

Commonwealth Update

DEREK INGRAM

ABSTRACT Nigeria suddenly drops its widely respected woman finance minister as former military ruler Ibrahim Babangida says he will stand for the presidency. The UK has its first Lord Speaker and after centuries the Lord Chancellor no longer conducts the House of Lords from the Woolsack. India builds the world's highest bridge and reopens a direct Himalayan road trade route to China. Seven bombs hit railway trains in the Mumbai rush hour. After elections Fiji has a multiparty coalition. Zimbabwe knocks three noughts off its currency, but Mugabe still rejects offer of help from Kofi Annan. The first Maori Queen is laid to rest on a mountain after her 40-year rule ends. And Vanuatu is rated the happiest place on the planet.

Nigeria

Finance Minister Mrs Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, a former World Bank director, was appointed foreign minister in June 2006 in a surprise cabinet reshuffle, but only weeks later she resigned from the government (3 August 2006). Okonjo-Iweala was widely respected and brought some transparency to the country's finances, which helped persuade creditors to write off more than half the country's external debts. On her transfer to the foreign ministry President Olusegun Obasanjo had assured international institutions that she would remain head of the country's economic team but, while she was in London negotiating a new debt relief deal, news came that she was no longer in charge of it. Her successor as finance minister was Nenadi Usman, her deputy.

Former military ruler Ibrahim Babangida said (15 August) he would run for president in the 2007 elections. Babangida took power in a bloodless coup in 1985 and ruled for eight years. He left following annulment of the elections in 1993 and handed over to an interim government that was ousted by the dictator Sani Abacha. Babangida backed Obasanjo for president when he came out of jail but recently relations have deteriorated.

Seventeen new oil drilling licences were auctioned (19 May) to companies from China, India, the UK, and Nigeria. One block was reserved for a company linked to militant activists in the Niger Delta. After a spate of kidnappings in May and June Obasanjo ordered round-the-clock security patrols and threatened to

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sanction oil companies if they paid ransoms. Six Britons, a Canadian and an American were seized on an oil rig by 30 attackers (2 June), but released two days later. Fourteen more foreign workers were kidnapped in mid-August—five from a bar in Port Harcourt (14 August). In a crackdown at the end of August security forces arrested 100 people.

Obasanjo appointed Ken Wiwa, son of the executed activist Ken Saro-Wiwa, as his special assistant on peace, conflict resolution and reconciliation. In the London *Observer* (9 July) Wiwa explained why he had accepted the post: Obasanjo had laid the foundation stone to a memorial honouring his father and the 12 others killed during the struggle for the Ogoni people's self-determination. It was the second stage of exoneration by the state. In December Obasanjo had released his father's remains and they had been given a proper burial. It was Ken Saro-Wiwa's execution by President Abacha that led to the suspension of Nigeria from the Commonwealth in 1995.

China, to which Nigeria had offered four oil drilling licences, offered to invest £530 million in the country's railways. A soft loan announced in May would help repair old lines and install new rolling stock and equipment.

Sierra Leone

President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah announced (4 August 2006) that elections would be held in July 2007. They would be the first since the UN peacekeepers left in 2005. He said he had named the date a year in advance to show his government's commitment to good governance and democracy. Kabbah and his Sierra Leone People's Party scored a landslide victory in May 2002 when UN peacekeepers were still in the country. He would not be eligible for re-election.

The government reacted angrily to a decision by Australia to give visas to 10 Sierra Leoneans who absconded during the Commonwealth Games in Melbourne. The Information Minister said that, if other countries took athletes from developing countries, it would affect their medal chances in international competitions. At the 2002 Games in Manchester 21 of Sierra Leone's 30 athletes went missing.

The UN Security Council agreed that, in the interests of the stability of the West African region, former President Charles Taylor of Liberia should be tried in The Hague, using the facilities of the International Criminal Court, rather than in Freetown, where he had appeared on 11 charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity. The Netherlands agreed to take Taylor provided another country would incarcerate him if found guilty. Britain gave such a promise, and he was flown to The Hague (20 June). The trial, for which the prosecution had served 32 000 pages of evidence, was expected to take place in 2007.

Ghana

Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao said on a visit to Accra that China would lend Ghana £30 million to fund development projects that would include upgrading communications networks and improving internet access. Ghana benefited from £2 billion debt relief after the Gleneagles G8 meeting, but it still depends on £500 million in aid a year, the biggest chunk from the UK.

The government sold off the presidential jet bought in 1999 for former president Jerry Rawlings. President John Kufuor had always refused to travel in it. Funds raised would be used as a down payment on four Chinese jets for the military and a flight simulator.

The Gambia

Ahead of presidential elections the government of President Yahya Jammeh dismissed Ndondi Njai, head of the independent electoral commission (18 July 2006). Opposition leader Halifa Sallah said the impartiality of the commission was being undermined.

Forty African leaders met in Banjul for the seventh annual summit of the African Union (AU) (2 July). It was a low-key affair. Special guests included Presidents Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran and Hugo Chavez of Venezuela, who appealed for solidarity against capitalist and imperialist hegemony. European observers walked out when Ahmadinejad said the Jewish death chambers were given more importance than the rooms where thousands of African slaves died before being shipped to the Americas.

The most urgent problem on the AU agenda was the future of Sudan's war-torn Darfur region, where the AU had 7000 troops in its first peacekeeping operation. The AU wanted to hand over to the UN in September, but Sudanese President Omar Hassan al-Bashir opposed the move and it was decided to keep it there until December. A proposed African Charter on Democracy and Governance was delayed until next year because presidents could not accept a clause aimed at stopping governments changing their constitutions to keep themselves in power.

During the meeting UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan met President Robert Mugabe and offered to mediate in Zimbabwe, but he was told another mediator had already been arranged—former president Benjamin Mkapa of Tanzania.

A team from the UK-based Centre for Fortean Zoology, led by cryptozoologist Richard Freeman, began in mid-2006 a search for a huge and mysterious creature with a horse-like face known as the Ninki-nanka and believed to live in West African swamps. Cryptozoology is the search for disputed animals such as the Loch Ness Monster.

Cameroon

A census of civil servants carried out in a drive against corruption showed that civil service salaries were being paid to 45000 employees who did not exist. Finance Minister Polycarpe Abah Abah said the cost was £5 million a month.

The World Bank said (1 May 2006) Cameroon had made enough progress to become eligible for debt relief—the 19th country to do so under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative.

With help from the Human Rights Unit of the Commonwealth Secretariat a uniform criminal code came into force and a human rights curriculum was introduced in police training. A workshop for 30 senior police and prison officers to promote awareness of human rights was held in May.

British, US and French scientists searching for the origin of HIV said they believed they had tracked it to two colonies of chimpanzees in southeast Cameroon. Views on how the virus jumped to humans vary, but most likely hunters became infected when

they caught and butchered the chimpanzees. This probably happened before the 1930s and spread slowly by river travel. The research appeared in the journal *Science* (26 May).

Nigerian troops started to leave the Bakassi peninsula ahead of the 11 August 2006 deadline to hand the oil-rich area over to Cameroon. President Obasanjo had said in June that Nigeria would abide by the World Court ruling on the award of the area to Cameroon. Most Bakassi inhabitants oppose the hand-over and one group declared independence. The withdrawal was monitored by Germany, the UK, France and the USA. Transitional arrangements for the civilian administration would last five years. In the 1990s military clashes led both sides to go to the International Court of Justice. Its ruling was based on a 1913 treaty between Britain and Germany.

Uganda

A video interview recorded in early May 2006 by Joseph Kony, reclusive leader of the Lord's Day Resistance Army (LRA), was given to news agencies after he had met Riek Machair, Vice-President of Southern Sudan and of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM). Machair was seen handing Kony £10 000—"for food not ammunition" and in the interview Kony said he wanted peace.

Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni responded by saying that his safety would be assured if the 19-year civil war ended by August.

