... but to

bring democracy to Pakistan I thought I needed it". As he spoke leaders of Benazir Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party and Nawaz Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League met in London and agreed to work together to restore democracy. Former prime ministers Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif, hitherto bitter enemies, then met in London and endorsed the agreement (15 May). The core was that, if in power, they would shut the military out of government and let parliament scrutinize the defence budget, now not allowed.

After more than three years' training the first four women pilots were welcomed into the air force with a big parade and an aerobatic show near Peshawar.

Mohammad Farooq, right-hand man of Abdul Qadeer Khan, the scientist who traded nuclear technology and materials with Iran, Libya and North Korea, became the last scientist to be released after two and a half years in custody. Khan lives under house arrest in Islamabad. The Foreign ministry said the release probably ended Pakistan's investigations in the matter, but Western diplomats said the case was far from closed and that the scientists should be made available as witnesses for prosecutions in other countries. No Pakistanis have been prosecuted and the USA has never been allowed direct access to Khan and his colleagues.

A bomb blast in Karachi (12 April) at a Sunni Muslim gathering killed 57 people. Two days earlier 29 women and children died in a stampede at a women-only Islamic ceremony in a mosque celebrating Muhammad's birthday. Terrorism was not involved.

In the aftermath of the 2005 earthquake the government decided to relocate the entire 25 000 population of Balakot, where 2500 died. The town sits on four volatile fault lines and would be abandoned.

In Lahore and other parts of the Punjab police cracked down on people flying kites at a centuries-old springtime festival. More than 1400 were arrested. In the run-up to the March festival seven people were slashed by kite strings reinforced with wire or glass and died. In 2005 19 people were killed.

Evidence that teeth were drilled to remove decay 9000 years ago was found by Italian researchers examining skeletons at a site in Mehrgarh, Baluchistan. Treatment was done with tiny, flint-tipped wooden drills that rotate 20 times a second. Previously, the earliest known dentistry was found in Denmark, dating from 3000BC.

## **India and Pakistan**

The peace process went on. Ministers from both countries pledged (29 March 2006) in a third round of trade talks in Islamabad to develop links in banking, freight transport and goods like tea and rice. Moves to let banks open branches in each other's country would be speeded.

In a pre-dawn massacre in Indian Kashmir 22 Hindu villagers died (1 May). It happened in the mountainous Doda district. On the same day 13 Hindu shepherds were found dead in Udhampur district. The incidents—the worst outbreak of communal violence for three years—took place two days before Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh met leaders of the All Parties Hurriyat Conference, which consists of 26 Kashmiri separatist parties.

Talks in Kashmir between Singh and pro-India political leaders at the end of May were boycotted by separatists. Singh admitted aberrations by Indian security forces

do take place, but “cannot be allowed to become the norm”. Steps would be taken to stop them.

A tenth round of the two-year-long talks between India and Pakistan over withdrawing troops from the Siachen glacier broke down (24 May). About 7000 Indian and 4000 Pakistan troops are still deployed in the area.

Talks in May made progress on a long-running demarcation issue involving Sir Creek, a narrow strip of marshland separating India’s Gujarat state and Pakistan’s Sindh province—the scene of heavy fighting on 1965. A joint survey was planned.

### **Bangladesh**

President Khaleda Zia visited India (20–22 March 2006) for the first time since taking office in 2001. She talked with President Abdul Kalam, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, Commerce Minister Kamal Nath and Sonia Gandhi. Talks centred on the £500 million trade imbalance in India’s favour, the war on illegal drugs, terrorism and water sharing.

Security forces captured the two most wanted Islamic militant leaders—Abdur Rahman, said to lead the JMB group, and Bangla Bhai, the No. 2. They surrendered (2 March) after a siege of a house in Sylhet by 500 police and paramilitaries.

Death sentences were passed (28 February) on 21 Islamic militants for carrying out bomb attacks on courts and government offices across the country in August 2005.

### **Sri Lanka**

A Tamil Tiger suicide bomber posing as a pregnant woman penetrated military headquarters in Colombo and set off a device next to a car carrying the new army chief of staff, Lieut-Gen. Sarath Fonseka (25 April 2006). Eight people were killed and 27 wounded, including Fonseka. Within hours Sri Lankan fighters and artillery began a two-day pounding of Tiger positions near Trincomalee. The Tigers still insisted they would not pull out of the four-year-old ceasefire agreement, but later several more military personnel died in mine blasts in the northwest and Jaffna. Then nearly 70 people, including 17 Sri Lankan sailors, were killed in a sea battle off the northern tip of Sri Lanka (11 May). Fifteen Tiger vessels ambushed a squadron of six ships, an unarmed troop carrier and five escorts. At least five boats were sunk—the worst confrontation since the 2002 ceasefire ended two decades of war. The rebel navy is thought to have 6000 ‘sea Tigers’. In separate attacks the rebels had shelled Trincomalee and targeted Sampur.

New President Mahinda Rajapakse had come to power preaching a hard line and then softened his position, but now the Tigers were said to be provoked by the government’s backing for the breakaway Tiger faction led by their former commander, Colonel Karuma.

After a 10-year experiment to maximize daylight hours the government reverted (14 April) to its previous time zone. Clocks would now again be set five-and-a-half hours ahead of GMT, as they had been up to 1996. The move was unpopular as it upset children’s bedtimes. The Tigers had always refused to make the switch.

## Maldives

Ahmed Ibrahim Didi and Maushad Waheed, jailed in 2002 for 15 years for alleged treason, were pardoned and freed (21 February 2006). Didi had been held with three others for writing articles for an underground newsletter. Amnesty International said the human rights situation in Maldives was little improved. It was pressing for legal reform.

Members of the opposition Maldivian Democratic Party boycotted the presidential opening of the legislature because of repression by President Abdul Gayoom and his failure to implement reforms. The Maldivian Social Democratic Party was registered as the country's fifth political party.

## Malaysia

The cabinet suspended talks with Singapore on improving bilateral ties and scrapped plans to build a bridge to replace the 84-year-old causeway that links the two countries (12 April 2006). Singapore wanted the bridge to be part of a package deal that would include supplies of sand for land reclamation projects and overflight rights for Singapore air force training missions. Singapore had told Malaysia that to proceed unilaterally with the bridge would violate treaty agreements. The causeway blocks access to ships through the Johor Strait between the two countries. Malaysia wants Johor to become a regional transport centre to rival Singapore. Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi said Malaysia was cutting off the talks because the public did not want to concede to Singapore's demands. Singapore said it was surprised at the sudden decision.

