

Commonwealth Update

OREN GRUENBAUM

ABSTRACT *A power-sharing deal was hammered out in Kenya after eight weeks of ethnic violence had threatened to tear the country apart. Opposition parties in Pakistan overwhelmingly defeated the allies of President Pervez Musharraf and a coalition government began to form between the party of the late Benazir Bhutto and her rival Nawaz Sharif, while secular parties won unexpected victories over Islamists. Former deputy president Jacob Zuma was elected leader of the African National Congress and became South Africa's likely next head of state. The Ugandan government signed a ceasefire with the rebel Lord's Resistance Army. President Robert Mugabe faced opposition from within his own party in Zimbabwe's elections.*

AFRICA

Kenya

A power-sharing deal was agreed between the disputed president, Mwai Kibaki, and the opposition leader, Raila Odinga, raising hopes of an end to the unrest that followed flawed elections in December, in which more than 1,000 people died and 600,000 fled their homes in ethnic cleansing (28 February). Negotiations were led by the former UN secretary-general Kofi Annan, aided by the African Union's new chairman, Jakaya Kikwete, president of Tanzania. Annan said: "Compromise was necessary for the survival of this country."

Under the National Accord and Reconciliation Act, Odinga will become prime minister, with wide-ranging executive powers, while Kibaki will remain president. Cabinet posts will be divided equally. MPs will amend the constitution to shift the balance of power between president and prime minister, a role that had not previously existed. Odinga can only be dismissed by the National Assembly, of which his Orange Democratic Movement is the largest party.

Odinga pledged to reconcile Kenyans and address "historical injustices". He said he hoped for a new constitution within a year and fresh elections within two.

Don McKinnon, Commonwealth secretary-general, welcomed the power-sharing agreement as "a new beginning". The Commonwealth Observer Group had said the vote tallying had brought "the election results into question" despite "many positive aspects of the pre-election and polling-day procedures, when Kenyans came out in large numbers to vote".

Correspondence Address: Email: Oren.Gruenbaum@guardian.co.uk

The economy has been devastated by the turmoil. Some 40,000 tourist workers have lost their jobs after visitors cancelled trips, and the industry is thought to be losing 5.5bn shillings (\$85m) a month. A logjam of cargo at Mombasa port also badly hit Uganda, Rwanda, eastern DR Congo and southern Sudan.

Meanwhile, the government said it would introduce free secondary schooling to raise student enrolment to 1.4 million by next year. President Kibaki, who made it a key pledge in his campaign, said the government would pay tuition fees for students while parents would pay for board and uniforms.

Cameroon

At least 17 people were killed in clashes with security forces in the capital, Yaoundé, Bamenda and the port of Douala (29 February). What started as a nationwide transport strike in protest at fuel costs turned into a series of anti-government protests despite the increase being reduced. A week before, the government closed the private television station Equinoxe, which had broadcast interviews with politicians opposed to President Paul Biya's plans to change the constitution to allow him to run for president again in 2011.

Florence Mugasha, Commonwealth deputy secretary-general, led a delegation to Cameroon on 18 February to assess progress in establishing an independent electoral body, Elections Cameroon. Earlier in the month, up to 20,000 refugees fleeing fighting in Chad had put a heavy strain on the border town of Kousseri, the UN said.

Ghana

Ghana refused to host any US military base under Africom, whose creation was announced a year ago, as US President George Bush was visiting on his five-country tour of Africa (20 February). The US military is keeping its Africa Command based in Germany, after only one African nation, Liberia, offered to host it. Critics say Africom is designed to protect US interests, such as oil, on the continent.

Mozambique

The government revoked a recent increase in the price of diesel for private minibus taxis after a week of clashes between police and rioters that killed at least four people and seriously injured more than 100 (13 February). It had previously suspended plans to increase bus fares after a person was killed by police in riots. More than 60 people were also wounded when officers opened fire on protesters in the capital, Maputo. Prices on some bus routes had been set to rise by up to 50%. The price of bread and rice has also increased. Elsewhere, about 70,000 people were displaced and several killed by flooding. Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe were also badly affected.