A month later Kony emerged from the bush to give an interview to a BBC correspondent in which he said he was not a terrorist but was fighting to save his Acholi people in northern Uganda from repression. The stories of killings, abductions and atrocities in his name were Museveni propaganda.

Peace talks between the LRA and the Uganda government were set up in a Juba hotel. Before they opened Uganda offered Kony a "total amnesty", even though the International Criminal Court had issued warrants for him and five commanders and Museveni had attacked the UN for not arresting him. Kony said he and his deputy Vincent Otti would not be in the LRA delegation, fearing that they would be arrested on the ICC warrants if they came out of hiding without guarantee. The LRA declared a unilateral ceasefire ahead of the talks, which opened on 14 July. Internal Affairs Minister Dr Ruhakana Rugunda led the Ugandan delegation. Machar was mediator. The LRA wanted South Africa to help mediate, but Uganda said it trusted Machar.

Hilary Benn, Britain's International Development Secretary, said (3 July 2006) aid to Uganda would be cut by £20 million because of "concerns about governance, public administration expenditure and the government's new budget plans". In 2006–07 and 2007–08 £35 million would be given in direct aid to fight poverty. In May Benn had visited northern Uganda, where the 20-year-old civil war had displaced up to two million people.

Kenya

The first budget produced by newly appointed Finance Minister Amos Kimunya (15 June 2006) reflected the economic recovery of the country over three years brought

about by the government of President Mwai Kibaki. Growth was projected at 5.8% and inflation was expected to slow by 5% from 13.1% in May 2006. The budget offered several tax and important duty exemptions.

The High Court (31 July) overturned the findings of a commission of inquiry and ruled that former vice-president George Saitoti could not be charged for corruption. Saitoti, education minister until February, was the most high-profile person accused in the so-called Goldenburg scandal of 14 years ago. It was a big setback for the £2.5 million inquiry set up to investigate the scandal.

Mwalimu Mati, head of Transparency International in Kenya, was sacked by the branch's board of directors over allegations of financial and other irregularities (26 June).

Kenya's increasing engagement with China was defended by Foreign Minister Raphael Tuju in an interview in the London *Financial Times* (10 August). He accused Western countries of hypocrisy by criticizing others while they themselves traded openly with China. A Chinese grant and loan facility to Kenya had been agreed at a time when relations with western donors had deteriorated because of corruption scandals. Tuju said: "China respects the diplomatic etiquette and they don't bring up these issues because we don't bring up these issues".

Russian ambassador Valery Yedgoshkin was stabbed in the back and robbed by two men with machetes 30 miles from Nairobi (20 August).

The Archbishop of Kenya, the Most Rev. Benjamin Nzimbi, withdrew hospitality for the Bishop of Chelmsford, the Rt Rev. John Gladwin, and 20 curates (23 May) while they were visiting Kenya, which has had long links with Chelmsford. The Archbishop had discovered the Bishop's liberal views on gays. After the two men met the difficulties were resolved and the programme continued. Bishop Gladwin is chairman of Christian Aid and had become a patron of Changing Attitude, a lesbian and gay lobby group. In 2005 he was forced to cancel a visit to Trinidad and Tobago for similar reasons.

Women's rights activists condemned the government for diluting sex crime laws. A Bill increasing sentences for rapists was passed, but sections to outlaw marital rape and female genital mutilation were scrapped.

The High Court suspended (31 May) for 30 days a ban on smoking introduced only two days earlier. British American Tobacco and Mastermind challenged Health Minister Charity Ngilu's authority to impose the restriction in offices, bus stations, airports and sports venues. Kenya's 30 000 tobacco farmers feared loss of income.

Tanzania

Finance Minister Zakia Meghi forecast in his budget (15 June 2006) that real GDP growth would rise from 5.9% in 2006 to 7.3% in 2007 and 7.7% in 2008.

The new President, Jakaya Kikwete, was elected (25 June) by 1812 votes to one to become the fourth leader of the ruling Cha Cha Mapunduzi (CCM), replacing former president Benjamin Mkapa.

The legality of the treaty that created the United Republic of Tanzania in 1964 was challenged in court by 10 Zanzibaris. They sought to invalidate the union of mainland Tanzania and the Zanzibar archipelago. Before the case opened talks were

held in May between Union Prime Minister Edward Lowassa and Zanzibar Chief Minister Shamsi Vusi Nahodha.

A bus carrying 74 passengers plunged into a gorge on the river Malala in northern Tanzania (9 June), killing 54 and injuring 20. Days earlier 28 people had died in an overturned lorry.

Seychelles

President James Michel won the presidential election (28–30 July 2006) in a close race with Anglican priest Wavel Ramkalawan of the Seychelles National Party. Michel got 54% of the vote and extended the 30-year rule of the People's Progressive Party for another five years. Michel took over in 2004 from Albert Rene, who became president in a bloodless coup in 1977. A Commonwealth expert team observed preparations for the election, polling, counting and the results process. It comprised: Omar Jallow, Acting Secretary-General of the People's Progressive Party of The Gambia; Linnette Vassell, Chair of the Women's Resource and Outreach Centre, Jamaica; and Moorogessen Veerasamy, Principal Electoral Officer of Mauritius. Their report recommended changes in the electoral process, but said it had been a credible election allowing for the expression of the will of the Seychellois.

Mauritius

Finance Minister Rama Sithanen said Mauritius sought £1 billion in international support to end, over a 10-year transition period, its dependence on preferential treatment by the European Union. Sweeping budget reforms in July 2006 aimed to stave off 'economic disaster'. Mauritius had been hit by a 36% cut in the cane sugar price and the opening of EU textile and clothing markets to competition from China and other Asian countries.

An international team of scientists from 15 institutions said they had discovered part of the skeleton of a dodo, the flightless bird that became extinct 300 years ago. Dr Julian Hume, of London's Natural History Museum, said it was the first discovery of fully preserved bones that could give clues as to how the bird lived. They are thought to be 2000 years old. The last full set of bones was destroyed in a fire in 1755. Mauritius was uninhabited until 1598.

Malawi

Former president Bakili Muluzi was arrested (27 July 2006) and accused by the Anti-Corruption Bureau on 42 counts of corruption, fraud and theft while in office. Parliament erupted in commotion at the news and was suspended. Hours later Bureau head Gustave Kaliwo was suspended by President Bingu wa Mutharika. On 1 August Director of Prosecutions Ishmael Wadi dropped the charges against Muluzi, saying he had no choice since Kawilo had been suspended. Nine days later Mutharika asked Wadi to resign within 24 hours because he had "done the country more harm than he realizes" by dropping the charges. He had not authorized the move and Muluzi should have had a chance to prove his innocence in court. The withdrawal had "destroyed my credibility as president against corruption".

Muluzi's United Democratic Front said the charges amounted to "political persecution". Muluzi stepped down as president in 2004, having picked Mutharika for president on the UDF ticket. Eight months later Mutharika resigned from the UDF. The vice-president, Cassim Chilumpha, who is close to Muluzi, was still being held on treason charges.

Zambia

The World Bank delivered £1.3 billion in debt relief to Zambia on 1 July 2006 as part of its programme provided in exchange for sound fiscal management, good governance and a favourable track record on human rights. Finance Minister Ng'andu Maganda said revolving funds would be created for agriculture, tourism, manpower training and recruitment of more teachers and doctors.

China gave Zambia and Tanzania £2.5 million each to maintain the Tazara railway. It was also giving Zambia £1 million for election costs, including the provision of cars, and paying for a printing press for the elections. It said the money was given "in line with its foreign policy of non-interference in sovereign states" and hoped the upcoming poll would be free and fair.

Information minister Vernon Mwaanga was beaten up by members of the United Party for National Development (26 May) as he delivered condolences on the death of party leader Anderson Mazoka, who lost narrowly in the 2001 presidential election. Businessman Makoza died aged 63. He was managing director of Anglo-American Corporation of Zambia and general manager of Zambia's railways.