Works Minister Samy Vellu opened Malaysia's first motorway drive-in massage parlour (27 March). The aim: to cut accidents by easing the tense muscles of stressed drivers. The parlours will have automatic massage chairs.

The annual inflation rate hit its highest level for seven years in March. The consumer price index was driven by higher transport, alcohol and tobacco prices.

A team of 120 officials, academics and World Wildlife members found in Sabah state evidence of at least 13 Sumatran rhinos—the first time so many had been found in a compact location.

The government suspended the *Sarawak Tribune* indefinitely (9 February) for republishing cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad printed in Denmark. No Malaysian newspapers had been shut down since the 1980s.

## Singapore

In a snap election (6 May 2006) with a nine-day campaign the ruling People's Action Party (PAP), now led by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, son of the first prime minister Lee Kuan Yew, took 67% of the votes—down from 75% in 2001. No seats changed hands. The PAP held all but two in the 84-member parliament. The two opposition parties put up candidates for 47 seats, up from 29 in 2001 and their strongest challenge for 18 years.

A week before the election all adult citizens received a one-off cash giveaway that had been announced by Lee, who is also Finance Minister, in his budget (17 February). It would cost £1.3 billion. The country's growth was 6.4% in 2005.

As the arguments with Malaysia over the causeway continued, Singapore revealed a plan to build a helix-shaped bridge linking a tourist development, including a 185-metre Ferris wheel and a casino complex on reclaimed land. The bridge would cost £24 million.

### **Brunei**

Prince Jefri Bolkiah, who lives in London, was ordered by Brunei Chief Justice Mohammad Saied (4 March 2006) to hand over properties and jewels worth billions of pounds in the latest stage of a five-year battle with his brother, the Sultan. It is claimed the Prince embezzled £8 billion in the 13 years he was finance minister. Following action by the Sultan and the Brunei Investment Authority the Court of Appeal in London in September 2005 ordered the Prince to disclose details of how he continues to fund his high lifestyle in London, New York and Paris after having handed over £3 billion of his assets in 2001.

### **Fiji Islands**

Laisenia Qarase won a second term as prime minister in general elections (6–13 May 2006). His Soqosoqo Duavata Ni Lewenivanua (SDL) party won 36 seats. The Fiji Labour Party, led by Mahendra Chaudhury, won 31. Having won 10% of the seats Qarase invited the FLP to join a multiparty cabinet, as required by the constitution. Ten ministers would be from the SDL and seven from the FLP.

A Commonwealth group headed by K. D. Knight, former foreign minister of Jamaica, observed the elections. Other members were from Papua New Guinea, Uganda, Tanzania, Antigua and Barbuda and Kiribati. Their report found that this had been a credible election. The counts were orderly and professional. Most problems were minor but, because of the high number of invalid votes, arrangements needed to be made so that voters were taught clearly how to vote. Reports of 15 missing ballot boxes at one count centre had to be investigated. The group made recommendations on the independence, powers and capacity of the electoral commission and the election supervisor, voter registration, voter education and other matters.

Ahead of the election the Great Council of Chiefs reappointed for five more years President Ratu Josefa Iloilo and Vice President Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi. As Opposition leader, Mahendra Chaudhury welcomed the move as ensuring stability.

### **Vanuatu**

Prime Minister Ham Lini reshuffled his cabinet (1 March 2006) on learning that former prime minister Barak Sope, now agriculture minister, was trying to topple the government. He survived a no-confidence vote by 30:20 in the 52-member parliament.

### **Kiribati**

At a UN conference on biodiversity in Brazil it was announced (28 March 2006) that a 84 700 sq km zone to be known as the Phoenix Islands Protected Area was being created as a marine reserve in which commercial fishing would be banned.

## **Tonga**

A series of earthquakes hit Tonga in May 2006. One measuring 6.0 shook the islands and did no damage. The second measured 7.9 but was undersea and not felt. A tsunami alert was cancelled after a few hours.

Acting prime minister Fred Sevele was put on a permanent basis (31 March)—the first commoner to hold the post. By-elections were held for two noble seats—one because the former Speaker had been stripped of his title and seat after conviction for bribery.

## **Solomon Islands**

Hours after Snyder Rini was elected prime minister in a secret parliamentary ballot, hundreds of protesters in Honiara burnt cars and looted shops. Rini, deputy prime minister in the previous government, was trapped in parliament for several hours (18 April 2006). Two days later mobs burned down the new Pacific Casino Hotel, largest in the islands, along with restaurants and night clubs. About 90% of the Chinese-dominated business district was destroyed. Rini was considered to be closely aligned with the Chinese minority. The riots followed the first general elections to be held since peacekeepers restored order in 2003. During the election campaign it was alleged the government had directed money from Taiwan towards its supporters. In the poll voters fed up with corruption ousted half the MPs. Former prime minister Billy Hilly said the election of Rini by parliament was not free because MPs had been offered bribes. In a second ballot MPs elected opposition leader Manasseh Sogavare to be prime minister as head of a four-party coalition. Supporters outside parliament sang the national anthem in celebration.

When the riots broke out Australia and New Zealand sent 200 troops and police to the islands to protect those police sent there to keep the peace in 2003 when years of ethnic gang conflict ended. Seventeen Australian police were injured.

The Commonwealth sent an observer group for the election headed by Sir Arnold Amet, former chief justice of Papua New Guinea. Other observers were from Fiji, Malta, Ghana, Tonga and the UK. After the riots Commonwealth Secretary-General Don McKinnon said: “The people of the Solomon Islands have worked hard in recent years to restore their country to sustainable peace and put it on a path to renewed prosperity. These efforts should not now be undermined by those who pursue their goals through other than peaceful and democratic means.” The actions were not acceptable behaviour in any corner of the Commonwealth.

## **Papua New Guinea**

National Planning and Monitoring Minister Arthur Somare, son of Prime Minister Sir Michael Somare, resigned (1 March 2006) after being referred to the public prosecutor by the Ombudsman Commission for misconduct in office. He and Health Minister Melchior Pep were referred in relation to alleged misuse of public funds. Deputy Prime Minister Sir Moi Avei was also referred to the public prosecutor for misconduct in office.

### Samoa

In legislative elections (31 March 2006) Prime Minister Tuila'epa Sailele Malielegaoi's Human Rights Protection Party won 32 seats and the main opposition Samoa Democratic United Party 10 seats, with six independents in the 49-seat Fono. The prime minister was uncontested. In 2001 he had no clear majority. His success was attributed to economic stability and 6% GDP growth.

Susuga Malietoa Tanumafili II celebrated his 93rd birthday (4 January 2006). He has been head of state since 1963—the third longest-serving in the world after Queen Elizabeth and King Bhumibol of Thailand.

### Australia

At the 18th Commonwealth Games in Melbourne (15–26 March 2006) Australia took top place in the final score table with 84 gold medals. England took 36 and Canada 26. They were followed by India 22, South Africa 12, Scotland 11, Jamaica 10, Malaysia 7, New Zealand 6, Kenya 6, Singapore 5, and Nigeria 4.

Queen Elizabeth inaugurated the Games, at which the organizers had decided *Advance Australia Fair* and not *God Save the Queen* should be played. Australian Prime Minister John Howard complained, saying the royal anthem should be played as a matter of “respect and good manners”. As a compromise, opera star Kiri Te Kanawa sang eight bars of the royal anthem. In her speech at the state dinner the Queen said that “for many indigenous Australians there remains much to be done”.

In the same week the New South Wales parliament, the oldest in Australia, voted to abolish its oath of allegiance to the monarch—the first state to do so. It also abolished its office in London, saying it would focus on trade relations within the Asia-Pacific region.

Prime Minister John Howard appeared before the independent inquiry he had set up into how, under the UN oil-for-food programme, the Australian Wheat Board funnelled £128 million in kickbacks to the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq. It was the first time a prime minister had appeared before such an inquiry in 23 years. Earlier, Mark Vaile, Deputy Prime Minister and Trade Minister, and Alexander Downer, Foreign Minister, had given evidence. Vaile said he had not seen any of 21 diplomatic cables sent to his office outlining the allegations and had no recollection of events. Downer also said he did not remember cables from Australian representatives abroad discussing these issues. He had ignored summaries of the cables because he was too busy. He got so many cables he tended not to read them unless “I'm stuck on a plane and I've run out of reading material”. Howard took a similar line. He had not received or read any of the 21 cables and “always believed the best” of the Wheat Board.

The government unveiled plans to scrap most restrictions on the media sector (14 March). It would ease limits on cross-media ownership that stop investors owning TV stations and newspaper operations in the same city. The changes would enable the Murdoch and Packer groups to strengthen their hold on the media.

Howard announced (3 April) that Australia was to supply uranium to China. Safeguards were in place to ensure that it would be used for non-military purposes, but the first shipments were years away.

The British Museum said (24 March) it had agreed to a request from the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre to return the small bundles of cremated ashes of Aborigines acquired in 1838. They had been used by Aborigines to ward off sickness.

The most powerful cyclone for decades hit north Queensland (20 March). Winds up to 180 mph hit worst the towns of Innisfail and Cairns, left 1000 homeless and 20 000 without power. The region's banana and sugar crops were destroyed. The storm was category five, the strongest possible. A month later a similar cyclone hit Darwin.

### **Pitcairn Island**

The six men jailed for raping women and under-age girls failed in an appeal against their convictions in New Zealand (2 March 2006). They decided to appeal to the Privy Council.

### **Cook Islands**

The government dismissed in March 2006 former prime minister Robert Woonton as its high commissioner in New Zealand. It claimed he had tried to hatch a conspiracy to overthrow it.

### **New Zealand**

Major-General Jerry Mateparae, 51, became the first indigenous Maori to head the defence forces—and the youngest ever army chief. As a lieutenant-general he replaced Air Marshal Bruce Ferguson (1 May 2006).

David Parker resigned as attorney-general over allegations that he filed inaccurate company reports to the corporate registrar's office (20 March). He remained in the cabinet as Transport and Energy Minister.

### **Canada**

On his first foreign trip since becoming prime minister Stephen Harper went to see Canadian troops in Afghanistan. Four Canadian soldiers were killed in a roadside convoy bombing north of Kandahar (21 April 2006). The Taliban was blamed. Canada has 2300 troops in the country as part of the NATO force. Fifteen have been killed since 2002.

In a 8:0 landmark ruling the Supreme Court decided that Sikh school children should be allowed to wear a kirpan, a small dagger central to their faith. Schools banned the kirpan in 2002. But the court said this violated Canada's Charter of Rights. About 250 000 Sikhs live in the country.

International protests again marked the start of the annual cull of baby seals (26 March). Animal rights activists clashed with the hunters. Their boats and helicopters filmed the killing. Prime Minister Harper said Canada was the victim of international propaganda. The government claims the hunt is environmentally justified. At nearly six million the seal population has almost tripled since the 1970s. This year the total killed was expected to reach 325 000. Pelts are sold to the fashion industry and blubber for oil. The 2005 hunt produced about £8.3 million in revenue.

Eight men were shot dead and dumped in cars on a former dairy farm 20 miles from London, Ontario—the worst slaughter in the province's history (9 April). Police said the suspects were associated with the Bandidos, a criminal motorcycle gang. In the 1990s 160 people were killed in a feud between the Hells Angels and the Rock Machine, which preceded the Bandidos. Membership of the Bandidos extends from North America to Europe, Indonesia and Australia. The Hells Angels were formed in the USA after World War II and now see Canada as their home. The Toronto chapter earns millions in drug sales. In dawn raids across Canada in January 27 were arrested.

Indigenous peoples, environmental groups and logging companies agreed (7 February) to protect ecologically sensitive land in central and northern coastal areas of British Columbia known as the Great Bear rainforest. The agreement ended a 10-year dispute.

### **Jamaica**

P. J. Patterson, 70, stepped down after 14 years as prime minister. In an internal vote Local Government Minister Portia Simpson-Miller, 51, was elected president of the ruling People's National Party and sworn in as the country's first woman prime minister (30 March 2006). She narrowly beat the national security minister and two other candidates. Foreign Affairs Minister K. D. Knight questioned Miller's leadership ability and resigned. Miller, a popular figure in Jamaican politics since entering parliament in 1976, comes from a poor background. On taking over, she said Jamaica should stop worrying about her gender and concentrate on the island's problems, especially the high crime rate. She is a keen boxing and golf fan. In today's Jamaica 70% of university students and 90% of law school students are women. They head 45.5% of households, but in 2005 were the victims of 10 023 cases of domestic violence, of which 1269 were rape.