In London police raided a solicitors office (18 May) as part of the corruption case against ex-president Frederick Chiluba. Zambian anti-corruption investigators accuse Chiluba of transferring public funds to London. They filed a claim for the alleged theft of £13 million. When Chiluba went to South Africa for heart treatment in March the Zambian government paid his medical bills.

For overstaying his visa British businessman Charles Long was sentenced by a court to 15 days of gardening (2 June). He had to cut the lawn and tend the flowers at the immigration department before being deported.

Zimbabwe

With inflation running at nearly 1000%, Bank governor Gideon Gono launched (31 July 2006) a three-week changeover to cut three zeros off the face value of bank notes and devalue the interbank exchange rate by 58.3%. Notes of 1000 Zimbabwe dollars would now be worth one dollar. A three-week price freeze was enforced. The banks stayed open over the weekend before the old notes were withdrawn (21 August) and long queues of confused people formed. Millions of banknotes were seized at roadblocks, border posts and Harare airport.

China announced (15 June) energy and mining deals worth £700 million, including building three coal-fired thermal power stations. Repayment was not spelled out, but China would get access to several minerals, notably chrome. On a visit to China in June Vice-President Joyce Majeru signed the power station deal and also one by which China would provide transmission equipment to enable all parts of Zimbabwe to receive state radio and television. Many question marks remained about the deals,

including how Zimbabwe, with most of its locomotives off the rails, could export thousands of tonnes of bulky chrome ore. In August the government said it had bought six more military planes from China. It had already bought six in 2005.

President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa supported moves by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan to try to broker a solution to the country's economic and political crisis. He said (23 May): "We are all awaiting the outcome of his intervention." Annan had planned to engage Mugabe at a UN AIDS summit, but Mugabe decided to go instead to the nonaligned movement meeting in Malaysia. His spokesman said Zimbabwe "is not a UN issue". Mbeki's stance marked a departure from his insistence on a policy of quiet diplomacy on Zimbabwe.

Information minister Tichaona Jekonya was found dead in a Harare hotel (24 June).

Trudy Stevenson, MP for Harare North and founder member of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), and four others were attacked by a mob of supporters of party leader Morgan Tsvangirai. American-born Stevenson had split from Tsvangirai and joined the breakaway faction that boycotted elections for the Senate newly created by President Robert Mugabe. She was badly injured in the head. MDC MP Timothy Mubawu was charged with organizing the attack. Tsvangirai said the attackers were Mugabe agents.

Justice minister Patrick Chinamasa was put on trial in Rusape in August, accused of trying to pervert the course of justice. Another 23 people faced similar charges.

South Africa

Former deputy president Jacob Zuma, 64, was acquitted of raping a 31-year-old HIV-positive acquaintance in a six-hour verdict in Johannesburg High Court (8 May 2006) by Judge Willem van der Merwe. He issued an "apology to the nation" for having consensual but unsafe sex and pledged to campaign against the spread of HIV. He was reinstated as deputy president of the African National Congress, but he still had to face trial on corruption charges relating to an arms deal. That case was postponed at a hearing in Pietermaritzburg (31 July) as 5000 supporters cheered him outside the court. Until this trial ended Zuma, who has a power base among Zulus, would remain a serious challenger for the presidency of South Africa on the retirement of President Thabo Mbeki in 2009.

On a visit to Cape Town—part of an eight-day trip through seven African countries—Chinese premier Wen Jiabao signed (21 June) an agreement to broaden cooperation on peaceful nuclear energy issues.

Media groups hit out at draft legislation they claimed would violate freedom of expression and press freedom guarantees enshrined in the constitution. They said it would give the state the right to censor some publications and broadcasts. Media lapses are already dealt with by a press ombudsman, broadcasting complaints commission and independent communications authority. In his online *Letter from the President* on the ANC website President Mbeki has often hit out at media reporting and negative coverage of Africa.

An SABC TV documentary critical of Mbeki was cancelled (14 July) on legal advice just before it was to be aired. It was said to be unbalanced and

defamatory. The Freedom of Expression Institute and opposition Democratic Alliance said the public broadcaster had kowtowed to the ANC.

Land Minister Lulu Xingwana reassured the public (15 August) that a tougher stance on land reform would not lead to 'Zimbabwe style' seizures. Her remarks followed a warning that some white farmers were stalling over the price of land. Talks, she said, had sometimes continued for four or five years and in future could not go on for longer than six months. Government policy is to get 30% of farmland in black hands by 2014. Since 1994 only 4% has been transferred.

In a letter to the London *Times* South African High Commissioner Lindiwe Mabuza said South Africa was "rolling out one of the biggest and most comprehensive public health programmes in the world". Expenditure on HIV/AIDS had increased a hundredfold to £226 million in 2005–06. The World Health Organisation (WHO) had said South Africa's commitment to anti-retroviral treatment over three years was "by far the largest allocation of any low or middle-income country". South African clinics provided free treatment to 130 000 in 200 facilities.

Twelve people died in a shootout with police in a Johannesburg supermarket robbery (25 June). Days earlier Safety and Security Minister Charles Nqakula told parliament that those who complained about the high crime rate were unpatriotic moaners. The government said the figures were dropping and South Africa was becoming safer, but demonstrators pointed to the fact that the murder rate is the third highest in the world after Colombia and Swaziland.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu said that 10 years after the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was formed white South Africans still did not fully appreciate the sacrifices of black victims in forgiving past wrongs. Former president F. W. de Klerk urged black people to recognize the sacrifices made by white people in embracing all-race democracy. He repeated his apology to victims and said white rule was "indefensible", but denied his government had been a "criminal regime".

A search began for the Bulgarian semi-automatic Makarov pistol buried by Nelson Mandela before he was arrested and sentenced to life imprisonment. The weapon was given to him during military training in Ethiopia in 1961. If found it would have pride of place in a struggle museum to be built on the site of a secret ANC HQ on a farm at Rivonia. Mandela has described how he hid the gun, but now metal detectors were brought in to find it.

Lesotho

At a summit of the Southern African Development Community held in Maseru (23–24 August 2006) a closed meeting of heads of state and foreign ministers discussed the economic troubles in Zimbabwe. President Robert Mugabe left before the meeting ended. The leaders were said to have described Zimbabwe and Swaziland as the two countries that were obstacles to economic progress in the region.

South African and Lesotho defence forces with helicopters rescued 39 people trapped in the mountains for days in heavy snow (3 August 2006). Exceptionally cold weather had hit the country and adjacent parts of South Africa.

Namibia

The WHO launched a campaign in mid-2006 to immunize the whole population against polio following an outbreak of the disease. Namibia had been polio-free since 1995. The virus had arrived via Angola and could be traced back to Uttar Pradesh in India. Most polio outbreaks affect children under five, but in Namibia the victims were between 15 and 45. Nearly 200 cases were suspected.

India

A setback to economic reform came when the government cancelled plans (7 July 2006) for several privatizations under pressure from the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) Party led by the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu. The 16 DMK seats in the Delhi parliament are vital to the coalition government. The U-turn followed days after the cabinet decided to sell small stakes in four state-run enterprises, including the Neyveli Lignite mining and energy group, a Tamil Nadu industrial flagship, and the National Aluminium Company. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said all disinvestment decisions would be kept on hold pending review.

In a low-key Independence Day address at the Red Fort (15 August) Singh gave reformers little comfort. He focused on reducing poverty and helping farmers. Natwar Singh, dismissed as foreign minister following the UN oil-for-food scandal report, called the prime minister “weak” and “indecisive”.

By 359 to 68 votes the US House of Representatives backed the agreement signed by President George Bush to allow civil nuclear cooperation with India, but it insisted Congress retain some oversight of the final deal. Before it votes India must negotiate safeguards of its facilities with the International Atomic Energy Authority. The opposition BJP, which had sought a similar deal when it was in power, walked out of parliament because it said the USA had imposed new conditions.

In his book *A Call to Honour* published in July, former foreign minister Jaswant Singh said one of India’s top civil servants was in the pay of the CIA and leaked secrets to Washington about India’s nuclear programme in the early 1990s.

After 44 years the direct trade route along the road that links India and China through the 14 200 ft high Himalayan pass of Nathu La was formally reopened (1 July). Pawan Chamling, chief minister of Sikkim state, broke bread and ate sweets with China’s representatives. The pass was closed in 1962 after the short, bloody war between Mao’s China and Nehru’s India, ending a booming cross-border trade in wool, machine parts and tea carried over the pass on pack mules. China recognized Sikkim as part of India only in 2003.

In shock comments Manmohan Singh said in July that India’s education system was in crisis and threatened growth. A new report on higher education said India was producing large numbers of graduates who are unemployable. Enrolment had leapt from 0.1 million in 1947 to 10.5 million in 2005, but public funding per student declined by 30% between 1991 and 2003. The number of jobless graduates, at 17.2%, was higher than the overall rate of joblessness. Nearly 100% enrolment in primary education was within sight, but literacy was still less than 70% and dropouts

averaged 31%. Singh said sector after sector faced constraints of skilled, qualified manpower, and this was unacceptable in a country of a billion people.

A ban was to be imposed on employment of children under 14 in hotels, restaurants and teashops, and as domestic servants. Violators would face up to two years' jail. Official figures show India has 13 million child workers

A UN sponsored study (20 July) said HIV/AIDS could knock almost a whole percentage point off India's growth in the next decade. The rate of the disease, 0.9%, is relatively low, but the size of the population means it has overtaken South Africa as the country with the largest number of people infected (5.6 million).

The Supreme Court ordered Coca-Cola and PepsiCo to reveal their secret formulas (4 August). It wanted details of the chemical composition and ingredients of their products because a study had claimed they contained unacceptable levels of insecticides. Coca-Cola's 120-year-old recipe is kept in an Atlanta bank vault. Only two executives know it. In India's lower house MPs called for the drinks to be banned, but the Health Ministry said it had found no evidence of high levels of pesticide in either drink. Coca-Cola's share of India's £825 million soft drinks market is 60%. More than a quarter of India's 28 states announced partial or total bans on the two drinks. PepsiCo appointed an Indian-born woman, Indra Nooyi, as its chief executive (12 August).

The European Commission warned India (7 August) that it would be referred to the World Trade Organization (WTO) unless it stopped discriminating against European spirits and wines. An EU inquiry found India's duty system blatantly violated WTO rules and distorted competition by imposing on bottled spirits a much higher tax burden—up to 550% on Scotch whisky—than that faced by Indian distillers.

UK Science Minister Lord Sainsbury and Indian Commerce Minister Kamal Nath signed a treaty (27 June) over the management and enforcement of intellectual property rights (IPR). It presented for the first time a formal framework for cooperation on copyright issues. The bill centred on training patent office staff in India; teaching IPR in Indian universities, law and business schools; raising general awareness of IPR; and enforcing patents and handling infringements. The deal would stimulate investment in India by UK companies afraid of piracy.

A report from the House of Commons trade and industry committee (2 June) said the UK was losing ground to global competitors in trade and investment in India. Too many companies saw it only as a source of cheap labour and a location for outsourcing services. Investment is rising but Britain is slipping down the international league table.

A bill was prepared to force media empires to restructure and cut broadcasting monopolies down to size. Mostly it was aimed at the domestic media, but one provision says 15% of broadcast content must be produced in India. This could affect the biggest foreign broadcaster, Star, owned by Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation.

Education Minister Arjun Singh pressed ahead with plans to reserve almost 50% of seats in colleges and universities for lower-caste and other disadvantaged Indians, despite days of strikes and street demonstrations across the country. Hospital services were disrupted. Students at elite colleges complained and at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences in Delhi 100 medical students went on hunger strike.

Currently 22.5% of all places in Indian universities are guaranteed for those at the bottom of the caste ladder. The government wants to secure seats for the remaining 4.5%.

Pressure on the government grew to pass new legislation to prosecute whole communities to prevent the practice of sati, by which a widow kills herself on her husband's funeral pyre. This followed events in Fatehpur, Uttar Pradesh, when 400 villagers watched, and egged on, a woman as she died on a pyre within minutes, leaving three children. A dozen villagers were arrested. Sati was banned 175 years ago by Lord Bentinck, the governor-general of India, but it lingers in some rural areas.

The department of telecommunications blocked several popular blogging sites on the grounds of national security.

An Indian proposal to give more power to the UN General Assembly over the choice of the next secretary-general was rejected by the permanent members of the Security Council (22 May). India wanted the Assembly to be offered a choice of names rather than the matter being decided behind closed doors by the permanent members.

India is completing a billion-pound, 560-mile railway link from the Himalayan foothills to the Valley of Kashmir. It involves building the world's highest bridge over the Chenab river—1257ft—and tunnelling through granite, quartz and slate rock peaks.

At an Antarctic treaty meeting in Edinburgh in June Russia, China and Australia pleaded in vain with India not to go ahead with its plans to build a third base in Antarctica. The year-round scientific research base would be the 60th on the icecap. Environmentalists want to turn the area into a conservation zone and help stop what has been called the 'cold rush'. India said the science justifies the site.

No ceremonies were held in Kolkata (Calcutta) to commemorate the 250th anniversary (20 June) of the Black Hole—not surprisingly since the famous event in the history books has long been thought not to have taken place at all. An obelisk commemorating the event in Fort William stands overgrown with weeds in the grounds of St John's Church and a small plaque remains on the wall of the general post office in Dalhousie Square. The latest edition of the Cambridge History of India has no reference to it.

Himachal Pradesh, not wanting to miss out on a property boom, lifted a ban on outsiders owning homes in the Himalayan hill stations built by British officials in colonial days. Affluent middle classes are queuing to restore houses in Simla, Darjeeling, Mussoorie, Dalhousie and McLeod Ganj, and to build bungalows based on original designs.

Small children in Madhya Pradesh were told not to sing English nursery rhymes such as Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star and Baa Baa Black Sheep. Education Minister Narottam Misha commissioned a new set of rhymes written by Indians "to infuse a sense of patriotism".

Pakistan

President Pervez Musharraf said on a local TV network in May 2006 that he could be voted in for a second five-year term by the current parliament before it was

dissolved for elections in 2007. A constitutional debate had centred on whether he could be re-elected by standing MPs. He came to power by coup in 1999 and was elected in a referendum in 2002 which opponents said was rigged.

Leaders of the 15-party grouping called the Alliance for Restoration of Democracy held a first meeting in London (2 July) to discuss a charter of democracy agreed by exiled former prime ministers Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif. It aimed to end the military dominance of politics and return to representative democracy.

As troops from the UK, Canada and The Netherlands were deployed in Afghanistan against the Taliban in May the British chief of staff said the Taliban were coordinating their campaign from Quetta in Pakistan. British and Canadian diplomats were pressing Pakistan to take a tougher stand against the Taliban. Pakistan had killed or arrested hundreds of al-Qaida suspects, but it had held only a handful of Taliban suspects. In raids in Baluchistan in July Pakistan arrested 52 Taliban militants and, under pressure, took steps to curb the flow of militants from North Waziristan into Afghanistan.

Musharraf signed an amendment to an Islamic law allowing 1300 women accused of adultery and other crimes to be freed on bail.

The World Bank signalled it would almost double spending to Pakistan, raising its loan programme to £3 billion over four years. This included £500 000 for post-earthquake rebuilding. In his annual budget (5 June) Finance Minister Omar Ayub Khan promised to reform tax collection and raised defence spending by 11%.

A 27-year-old Pakistan International Airways Fokker aircraft crashed on takeoff from Lahore (10 July). All 45 on board were killed. Terrorist attack was ruled out.