The Kingston house where reggae singer Bob Marley lived was designated a national heritage site (9 February). His daughter unveiled a plaque to Marley, who died in 1981. The house is now a recording studio and museum.

### **Trinidad and Tobago**

The first of 39 Scotland Yard officers arrived in Port of Spain in March 2006 to fight rising crime. They would carry firearms and have the power to make arrests.

Energy Minister Eric Williams resigned in a corruption scandal. He was accused of accepting a bribe from a local government councillor for the award of government contracts (9 January 2006).

The trial of opposition leader and former prime minister Basdeo Panday was postponed (31 January). He was charged with not disclosing details of an overseas bank account in 1997–99.

### **Guyana**

Gunmen shot dead Agriculture Minister Satyadeow Sawh, his brother, sister and a security guard as they sat on the patio at his home six miles from Georgetown

(22 April 2006). Another brother was injured. Police said it seemed to be a robbery—the gunmen stole just £56—but the ruling People’s Progressive Party (PNP) said it was an assassination in the run-up to general elections. Fifty killings had occurred since January, a crime rise said to be connected with the growing drugs trade and gun smuggling. A distraught President Bharrat Jagdeo wondered why crime was spiralling despite considerably more resources being given to the police. Canadian High Commissioner Bruno Picard said at the minister’s funeral that Guyana faced a defining moment when the nation was called on “to set aside its differences to address difficult challenges”.

Earlier, after talk show host and opposition activist Ronald Waddell had been shot dead in his Georgetown home (30 January), the US, Canadian and EU ambassadors issued a statement expressing concern at the level of violent crime in the country. Waddell was said to have called on viewers to support gangs in the village of Buxton who he claimed were defending the Guyanese of African descent. The station cancelled the programme and asked the Ethnic Relations Commission to investigate the remarks.

The elections commission postponed presidential and parliamentary elections due to be held by 4 August following months of disagreement over the electoral list. The opposition Peoples National Congress (PNC) demanded door-to-door registration. The commission said it needed more time to clean up the lists. A top official of the Organization of American States (OAS) said the commission had become too politicized. Its directors are chosen by the parties. Talks on extending the life of parliament collapsed.

### **Bahamas**

The UK Privy Council judicial committee abolished the mandatory death sentence for those convicted of murder, ruling that it was in violation of the constitution. It said it should have been deemed inhuman and degrading punishment in 1973 when the constitution was redrafted.

Arthur Dion Hanna, 77, succeeded the country’s first woman governor-general, Dame Ivy Dumon (1 February). He was deputy prime minister in the Pindling government and resigned following corruption allegations which a royal commission upheld in 1984.

### **Belize**

The opposition United Democratic Party won 64 of 67 seats contested in municipal elections (1 March 2006)—a crushing defeat for Prime Minister Said Musa’s People’s United Party. Said denied the result was because of perceived corruption. General elections were two years off.

### **St Vincent and the Grenadines**

Glen Jackson, press secretary to Prime Minister Ralph Gonsalves, was found shot dead in his car (6 March 2006). Detectives from Scotland Yard were called in.

### **St Lucia**

The ruling St Lucia Labour Party had its first electoral defeat in 10 years in a by-election in Central Castries (13 March 2006). An independent beat the attorney-general—only the second to win a seat in the legislature.

### **Antigua and Barbuda**

The government accused the USA of not complying with a WTO ruling that US federal laws discriminated against foreign-based internet gambling companies by outlawing cross-border gambling. It protested against American attempts to make online gambling illegal in the USA. Internet gambling is an important source of income for Antigua.

### **Sierra Leone**

UN prosecutor Desmond de Silva asked President Olusegun Obasanjo (26 March 2006) to arrest former Liberian president Charles Taylor as concerns grew that he would flee Nigeria to evade trial for war crimes before the international criminal court in Freetown. Taylor had been given refuge in a Calabar villa from Liberia in 2003 under a deal by which he agreed to step down as president. The new Liberian President, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, now called for his extradition and Nigeria agreed (27 March 2006) to hand over Taylor. He tried to escape into Cameroon, but was captured on the border, taken to Monrovia, arrested and flown in handcuffs to Freetown—the first former African head of state to be tried for such crimes. He faced 11 charges of backing Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front rebels, who waged a 10-year civil war. Nigeria had been reluctant to agree to the extradition, but did so under pressure from Washington before Obasanjo went there for talks with President Bush. In court (3 April) Taylor pleaded not guilty but refused to recognize its jurisdiction.

### **Nigeria**

The Senate rejected a bill to amend the constitution so that Olusegun Obasanjo could run for a third term as president (16 May 2006) in elections due in early 2007. Obasanjo had not himself announced he would stand again, but his supporters argued he would be the only suitable leader to carry through the country's economic reforms. Obasanjo accepted the Senate decision. An amendment to bring about the change in the National Assembly would require a two-thirds majority—not considered possible. The anti-corruption commission was investigating allegations that assembly members had been offered bribes to vote in favour of a third term. Meantime, divisions had opened up within the ruling People's Democratic Party, which won the 1999 and 2003 elections. Factions formed a rival party.

Before the Senate vote the matter of a third term caused Obasanjo and his Vice-President Atiku Abubakar to fall out and call for each other's resignation (7 April). Obasanjo said Abubakar should resign after he had met legislators and political figures. Washington stepped into the argument. US intelligence chief John

Negroponte said a third term could unleash “major turmoil and conflict” and disrupt oil supply.

In March the first census for 15 years was conducted. Earlier censuses were marred by allegations of fraud and manipulation. This time the National Population Commission, which ran the operation, said it was overall a success. Forms were digitally processed and satellite positioning was used to identify the areas to be counted. The real test would come in several months when the information was collated and the result announced. The population is estimated at 120–150 million.

Attacks on oil export installations in the Eastern Delta forced Shell to shut them down in February 2006 at a cost of half its output. Nine foreign workers were taken hostage, a pipeline was destroyed, gunmen stormed a pipe-laying barge, and a fire started at the Forcados terminal. The Movement for the Emancipation of the Nigeria Delta claimed responsibility. It was the worst outbreak of violence for three years and pushed up world oil prices. Six of the hostages were released after 10 days (1 March) and handed over to foreign journalists. The other three, two British and one American, were freed a month later. The unrest continued and for the first time a car bomb was exploded in a barracks in Port Harcourt. Three foreign oil workers were kidnapped from a car and held for a day.