India and Pakistan

Within 15 minutes seven bombs ripped through the carriages of packed rush-hour commuter trains and stations along the line of the western railway in Mumbai, killing 200 people and injuring 714 (11 July 2006). The evening blasts came within hours of a wave of explosions in Srinagar, Kashmir. No warning was given of the explosions and no organization claimed responsibility for the obviously well planned operation. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said “no one can make India kneel. No one can come in the path of our progress. The wheels of our economy will move on.” Police detained 350 people and three men were formally arrested—one in Mumbai and two in Bihar—and produced in court.

Inevitably suspicions centred on Pakistan-based Kashmiri groups operating in India, especially the most sophisticated, Lashkar-e-Toiba, which quickly denied involvement. Pakistani President Musharraf condemned the attacks as “despicable” and offered to help any investigation India wanted to carry out.

On a visit to Mumbai (14 July) Singh said Pakistan had “solemnly” assured India that Pakistani territory would not be used to train and help terrorists directed against India and these assurances had to be fulfilled before the two-year-old peace process between the two countries could progress.

Pakistan Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz urged India (16 July) to keep the process intact, but talks between their foreign secretaries scheduled to take place four days

later were postponed. In August the talks were further delayed because of the expulsion of an Indian diplomat from Pakistan for alleged spying activities. In a tit-for-tat response India expelled a Pakistani diplomat.

Indian intelligence officials blamed Britain for not acting against wealthy businessmen who they claimed were funnelling £8 million a year to militant groups such as Lashkar, which was now functioning under different names. Singh raised the terror link with British Prime Minister Tony Blair at the St Petersburg G8 summit a few days after the attack. The Indians said a dossier identifying 14 men living in Britain had been handed over three years ago, but nothing had been done. They added: "More money comes from the UK to Kashmir terror groups than any other country".

India launched its longest-range nuclear-capable ballistic missile from Wheeler Island, off the east coast (9 July). The rocket has a range of 2200 miles. At the end of April Pakistan test-fired a nuclear-capable surface to surface ballistic missile with a range of 1250 miles.

US non-governmental think-tank the Institute for Science and International Security (ISIS) said satellites showed expansion of the Khushab nuclear complex in Punjab could increase Pakistan's capacity by 20 times and allow it to build up to 50 warheads a year. ISIS warned that South Asia may be heading for a nuclear arms race.

After talks in Kashmir at the end of May Manmohan Singh announced, despite a separatist boycott, measures aimed to end regional violence—troop cuts and peace talks—if rebels abandoned violence. He admitted human rights violations had taken place.

Bangladesh

The Indian industrial group Tata put on hold its plans to invest £1.5 billion in the country because Bangladesh ministers said general elections due in January made it hard to accept the proposals. The programme included building a power plant, steel mill and fertilizer factory. Bangladesh has always found it hard to attract foreign direct investment. The Tata proposal was to be by far the biggest single total investment.

Thousands of opposition supporters marched through Dhaka (25 July 2006) to launch a campaign for electoral reform before the elections. The country was once again into a series of protests and strikes basically caused by repeated opposition boycotts of parliament. The ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and the opposition Awami League barely talk to each other, nor do their leaders, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina.

An international company based in Moira, Northern Ireland, won a £13 million contract to train 400 senior civil servants a year in Bangladesh for seven years.

India and Bangladesh accused each other of cross-border shelling (9 August). Tensions had increased since India began fencing off the porous border to keep out what it calls illegal immigrants.

Twenty-one people were sentenced to death (24 August) for killing politician Sabbir Ahmed Talukder. Five men shot him at his home in 2004.

Sri Lanka

On a US request EU member states unanimously agreed to outlaw the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE) as a terrorist group (18 May 2006). Their assets would be frozen and activities investigated in the 25 member countries. President Mahinda Rajapakse said he hoped the EU ruling would bring the Tigers back to peace talks, but this did not happen.

The ceasefire and prospect of a settlement steadily unravelled in mid-2006. In April and May more than 200 people died in Tiger attacks on the military, in ethnic riots and in government air strikes. Trincomalee was a centre of violence with 22 000 people forced to leave their homes.

Landmines wrecked a bus full of commuters and children in Kebitigollawa west of Trincomalee (15 June), killing 64 passengers and bystanders and injuring 78. The Tigers denied involvement. Government forces retaliated with rocket and artillery attacks on two Tamil towns. One hundred more people died in fighting in the days that followed. Near Colombo Sri Lanka's third highest ranking soldier, Major-General Parami Kulatunga, was killed in a suicide bombing (26 June). Two explosions killed eight people as Indian foreign secretary Shyam Sarean visited the island to discuss the violence (3 July). Twelve Sri Lankan soldiers and four Tiger rebels died in a fight in Tiger territory (14 July). Another 64 soldiers and civilians died in Trincomalee and Jaffna (31 July). As fighting worsened in August Danes, Swiss and Swedes pulled out of the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission. After the EU classified the Tigers as terrorists, only the Norwegians and Icelanders remained.

The most serious fighting broke out when rebels took over a reservoir, closed sluice gates and cut off water to 15 000 families. A Norwegian peace envoy forced the Tigers to reopen the waterway. After days of fighting 15 local aid staff working for a French relief agency on tsunami reconstruction were found executed (6 August).

The first bomb in Colombo for four months killed three and injured the target, a former MP (8 August). Six days later bombers ambushed a Pakistan High Commission convoy a mile from President Rajapakse's home. High Commissioner Bashir Wali Mohamed was unhurt, but seven people were killed. The same day a government air raid killed 43 schoolgirls in an orphanage in Mullaitivu, northern Sri Lanka.

Tiger chief negotiator, Anton Balasingham, apologised on television (27 June) for the assassination of Indian prime minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1991. He said the killing was a "monumental historical tragedy" and called for a "new relationship" in which India would help resolve the island's ethnic conflict. The Tigers had always denied involvement. Indian Minister of State Anand Sharma said "the people of India are never going to forgive and forget". He rejected the call to mediate.

President Rajapakse was elected (28 June) president of the ruling Sri Lanka Freedom Party in place of former President Chandrika Kumaratunga—the first to hold the post outside the Bandaranaike–Kumaratunga family since the party was founded in 1951.

Maldives

When opposition activist Jennifer Latheef, jailed for 10 years in October 2005 for inciting a riot, was released (16 August 2006) she rejected a presidential pardon. She

wanted her name cleared and four others freed. Latheef, daughter of the founder of the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP), said her trial was politically motivated. The government said 11 other people convicted of public order charges had been pardoned and freed, but the MDP said many had not been released as promised.

Mohammed Nasheed, MDP chairman, was under house arrest on charges of treason and terrorism and produced in court from time to time, but the government seemed uncertain about handling the case. Foreign Minister Ahmed Shaheed said the government was moving towards democracy, but the MDP said harassment of politicians and journalists continued. The government of President Abdul Gayoom promised multiparty elections in 2008 and the constitutional assembly, the Majlis, voted for a referendum to determine the system of government (18 June).

Malaysia

At a meeting of the supreme council of the ruling United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi won full backing (19 June), but the council refused to censure his predecessor, Mohamad Mahathir, for comments that the government was reversing his policies. Mahathir retained strong influence in UMNO and he had become increasingly critical of Badawi's abandonment of plans to build a bridge to Singapore and of the management of the national carmaker Proton which he set up.

The state energy group Petronas took a £576 million stake in the Russian oil producer Rosneft. Concerns were growing about Malaysia's dwindling oil reserves. An estimated 14 years' production was left.

As a result of increased naval and air patrols by Malaysia and Singapore, piracy attacks in the Malacca Straits had fallen to their lowest level since 1999. Lloyd's dropped its war risk designation.