Disruptions in oil supplies were beginning to cause concern in the USA, which buys 40% of Nigeria’s total exports. Of further international concern was an audit of the oil industry which showed a £185 million gap over six years between what oil companies said they had paid the government and receipts acknowledged by the central bank. The audit was commissioned as President Obasanjo tried to clean up Nigeria’s image in the drive for debt relief.

A Port Harcourt court ordered Royal Dutch Shell to pay £858 million in damages for polluting the Delta (24 February)—compensation to the communities in Bayelsa state for degrading their creeks and spoiling crops and fishing. It was a major victory for the Ijaw people who had been campaigning for years.

Oil was high on the agenda when President Hu Jintao of China paid a state visit to Nigeria (26–27 April), during which he was given a standing ovation in the national assembly. Talks were finalized to give China preferential rights in bidding for four drilling licences in exchange for £2 billion infrastructure investment. China would buy a controlling stake in a Nigerian state-owned refinery and invest in a railway line and power plants. Nigeria also agreed to buy patrol boats for use in the Delta and to spend £140 million on Chinese fighter and trainer jets. Nigeria was said to have turned to China for help because the USA had been too slow in helping secure the Delta from insurgency. A Navy official said Nigeria felt let down because the US military failed to offer more boats and support.

Many churches in northern Nigeria were burned by Muslims protesting in February over the cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad that had appeared in Denmark. At least 24 people died. Hotels and shops were torched. Worst hit were Bauchi, Onitsha and Maiduguri. Later unrest spread as protests grew in the north and east over the reports that Obasanjo, a Christian northerner, was planning to stand for a third term as president. Deaths totalled 130 with 5000 people displaced in Onitsha and other towns.

Vandals tapping into a pipeline just outside Lagos to steal petrol ignited 5400 jerrycans of fuel and caused an explosion that killed 200 people.

The top nine floors of the 21-floor Nigerian Industrial Development Bank in Lagos collapsed in a thunderstorm (22 March). Few were in the building because most people were at home for the census. Two people died.

### **Ghana**

A packed ship hit a stump and capsized on Lake Volta (8 April 2006). All but 30 of the 150 passengers died.

Peggy Appiah, daughter of British Chancellor of the Exchequer Sir Stafford Cripps, who married Joe Appiah, aide of Kwame Nkrumah in the liberation struggle in the 1950s but later twice jailed by him, died in Ghana, aged 84 (11 February 2006). She worked hard for the poor of Ghana, wrote 20 books and compiled a collection of 7000 Ashanti proverbs.

### **The Gambia**

The government said (22 March 2006) it had foiled a coup and arrested six officers while President Yahya Jammeh was on a visit to Mauritania. Jammeh cut short his visit. Army chief of staff Mbure Cham was said to have tried to oust Jammeh and then fled to Senegal. Jammeh seized power by coup in 1994. He won a second term as a civilian president in 2001 and was seeking re-election in 2006.

### **Cameroon**

A newspaper crusade accused 50 prominent figures, including ministers, news readers, singers and sports stars of homosexuality—illegal in Cameroon, as in many African countries. Communications Minister Pierre Mbonjo, one of those named, attacked the published lists, while Roman Catholic Archbishop Victor Tonye Bakot denounced the European Union for giving legitimacy to homosexuality. In Cameroon same-sex intercourse carries a penalty of five years' jail.

At least 127 people drowned when a ferry from Nigeria capsized in a storm off Kribi.

### **Uganda**

Kizza Besigye, leader of the opposition Forum for Democratic Change, was cleared in the high court of rape (5 March 2006). He had been charged on his return from exile to fight the February elections, in which his party won 37% of the votes. Besigye, who said the charge had been fabricated to keep him from challenging President Yoweri Museveni in the elections, still faced treason charges. The judge said the investigations had been “crude and amateurish, betraying the motives behind the case”.

By 4:3 the Supreme Court rejected a challenge to the presidential election results from Besigye. They said there was no evidence that the results had been substantially affected by irregularities. They dismissed his call for a recount of the vote or even holding the election again, but they agreed there had been irregularities. These included: disenfranchisement of voters with names struck off the voters' role; counting and tallying irregularities; a free and fair election compromised by bribing,

intimidation and violence; multiple voting and ballot box stuffing in some areas. The majority of the judges ruled that all this had not affected the overall result. Five judges to two ruled that Museveni did not commit illegal practices personally or through his agents. Besigye rejected the court's findings and said he would continue to regard Museveni's presidency as illegitimate.

The final report of the Commonwealth Observer Group led by Sir Ketumile Masire, former president of Botswana, confirmed its interim findings on the shortcomings of the election and made major recommendations for many improvements in the system. They included the need for legislation to separate the state and the ruling party; for public resources not to be abused to give the ruling party an advantage over the others; greater independence for the electoral commission; a code of conduct for the media; and turning the Uganda Broadcasting Corporation into a public service rather than a state broadcaster.

A final report by Uganda and Sudan (9 April) into the helicopter crash in Uganda that killed Sudanese first vice-president John Garang in July 2005 blamed pilot error. The helicopter belonged to President Museveni. Poor weather had caused the pilot to fly low and 14 were killed. Garang had just signed a deal ending Sudan's civil war and forming a coalition government.

A partly built church in Kampala collapsed in a storm on to the congregation during a service, killing 27 and injuring 86.

## Kenya

Masked and armed police stormed the offices of *The Standard*, the country's oldest newspaper with a circulation of 100 000, burned in the streets thousands of copies, destroyed equipment and forced the newspaper's 24-hour television station off the air (2 March 2005). The raid followed the arrest of three *Standard* journalists after a story about a secret meeting between President Mwai Kibaki and a senior opposition politician. It was the first time a leading media company had been shut down. The government admitted responsibility for the raids, although it was not clear whether the men were police or an elite rapid response unit used to fight carjackers. On the day of the raids President Mwai Kibaki said: "When you rattle a snake you must prepare to be bitten". The World Bank said the raid was inexcusable. A statement by 28 heads of mission called the action "an unprecedented attack on the freedom of the media in Kenya". The Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) said it was "a sad day for the Kenyan people, for the impartiality of the Kenyan police force and the freedom of the media in Kenya".

In renewed moves against corruption the former governor of the central bank, a former head of intelligence and four others were charged (15 March) in connection with the payment of massive cash subsidies for fictitious exports of gold and diamonds by a firm called Goldenburg International 14 years ago. The so-called Goldenburg scandal cost Kenyan taxpayers £400 million, but no one has ever been found guilty and no politician charged.

The Dutch government suspended £70 million in aid saying it wanted to see more tangible results in the corruption fight.

Former anti-corruption chief John Githongo, now in Britain continuing his campaign from an Oxford college, urged Britain to carry out a full inquiry into a

number of British businessmen whose multi-million contracts were at the centre of Kenyan investigations. Security and defence contracts worth up to £200 million were said to be involved.

As donors launched new appeals to feed millions in Kenya and the rest of the Horn of Africa suffering from drought, MPs in Nairobi were demanding a huge rise in travel expenses. In April they blocked the national budget, which included aid to drought victims, to force the government's hand. The MPs' salaries already compared favourably with those of their European counterparts. Rains finally came in later April, bringing floods, but 3.5 million were hungry at a time when UN appeals for help were receiving a poor response from donors. Tea production was down by half. In many areas of the Horn the drought had now gone on for five to six years. In March Kenya was the first recipient of a new UN emergency fund set up after months of pressure from Britain.

The government sold off in April 30% of its largest electricity-generating company, Kengen—the first public offering at the Nairobi stock exchange for 10 years. Applications for £64 million stock were two-and-a-half times oversubscribed in a country where three-quarters of the population have no access to mains electricity. Stocks quickly quadrupled in price.

Journalists, diplomats, judges and trafficking suspects watched as 950 sachets containing 1.1 metric tons of cocaine were burned in Nairobi (31 March). Police seized the drugs—worth £40 million and one of the biggest hauls of narcotics in Africa—in Malindi. The burning took eight hours. Some Kenyans feared it was a public relations exercise. A 1.1 metric ton haul of cocaine was set ablaze by the authorities in Nairobi.

Thomas Cholmondeley, 38, great-grandson of one of the first white settlers, Lord Delamere, appeared handcuffed in the High Court (24 May) accused of murdering a man he suspected of poaching on his farm. He pleaded not guilty. In 2005 Cholmondeley admitted shooting a Maasai ranger. He denied murder and the case was dropped, causing resentment among the Maasai community.

A military plane crashed near Marsabit, northern Kenya, as it tried to land in bad weather. Fourteen people were killed, including two assistant ministers and the deputy leader of the main opposition party (10 April).

## **Tanzania**

Jakaya Kikwete began a round of reforms in his first 100 days as prime minister. Among them was the creation of a new Ministry of Public Safety and Security to deal with a growing armed crime problem. Daring daylight robberies were leading to shoot-outs, particularly in Dar es Salaam. In one case robbers threw a grenade at a loading plane and stole gold bars. The Minister, Bakari Mwapachu, issued a shoot-to-kill order. Days later eight Tanzanian police officers were charged with murder over the shooting of four men. They said the four were suspected armed robbers, but it was found they were gemstone dealers. In April police chief Said Mwema ordered publication of the phone numbers of all the country's senior policemen, including his own.

Completion of new ministerial homes to replace housing sold off to civil servants was delayed so that in March 36 ministers and their deputies were living in expensive

hotels. The news caused disquiet and at the end of February newcomers in the Kikwete government were told to leave the hotels or pay their own bills.

A court in Zanzibar began hearing (23 May) a case brought by 10 Zanzibaris challenging the legality of the treaty that created the United Republic of Tanzania in 1964. Many Zanzibaris feel the union favours the mainland.

A new species of kipunji monkey was identified and named *rungwecebus* after Mount Rungwe volcano where it was found in social groups of 30–36. It is a crested monkey, pale grey-brown, with a long curled up tail. Details appeared in the journal *Science*.

### **British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT)**

The High Court in London ruled (11 May 2006) that the British government was “irrational” and “unlawful” in trying to block the 4000 inhabitants of the Chagos Islands from returning to their 65-island archipelago. The judges called the policy of exiling the population of British subjects “repugnant”. The islanders were forced to leave their homes between 1965 and 1973 when, under a Cold War deal with the USA, a huge military base was built on the largest island, Diego Garcia. Most have lived in Mauritius ever since. Some are in Britain. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office said it was disappointed at the judgment. The British said repopulating the islands was impractical.

### **Malawi**

Vice-President Cassim Chilumpha was arrested at his Blantyre home on treason charges (28 April 2006). He was accused of holding meetings with his United Democratic Front party and conspiring to topple President Bingu wa Mutharika. It was the culmination of a long feud between the two men. Chilumpha no longer attended cabinet meetings or state functions and Mutharika said his deputy had “constructively” resigned.

President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe cut the ribbon on a highway from Malawi to Mozambique named after him (3 May). The road was funded by the European Union, which has a travel ban on him. At the ceremony President Mutharika, whose wife is Zimbabwean, hailed Mugabe as a “true son of Africa and a true democrat”. Desmond Kaunda, chairman of the Council of Non-Governmental Organisations, said Malawi should not be honouring Mugabe.

The appointment of an English vicar, Rev. Nicholas Henderson, as a bishop in Malawi was blocked by the Anglican Province of Central Africa’s Confirmation Court. He was deemed to be “not of sound faith” because of his liberal views on gay rights. A Zambian was named acting bishop. Henderson’s supporters carried him shoulder high and blockaded the office of the Archbishop Bernard Malango, head of the diocese of Central Africa. He is popular in Malawi for his development work during a previous posting.

### **Zambia**

The economy received a boost in the first half of 2006 as the copper price soared to all-time records, largely thanks to the demand from China. By May it had gained

68%—rising to five times what it was in 2001. The Zambian kwacha had become one of the world's best-performing currencies. Zambia found itself a favoured exploration destination in Africa for several minerals. Mining activity was at a peak. A diamond drilling programme began in eight areas. In March high-grade uranium was reportedly found and helicopter surveys had identified gold. Tourism was steadily growing as visitors to the Victoria Falls now chose to view them from Zambia rather than from troubled Zimbabwe.

Zimbabwean white farmers who had moved into farming in Zambia found themselves the victims of this economic success. The new farmers were producing bumper harvests of maize and tobacco, but their produce is paid for in US dollars and the surge in the value of the Zambian kwacha meant many farms were not viable. Their income was in US dollars.

Former President Frederick Chiluba had his passport released on the eve of a court case in which he was due to appear again (21 March) on new charges of theft of public funds; he was allowed to go to Johannesburg for heart treatment. He first went on trial in 2003 but the case was dropped because of procedural problems.