Singapore

US gaming group Las Vegas Sands was chosen to run the £1.9 billion casino complex, with convention halls, shopping malls, a museum and a 2000-room hotel, planned to be built around Marina Bay. The government wanted to attract more tourists and shed its nanny-state image.

Chee Soon Juan, leader of the opposition Singapore Democratic Party, and two others were charged with speaking in public without a permit. Police said they had illegally "provided public entertainment" by addressing crowds.

Brunei

Dinner was served for 10 000 people to mark the Sultan's 60th birthday (15 July 2006). Many heads of state attended an investiture, military parade and fireworks display. Conspicuously absent was the Sultan's brother, Prince Jafri, who is accused of embezzling £8 billion when he was finance minister.

Hong Kong

Anson Chan, chief secretary under the last governor, Chris Patten, and first chief executive Tung Chee-hwa, took part for the first time in the annual march of the democracy lobby (1 July 2006). Speculation grew that she might stand as chief executive in the 2007 elections. Chan, who retired in 2001, said in a speech to foreign correspondents she would form a core group to lobby for universal suffrage. She said maintaining the status quo indefinitely was not an option. Patten, on a book tour, said the territory was ready for full democracy, adding: "I reflect wryly that there were never several hundred thousand people in the streets when I was governor." As in previous years thousands gathered on the 17th anniversary of the Tienanmen Square protests (4 June)—the only known event of its kind in China.

Australia

Prime Minister John Howard, 67, announced (31 July 2006) he would stand for a fifth term of office. Elections are due in late 2007. The situation echoed the Blair–Brown relationship in the UK: Howard's deputy, Treasurer Peter Costello, 48, was prime-minister-in-waiting. Before Howard made his statement Costello accused him of reneging on a pledge made in 1994 to step down in his second term. A former minister, Ian McLachlan, who was at the meeting, claimed to have carried a note of it in his back pocket. Howard said he had made no such agreement and after the carry-on decision Costello said he would stay in place. Howard, the longest serving prime minister since Robert Menzies, remained popular in the country because of the strong economy, in its 25th consecutive year of expansion and now praised by an OECD report (31 July). Unemployment was at its lowest for 30 years. A poll said 82% agreed Howard should stay on.

The lower house passed by 78 to 62 a controversial bill to process all future asylum-seekers arriving by boat in offshore camps (9 August). But three Liberal MPs voted against—the biggest revolt in Howard's decade in power—and there was no hope of getting the bill through the Senate, where the coalition had only a one-seat majority. Within a week Howard had to drop the bill. Critics said Howard had been trying to appease Indonesia, which had been angry when Australia gave 40 Papuans visas, showing tacit support for West Papua (Irian Jaya) independence.

Howard visited China to preside over the landing of the first commercial shipment from Australia of liquefied natural gas (27 June). It was part of a £9.9 billion contract guaranteeing supplies for 25 years—Australia's largest single trade deal.

The government set up an inquiry (6 June) to consider whether Australia should generate domestic nuclear power and enriched uranium for export. The Labor Party strongly opposes a domestic nuclear industry.

Australian troops made up most of a 2000-strong peacekeeping force sent to East Timor when renewed violence broke out at the end of May 2006. International troops had been withdrawn in 2005, but in March 600 troops of the 1400-strong Timorese army dismissed for striking refused to hand over their weapons. Men loyal to dissident commander Major Alfredo Reinaldo took on government troops and

widespread fighting followed. New Zealand, Malaysian and Portuguese troops joined the Australians and the situation was calmed. In August some Australian troops were withdrawn, although most would stay until elections in 2007. Australian Prime Minister John Howard was typically outspoken. He said East Timor had probably gained independence too early, adding “There’s no point in beating about the bush. The country has not been well governed.”

Howard said (23 August) Australia would substantially enlarge its army to help maintain order in unstable Asia-Pacific nations and for operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. It would cost £4 billion.

A study of health trends (21 June) showed the death rate of Aboriginal children was nearly three times higher than among non-indigenous infants. It said 70% of Aborigines die before 65, against 20% of other Australians. Aboriginal life expectancy was 59, against 77 for non-indigenous males. The figures prompted Health Minister Tony Abbott to call for a “new paternalism”. He proposed the appointment of administrators with wide-ranging powers to run Aboriginal communities. The remarks amazed indigenous leaders and the Labor opposition. Aboriginal justice commissioner Tom Calma said Abbott was suggesting a return to the days of Christian missionaries.

Earlier a dossier compiled for police chiefs by the crown prosecutor in Alice Springs contained a catalogue of rape and murder and other atrocities among Aborigines in Central Australia that shook many Australians. In May, days of violence between two factions of 600 men destroyed 28 homes in the biggest Aboriginal settlement in Australia at Wadeye, 260 miles from Darwin. Police reinforcements were flown in. Unemployment in the settlement stands at 98%. The Aboriginal population of Australia is 500 000—2.3% of the total.

A law passed by the state government in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) allowing gay and lesbian marriages for the first time was quashed by Attorney-General Philip Ruddock (13 June). The ACT bill was introduced in defiance of a federal law passed in 2004 that defined marriage as a union between a man and a woman.

Under an innovative scheme the government offered drivers a £400 subsidy to convert their car to run on cheaper liquefied petroleum gas. Howard said it would enable Australia to cut its reliance on Middle East oil and tap into an energy resource that Australia has in large amounts.

Radical plans for the deregulation of the media were announced (13 July). They would scrap most restrictions on foreign investment and lift limits on cross-media ownership which prevent investors owning newspapers and TV stations in the same city. The Murdoch and Packer groups criticized the proposals but the Fairfax group welcomed them. The Labour Party was relaxed about the plans, although concerned about media concentration.

Two Tasmanian gold miners trapped 3000 feet underground in a tiny cage were rescued after 14 days (8 May). Their colleague had been killed by a rock collapse. The rescuers bored a tunnel one metre wide.

A study led by a researcher at Macquarie University and reported in the journal *Nature* in June identified a group of fossils as the oldest evidence of life on Earth. The structures, known as stromatolites, from a rock formation in Western Australia are the relics of microbes that lived 3.4 billion years ago.

Norfolk Island

On Bounty Day, 8 June 2006, descendants of the Bounty mutineers marked 150 years of life on the self-governing Australian island 1000 miles east of Sydney. Finance Minister Neville Christian re-enacted events in period costume. But his news was not good: the territory was going bankrupt and Canberra was pressing it to hand over control of immigration and introduce income tax. Tourism was down from 40 000 to 28 000 a year. Australians need a visa to visit and restrictions are imposed on those who want to settle or buy land. Two hundred Bounty descendants moved to Norfolk in 1856 when the smaller Pitcairn Island became overcrowded. The population today is 1800.

In a five-day hearing in August a New Zealand chef was ordered to stand trial for the first murder on the island in its 150-year history. During the investigations three-quarters of the population were fingerprinted.

Papua New Guinea

Prime Minister Sir Michael Somare declared a state of emergency in the Southern Highlands province (1 August 2006) and moved in troops to restore law and order. The province is key to a proposed gas pipeline that will pump vast gas reserves into Queensland, Australia. Somare accused the provincial government of corruption and squandering development funds. Provincial governor Hami Yawari threatened to block the gas project.

Solomon Islands

Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer expressed deep concern that the new Prime Minister, Manasseh Sogavare, had appointed two MPs held in custody on charges of inciting the April riots. One was given the police and national security portfolio. Sogavare accused Downer of interfering, but then he reassigned the portfolios because the two MPs had been denied bail.

Later Downer and New Zealand Foreign Minister Winston Peters visited Honiara (19 May) and warned Sogavare not to try to change the remit of the Australian-led assistance mission, which included administrative and financial integrity to government.

Tonga

Prince Tu'ipelehake, 56, his wife Princess Kaimana Fielakepa, 46, and their Tongan driver were killed in a car crash in California where they were visiting the Tongan community to discuss political reforms. The Prince was a nephew of King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV and the leading reformist in the royal family. Thousands lined the streets of the capital, Nuku'alofa, as pallbearers carried the caskets containing the bodies (21 July 2006).