### **Zimbabwe**

Inflation passed the 1000% mark in April 2006 as the country reached the 26th anniversary of independence. The government said it would print another Z\$60 trillion in Z\$50 000 notes—now the smallest denomination. A loaf of bread cost Z\$90 000 and a pair of jeans Z\$5.7 million. The World Health Organisation said Zimbabwe now had the lowest life expectancy in the world—34 years for women and 37 for men.

At the Harare stadium on Independence Day Mugabe spoke for an hour to a 30 000 crowd which reacted in silence. They had come for the free football match that followed. In his speech Mugabe endorsed plans announced six weeks earlier by Mines Minister Amos Midzi to take 51% in foreign-owned mining companies. Foreign investors in the sector include Rio Tinto and Anglo-American. Central bank governor Gideon Gono had written a paper urging the authorities not to pursue a policy that could spell the end of Western and South African involvement in the mining industry.

The government had been militarized. Army and intelligence officers were in charge of key state institutions such as the Grain Marketing Board, tax collection and the electoral commission. The independent *Financial Gazette* was taken over by the Central Intelligence Organization.

Mugabe invited the mainly white Commercial Farmers' Union to submit applications to run farms on 99-year leases. The Union said 200 farmers had applied (21 April), but security and land reform minister Didymus Mutasa said land belonged to black people and there was "definitely no going back on our policy".

The split in the opposition Movement for Democratic Change, which had been developing for some months, worsened when Arthur Mutambara, 39, a Rhodes scholar who had completed a doctorate in robotics at Merton College, Oxford, and become a professor of robotics in the USA, was named as leader of a breakaway

faction at a congress in Bulawayo in March. His backers included the MDC secretary-general Welshman Ncube. The Bulawayo congress was followed by a convention in Harare at which Morgan Tsvangirai, who is 54, was endorsed as MDC leader. The party divided originally on the issue of whether to contest the 2005 elections for the new Senate.

In a 90-minute TV interview on his 82nd birthday (21 February) Mugabe claimed his doctors said he had “the bones of a 30-year-old”. He said African leaders lacked courage to take on European authority. He denounced the British government saying it still “wanted to govern us by remote control”.

A judge ordered three MDC officials, four policemen and a security reservist to be held on charges of plotting to kill Mugabe. An arms cache was said to have been found.

Roy Bennett, MDC MP and fierce opponent of Mugabe, who had been jailed and tortured, fled to South Africa after police linked him to an alleged plot to assassinate the president.

### **South Africa**

Former deputy president Jacob Zuma was acquitted of raping a 31-year-old HIV-positive family friend in Johannesburg High Court (8 June 2006). In the case Zuma, who had been chairman of the National AIDS Council, had admitted not using a condom. Afterwards he quickly apologized to the nation and denied he had hampered the country’s AIDS prevention programme. Two days later the African National Congress (ANC) national executive restored him as its deputy president, putting him back as a possible candidate to succeed President Thabo Mbeki, who had sacked him amid a corruption scandal. Zuma is a charismatic figure who was imprisoned on Robben Island with Mandela.

In local elections the ANC kept power in cities like Johannesburg and Durban, but lost majority control of Cape Town municipality, where it only took power in 2004. The main opposition Democratic Alliance won 90 seats to the ANC’s 81. The Independent Democrats, with 23 seats, would hold the balance of power. Cape Town is the only South African city without a black majority population.

About 200 000 people a year were now flocking to Soweto township, Johannesburg. A four-star Freedom Hotel was planned for the newly named Walter Sisulu Square, to mark where activists signed the Freedom Charter in 1955 setting down the aim of equality for all in a multiracial country.

Johannesburg itself was swiftly reviving. A major regeneration programme with such developments as the Nelson Mandela bridge had renewed the city. CCTV and rapid response police units had cut crime by 80%. From £10 a square metre in 2000 real estate had risen to £350. The price for gentrification: a big squatter eviction problem.

Elsewhere crime was still shocking. A detective who went on the rampage in Krugersdorp, west of Johannesburg (3 April), killing four colleagues, three others and an infant, was shot dead by police.

An armed gang stole £9.5 million in cash being unloaded from a jumbo jet at Johannesburg airport.

### **Lesotho**

Britain's Prince Harry returned for a fourth visit to Lesotho (April 2006) to launch his own charity called Sentebale (Forget-me-not). It will help orphans in Lesotho who have lost their parents to AIDS. The Prince spent part of his gap year between Eton and Sandhurst in Lesotho and planned the charity with Prince Seeiso, brother of Lesotho's King Letsie and High Commissioner in London.

### **Botswana**

After two years of talks the government signed a package of agreements with diamond group De Beers under which it would channel all its operations through Botswana. Part of its activities would be transferred from London to Gaborone. Diamond sales are three-quarters of Botswana's exports. It is the world's largest diamond producer.

### **Cyprus**

The European Parliament called on Turkey (16 March 2006) to honour its commitments to the EU by letting ships and planes from Cyprus enter Turkish ports and airports. Turkey said it would not lift its ban unless it was allowed to trade directly. Cypriot President Tassos Papadopoulos said Turkey was trying to avoid fulfilling its obligations to Cyprus and the EU. Papadopoulos and UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan agreed in Paris (28 February) that bicomunal talks should be held on technical issues to prepare the way for a new UN initiative for an overall settlement but the Turkish response was equivocal. When US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice visited Athens and Ankara in April, she gave public support to Turkey's stance on the Cyprus problem, upsetting the Nicosia government, particularly because she referred to "northern Cyprus". The USA said the visit to the region was an attempt to "re-energise" the Cyprus settlement process, but Rice did not bring any specific proposals.

Papadopoulos reaffirmed that Cyprus aimed to enter the euro single currency in 2008.

A 2500 year-old stone coffin with well preserved coloured illustrations believed to feature Homer's Ulysses was found in Paphos district in March.

### **Gibraltar**

Senior diplomats from Spain, Britain and Gibraltar met (20–21 February 2006) at the UK Foreign Secretary's residence in Chevening to tackle several thorny issues—Gibraltar airport, Spanish border controls, communications and pensions claims by former Spanish residents. There was no breakthrough, but Gibraltar Chief Minister Peter Caruana said (21 April) he hoped deals would soon be signed. Spain had shown a friendlier and more pragmatic approach because it had agreed to sideline the main issue of its 400-year-old claim to sovereignty. Caruana said: "The climate has changed".

## UK

In a May 2006 cabinet reshuffle Margaret Beckett became the first woman Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, succeeding Jack Straw. Lord Triesman of Tottenham remained Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State with responsibility for, *inter alia*, Africa and the Commonwealth. There was now no junior minister specifically responsible for the Commonwealth. The last was Chris Mullin, who left the government in the 2005 reshuffle. The Commonwealth was now listed fifth among Triesman's 11 responsibilities.

Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown and Secretary of State for International Development Hillary Benn visited Maputo, Mozambique (10 April) to launch a new UK-led initiative on education. The aim is to persuade industrialized countries to deliver free education for every child by 2015 at a cost of £57 billion over 10 years. Brown offered £8.6 billion. Immediately before his visit he urged EU finance ministers in Vienna to commit funding. In Mozambique Brown met African leaders and finance ministers as well as Nelson Mandela. In an interview ahead of his budget (16 March) Brown said Britain should stop apologizing for its history and celebrate its past and values.

Weeks before Jack Straw was replaced as Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary he brought back to London 200 ambassadors, high commissioners, governors and other Foreign Office staff to launch a white paper on the future of diplomacy, *An Active Diplomacy in a Changing World*. At a conference of the 200, plus 150 London-based Foreign Office staff (28 March), Straw charted UK strategic priorities for the next decade. The previous white paper in 2003 contained only two paragraphs on the rise of India and China. Now the emphasis was on the two countries' arrival as dominant economic forces. Much attention was also paid to pressures on natural resources caused by climate change and energy demand.

## Commonwealth Day

The theme of Commonwealth Day (13 March 2006) was Health and Vitality. During the Observance in Westminster Abbey young Commonwealth Ambassadors for Positive Living brought to London for the occasion spoke movingly of their work among fellow victims of HIV/AIDS. Volunteer doctors told of their work in Maldives and Pakistan after the tsunami. A team of gymnasts performed acrobatics in the chancel. Queen Elizabeth, in Australia for the Commonwealth Games, attended an Observance in Sydney Cathedral.

In her Commonwealth Day message on the eve of her 80th birthday she urged governments to do more about AIDS, saying: "We know that someone who is HIV positive can, with proper support, lead a full and rewarding life".

## Commonwealth Ministers Meetings

Two hundred young people from all 53 Commonwealth countries took part in a youth ministers meeting in Nassau, Bahamas (22–26 May 2006). It was the second time the young had been fully involved in a ministers meeting, making direct

interventions (the first was in Botswana in 2003). Youth poverty, crime and HIV/AIDS were central to the talks.

Sports ministers met (14 March 2006) alongside the Games in Melbourne. They agreed to encourage sports and health ministries to develop leadership and community participation, and to promote healthy living through sports programmes. Secretary-General Don McKinnon pointed to the way football had been used in a Kick Out AIDS programme in nine Africa countries and how sport was being used in Tonga and Fiji to fight obesity. These examples had been given by the Commonwealth Advisory Body on Sport, whose work was endorsed by the sports ministers.

A meeting of 60 countries on Aid for Trade organized by the Commonwealth Secretariat took place in Geneva (21–22 March). The aim was to strengthen developing countries' ability to negotiate in the new WTO task force set up by its Director-General, Pascal Lamy. Centrepiece of the meeting was a report by Nobel Laureate Professor Joseph Stiglitz commissioned by the Secretariat.

Health Ministers met in Geneva (21 May). Among the issues were the vexed subject of managing health worker migration and reintegrating returning migrants.

### **Around the Commonwealth**

Secretary-General Don McKinnon visited Washington (25–26 May) and talked with US Vice-President Dick Cheney, World Bank President Paul Wolfowitz and OAS Secretary-General Jose Miguel Insulza. He spoke at the Centre for Strategic International Studies on the Commonwealth way of building sustainable democracies.

Earlier he had visited Vanuatu, New Zealand and Australia (for the Games).

Former World Bank President James Wolfensohn, who is Australian by birth, gave the Ninth Commonwealth Lecture in London (2 March). His theme: 'The Future Role of the Commonwealth: A Bridge Between an Emerging Three-Speed World'.

Ransford Smith of Jamaica was appointed Commonwealth Deputy Secretary-General (Economic) in succession to Winston Cox of Barbados. Smith, 57, has been Jamaica's permanent representative to the UN and its specialist agencies in Geneva, Rome and Vienna, as well as Jamaican ambassador to the WTO. He has wide experience of international trade negotiations.

Secretary-General McKinnon pledged the Commonwealth would back a plan by the UK and France to raise billions of dollars for health and education in developing countries by floating bonds on the world financial markets (1 March).

The 2006 Commonwealth Writers Prize for best book was won by Kate Grenville for *The Secret River*. Best first book went to Mark McWatt of Guyana for *Suspended Sentences: Fictions of Atonement*. The Prize is sponsored by the Commonwealth Foundation.

Antigua and Barbuda returned to membership of the Commonwealth Foundation in May 2006. It had been a member from 1982 to 1997. It is the 49th country to belong. Of the four other non-members, one is South Africa. The Foundation is quite separate from the Secretariat and subscriptions are additional.

A workshop in St John's, Antigua (25–26 April), examined the implementation process of international human rights conventions, which some Caribbean countries have not yet ratified.

Officials from Commonwealth countries involved in anti-corruption work attended a training programme on better governance in Singapore (24 April–5 May).

A Commonwealth Heavily Indebted Poor Countries forum for finance ministers held in Livingstone, Zambia (10–12 April) focused on debt relief mechanisms.

How to promote public sector reform and good governance was the theme of a meeting of 20 Commonwealth cabinet secretaries and heads of public service held in London (19–20 April).

The Commonwealth Business Council organized the first global investment forum to be held in Sierra Leone since the conflict ended there (27–30 March).

A 12-week programme for legal drafters in the ministries of 15 African countries began at the Ghana Law School on 28 February. It was based on a curriculum developed by the Commonwealth Secretariat.

A training course on e-governance sponsored by the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation was held for senior public sector officials from several Commonwealth countries in Nicosia, Cyprus (26 February–3 March).

### **New Commonwealth Secretariat Publications**

*Achieving Education for All: Good Practice in Crisis and Post-conflict Reconstruction* by Peter Williams. Focuses on 16 African countries, but also discusses parallels elsewhere, such as in the Indian Ocean after the tsunami. Aims to help policy makers addressing situations arising from conflict and emergencies, generating a climate of tolerance, gender equality and diversity. 66 pp. £8-50. ISBN 0-85092-805-2.

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