In a major reshuffle the new Prime Minister, Fred Sevele, removed deputy prime minister Cecil Cocker and appointed the first woman minister. Civil servants objected to some of the changes and the matter was taken up by the Public Service Association.

Vanuatu

A new index known as the Happy Planet Index published (12 July 2006) by the Friends of the Earth and the New Economics Foundation put Vanuatu at the top as the happiest place on the planet. The index used three factors—life expectancy, human well-being and ecological footprint. Of 178 nations the UK was 108th, the USA 150th and Russia 172nd. Bottom was Zimbabwe. The newspaper *Vanuatu Online* said: “People are generally happy here because they are satisfied with very little. This is not a consumer-driven society.”

Samoa

The ruling Human Rights Protection Party, in office for 24 years, won a general election (31 March 2006), taking 30 of the 49 seats in the Fono (parliament)—an increase of eight on the 2001 election. Its leader, Tuila’epa Sailele Malielegaoi, has been prime minister since 1998. Samoa (population 178 000) is a beacon of stability in the Pacific. In 2005 its economy grew by 6%. Apart from agriculture and tourism, the economy relies on remittances from Samoans abroad—120 000 live in New Zealand.

Fiji Islands

After his May 2006 election victory Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase said that, because he did not believe in multiparty coalition government, he would rather the Fiji Labour Party (FLP) remained in opposition and did not take up the seven cabinet seats he had offered it, as required by the constitution. Labour leader Mahendra Chaudhry argued that the FLP was entitled to more seats and eventually it was given nine in a 24-member cabinet. Chaudhry himself chose not to join the cabinet but was disqualified from being leader of the opposition because FLP members had accepted cabinet posts. So President Ratu Josefa Iloilo named Mick Beddoes, leader of the small United People’s Party (two seats), as leader of the opposition (2 June).

In the High Court (30 June) former prime minister Sitiveni Rabuka pleaded not guilty to two counts of inciting mutiny in the army in 2000.

New Zealand

The Queen of the Maori, Dame Te Atairangikaahu, died (15 August 2006) aged 75. More than 100 000 New Zealanders filed past her coffin before her burial on Mt Taupiri south of Auckland. Just before the funeral senior tribal leaders named her eldest son to succeed as King Tuheitia. At the accession ceremony he was tapped on the head with a Bible that had been used for the first King. The Queen was the sixth Maori sovereign and the first woman, direct descendant of a royal line that began in 1858. She reigned for 40 years and was widely admired. Maoris make up almost 15% of the New Zealand population—nearly 90% in the North Island.

Interest rates rose to 7.25 %—the highest in the industrialized world. Finance Minister Don Cullen produced a cautious budget (18 May) that tried to put the

economy on an even keel after five years of strong growth, but 2006–07 growth was predicted at only 1%. Inflation was above the 3% target level. The jobless rate was at a record low—3.6%.

Decades after most countries, New Zealand introduced postcodes—partly because of population growth but also because of duplicate street names. The country has 60 George Streets and 50 Queen Streets and Auckland has 18 Beach Roads.

Liverpool Museum, UK, said (11 July) it was returning to New Zealand three tattooed heads of Maori warriors, acquired in the early 19th century, because it was right to send them to where they would be treated with “reverence and sensitivity”.

Canada

Prime Minister Stephen Harper paid his first visit to Washington (6 July 2006) since taking office. His predecessors had distanced themselves from the Bush administration—Jean Chretien refused to send Canadian troops to Iraq and Paul Martin criticized the USA for not signing the Kyoto Protocol. Harper extended the mission of 2300 Canadian troops in Afghanistan until 2005 and now announced he would spend £8.1 billion on new supply ships, trucks, helicopters and transport aircraft—much of it from the USA, which had criticized the neglect of the Canadian armed forces. A deal to come into force on 1 October settled, temporarily at least, the long dispute over Canadian exports of softwood lumber to the USA. During the Lebanon crisis Harper took a marked pro-Israeli stance, although the Muslim population of Canada has now grown rapidly to 700 000—double that of the Jewish population. But the prime minister rejected calls to tighten immigration and refugee policies, saying that “Canada’s diversity, properly nurtured, is our greatest strength”.

Police claimed to have foiled a terror attack on Toronto (7 June). They arrested 17 Muslim men and teenagers, alleged to be a group of al-Qaida-inspired militants planning attacks on Canada. Charges included plotting to bomb the Toronto Stock Exchange, storm the parliament in Ottawa, hold MPs hostage and behead the prime minister unless Canadian troops were withdrawn from Afghanistan. They were said to have arranged delivery of bomb-making equipment.

The Conservative Party, led by Premier Rodney MacDonald, was re-elected in Nova Scotia (13 June), but forced to form another minority government. It won 39.59% of the vote and held two fewer seats than before. The New Democratic Party increased its 15 seats to 20. Voter turnout was the lowest in Nova Scotia history—61.65%.

Lord Thomson of Fleet, whose father Roy Thomson founded the world-wide newspaper empire that once embraced The London *Times* and included 40 Canadian papers, died (12 June) aged 82. He gradually sold off his empire and devoted much of his life to collecting art, which he mainly donated to Canadian galleries.

Trinidad and Tobago

The government said it would spend £13 million over three years to hire 39 British police officers to fight crime. Trinidad had a record 386 murders in 2005—36% up on 2004. More than 75% are unsolved. Kidnappings were up to a record 235. Trinidad, only seven miles from Venezuela, is on the drug trafficking route between South and North America and Europe.

St Kitts and Nevis

The National Assembly passed a bill for major electoral reform (2 June 2006). Prime Minister Denzil Douglas set up several committees and said the public would be consulted on changes such as procedures to deal with voter registration and constituency boundaries.

Montserrat

Elections in May 2006 failed to produce a majority for any party. Political deadlock followed. Talks between the former ruling New People's Liberation Movement, the Montserrat Democratic Party (MDP), and an independent legislator led to formation of a coalition government. Lowell Lyttelton Lewis, of the MDP, became Chief Minister (2 June 2006).

Cayman Islands

The devastating Hurricane Ivan in 2004 was followed by an invasion of the tiny pink hibiscus mealybug, which feeds on staples such as cucumber, lettuce, avocado and mango. Agriculture faced ruin, so the Caymans imported from the USA swarms of killer bees and parasitic beetles to eat the infestation. The wasps are bred in Puerto Rico and 100 000 a week are shipped to Florida. The bugs were expected to be 90% eradicated within a year.

Guyana

Gunmen stormed the printing plant of the country's biggest daily newspaper, *Kaieteur News*, (8 August 2006) and shot dead five employees.

Cyprus

In a general election (21 May 2006) the government of President Tassos Papadopoulos improved its position. His centrist Diko party won 17.9% of the vote, up from 14.8% in 2001. The communist Akel (31.2%) and centre right Democratic Rally (30.3%) slipped. The vote was seen as endorsing the president's tough stance towards Turkey. In a major reshuffle George Lillikas replaced George Iacovu as foreign minister.

At the UN HQ in the buffer zone dividing Nicosia, Papadopoulos and Turkish Cypriot leader Mahmet Ali Talat met for the first time for two years (3 July). The purpose was to launch a new phase of a UN mission to search for the bodies of 1900 people from both communities designated as missing. But five days later the two men met again and agreed to new bi-communal talks to prepare for resumption of full UN-sponsored settlement talks.

EU foreign ministers in Luxembourg reached a last-minute deal (12 June) on Cyprus' demands on the opening up of Turkish ports to Cypriot ships and EU calls to Turkey to establish diplomatic relations with the island. But five days later Turkish prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan said his country was prepared to

abandon EU membership rather than open its ports and airports to Cyprus. Fresh efforts to revive the UN peace process were made at the end of July, when Greek and Turkish Cypriot officials exchanged lists of issues for discussion.

At the end of August Cyprus handled 50 000 evacuees from Lebanon. Mainly they came by ship to Limassol and were flown home from Larnaca. Cyprus won international plaudits for smooth handling of the sudden emergency.

Malta

Unprecedented numbers of illegal immigrants, mainly African, arrived in 2006. By July 1000 had landed mostly via Libya, hoping to reach the European mainland. Foreign Minister Michael Frendo said: "If the Spanish have had 100 000 in the Canaries, we can say we have had the equivalent of 96 000 taken on the density of population. We are at the limits of our capacity." Malta sought EU help.

Falkland Islands

As Britain announced plans for a major celebration to mark the 25th anniversary of its success in retrieving the islands after the Argentinian invasion, President Nestor Kirchner began to take a tougher stance on his country's claim to them. In the UN decolonization committee in June 2006 Argentina asked Britain to reopen talks on sovereignty. The Argentine parliament set up a commission to see how control of the islands is to be won. All this was seen as the beginning of Kirchner's build-up for his re-election in 2007. Falklands Governor Howard Pearce said those living in the islands were committed to remaining part of the UK. Britain keeps 1200 military personnel in the Falklands. Cost: £110 million a year.

When the twice-weekly BBC World Service programme *Calling the Falklands* was axed early in 2006, islanders complained, but the BBC said it had become "a bit of an anachronism".

UK

Increased use of the aid budget to fight corruption and to address environmental problems was central to the first political review to be published (13 July 2006) by the Department for International Development (DFID) since 2000. A £100 million fund was created to address corruption. Education spending was to be doubled to £1 billion.

A woman, Baroness Hayman was elected the first Lord Speaker (5 July). When she took her place on the Woolsack in the House of Lords history was made. For centuries the Lord Chancellor, oldest post in the government, had presided over the Lords. The change was part of the House of Lords reform being gradually introduced by the Blair government. Of 700 peers 134 were now women.

In a reversal of a year-old decision the asylum and immigration tribunal gave the government the right to deport asylum seekers back to Zimbabwe (2 August). Up to 70 000 people who fled Mugabe's rule could be returned against their will. The government was warned that each case would have to be decided on merit.

The Home Office said that in the first three months of 2006 nine in 10 claims for asylum had been adjudged unfounded.

For the first time the history of how Britain came to rule a quarter of the world was to be included in the National Curriculum for 11-to-14-year olds. Hitherto pupils have had to learn about the period 1750–1900, missing out the first stage of Empire that began with the expansion of British interests under Henry VII.

A £2 million institute for the study of slavery was opened in July at Hull University by President John Kufuor of Ghana, whence thousands were taken away as slaves. The institute is located next door to the home of William Wilberforce, the MP behind the abolition of slavery in 1807.

Youth Ministers

Young people sat alongside Commonwealth Youth Ministers at their meeting in Nassau, Bahamas (22–26 May). They were able to make direct interventions and fully participate in discussions on youth poverty, crime and HIV/AIDS. A new action plan for youth empowerment 2006–15 was put forward for the 2007 CHOGM in Kampala. About 100 participants took part in a Commonwealth Caribbean Youth Exchange in Tortola, British Virgin Islands (10–21 August), which involved a wide variety of activities from cultural performances and workshops to visiting an orphanage and a home for the aged.

The Digital Divide

Secretary-General Don McKinnon launched in London (3 August 2006) the programme ‘Commonwealth Connects’, which aims to bridge the digital divide. The project, adopted at the Valletta CHOGM, will harness business and communication technologies (ICTs) in least developed Commonwealth countries. The first project would help post-tsunami reconstruction in Indian Ocean countries.

Around the Commonwealth

Secretary-General Don McKinnon and representatives of Commonwealth governments gave the Queen an 80th birthday lunch at Marlborough House (9 May). Commonwealth Chairperson-in-office Dr Lawrence Gonzi of Malta attended, as well as former secretaries-general Sir Shridath Ramphal and Chief Emeka Anyaoku.

Ransford Smith, former permanent representative of Jamaica at the UN, succeeded Winston Cox of Barbados as Commonwealth Deputy Secretary-General.

The 22nd Commonwealth Agricultural Conference held in Calgary (13–16 July) was attended by 200 delegates. The theme: ‘market expectations for food—and farming realities’.

A symposium on local government in Islamabad (24–25 July) focused on strengthening decentralization in Pakistan and issues arising in the wider Commonwealth.

With the Caribbean Single Market Economy set up Cabinet secretaries and public service heads met at the Commonwealth Secretariat (19–20 April 2006) to draft a

plan to implement best practices in public service delivery from the Caribbean and Commonwealth.

A workshop for public sector information and communication technology managers and professionals in the Caribbean was held in Tobago (15–20 May) and two Commonwealth seminars were held in Belize—one (8–14 May) aimed to help small states legislate in support of international conventions on environmental law; the other (17–22 July) focused on improving public service management in the Caribbean.

Secretary-General Don McKinnon visited Washington (25–26 May) for talks with US Vice-President Dick Cheney, World Bank President Paul Wolfowitz and Organization of American States (OAS) Secretary-General Jose Miguel Insulza.

Under a Commonwealth project Dr Alex Forbes of Scotland, who has set up aquacultures in several countries, is helping Namibia to develop its oyster and shrimp production.

A fourth Commonwealth–India Small Business Competitiveness programme was held in Chennai in April 2006. Sixty participants from 34 Commonwealth countries attended.

Under a Singapore–Commonwealth Third Country Training Programme 23 civil servants took part in a training programme on global trends in human resource management (15–26 May). Then 28 chief executives from public and private enterprises discussed their work in rapidly changing international business environments (29 May–9 June). A third Singapore seminar (26–31 July) was for 16 permanent secretaries to sharpen their skills in supporting their minister, promoting good governance and better serving public interests.

Educators from 20 small states met in Mauritius for a workshop organized by the Commonwealth of Learning under the auspices of the new Virtual University for Small States set up by education ministers. Educators will be posting, collaborating and developing learning content on a COL-hosted website requiring minimum technical knowledge.

Principles for election observation were discussed at a Marlborough House meeting (31 May–1 June) attended by 30 international bodies, including the African Union, European Commission, OAS, UN Development Programme and British, Swiss, Irish, New Zealand and Japanese governments.

A meeting of heads of planning industries from 11 Commonwealth Pacific countries was held in Suva (23–26 May), focusing on freedom of information, anti-corruption, land issues and strengthening electoral systems.

A two-week meeting in Toronto in May–June with 25 senior Commonwealth officials tackled new approaches to public sector management.

A workshop in Maldives (17–18 June) aimed to enhance corporate governance reform and improve coordination between multilateral agencies in each country.

A West Africa meeting of 33 participants in Yaounde, Cameroon on gender, culture and law (24–26 May) discussed women's rights in marital disputes, child custody, inheritance and land and property ownership.

A new Commonwealth manual on human rights training for police was launched (12 June) at a five-day Commonwealth workshop in Kampala on police training in Eastern Africa.

The third forum of African heads of public services, organized by the Secretariat and the Nigerian government, was held in Abuja (5 July).

New Commonwealth Secretariat Publications

Declining Agricultural Commodity Prices by Australian academics Euan Fleming, Pauline Fleming and D. S. Prasada Rao. 100 pp. £20. ISBN 0-85092-834-6.

Commonwealth Ministers Reference Book 2006. Central source of information on key aspects of policy issues for all Commonwealth ministers. 280 pp. £35. ISBN 0-9546572-6-8.

Managing Change in Local Governance. Edited by Dr Munawwar Alam, adviser to the Commonwealth Secretariat, and Andrew Nickson, of Birmingham University. 165 pp. £15. ISBN 0-85092-836-2.

Combating Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing, 2nd edition. 190 pp. £20. ISBN 0-85092-842-7.