Nigeria

President Umaru Yar'Adua rejected a 78% pay rise that MPs voted for themselves (27 February). He said he would approve a 20% increase to stop committee

members seeking bribes from ministries. A tribunal annulled the election of the president of the senate, David Mark (23 February).

The government cancelled the sale of the state telecoms company Nitel to a consortium backed by the former president Olusegun Obasanjo. (18 February). A spokesperson said the new owners had failed to improve the running of the company. It is the second time a major privatisation carried out by Obasanjo's government has been halted.

A prominent Niger Delta militant leader, Henry Okah, has been extradited from Angola to Nigeria, Angolan officials said. A founder of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (Mend), he was arrested in Angola last year on arms trafficking charges. Lawyers said they had been refused access, amid claims that he had been killed in custody.

A fully equipped hospital that lay unused for two years has burned to the ground in northern Nigeria (15 February). Maiduguri general hospital was built in 2006 but the state government refused to open it until the president came to cut the ribbon. Surgical theatres, an intensive care ward and clinics were all destroyed.

The trial of 18 men for dressing up as women began in a sharia court in northern Nigeria. The men were arrested last year in a hotel room in Bauchi.

Nigeria's anti-trafficking authority said it had rescued 105 children who were to be used as farm labourers from a 15-seat minibus in Kano state. The parents said they were going to an Islamic school.

An Islamic scholar accused of being al-Qaeda's link to Nigeria appeared in court in the capital, Abuja. Muhammed Ashafa claims he was tortured into confessing to a planned attack after he was arrested in Pakistan in 2004.

Former state governor Lucky Igbinedion surrendered to the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission to face 142 charges of corruption. Igbinedion, an ally of Yar'Adua, is the eighth ex-governor charged with corruption since last year. He is accused of stealing more than \$24m through three front companies. The EFCC chief, Nuhu Ribadu, has reportedly been ordered to go on a year's training course in what is seen as an attempt to sideline him.

The government is suing three international tobacco firms for \$44bn. It accuses British American Tobacco, Philip Morris and International Tobacco of undermining health services and targeting young people to replace declining numbers of smokers in the West (14 January).

In the oil city of Port Harcourt, at least 13 people were killed in attacks by gunmen on two police stations and a hotel, and Seinye Briggs, wife of a prominent ruling party politician, was kidnapped (1 January). The Niger Delta Vigilante Movement reportedly claimed responsibility.

Sierra Leone

The government re-imposed a timber export ban because of what it said was indiscriminate plundering of forests by Chinese and other foreign companies (15 January). The new president, Ernest Bai Koroma, ordered investigations of ex-ministers and other officials for alleged corruption. A report commissioned by him found that no funds from a \$500,000 donor-financed project at one ministry had

reached the intended recipients. However, the president's inauguration was the most orderly Sierra Leone has seen.

South Africa

The former deputy president Jacob Zuma was elected leader of the African National Congress with more than 60% of the vote and is now the frontrunner to take over as head of state when President Thabo Mbeki, who was heckled by delegates, must stand down in 2009. However, Zuma, who was acquitted of rape in May 2007, will face trial for corruption in August after new charges were brought over a controversial \$5bn arms deal in 1999.

The finance minister pledged more funds in his latest budget to ease the nation's energy crisis (20 February). Trevor Manuel said state-owned Eskom would get 60bn rand (\$7.6bn) to tackle power cuts and rationing. Eskom stopped supplying power to neighbouring countries, with Zimbabwe and Mozambique being the worst affected. Power cuts in January caused chaos—commuters angry at long delays set fire to trains in Pretoria, and gold mines stopped production. South Africans have been warned to expect blackouts for at least five years.

A video of white students at the University of Free State apparently forcing black campus employees to eat food that had been urinated on led to widespread protests and questions about how much progress had been made since the end of apartheid (27 February).

The main trade union federation, Cosatu, sacked its president, Willie Madisha, over a missing donation of 500,000 rand to the South African Communist Party in 2002. Madisha is a close ally of Mbeki.

The government is to allow elephants to be culled as the population is thought to have doubled since 1995.

The controversial health minister, Manto Tshabalala-Msimang, said medicines used by traditional healers should not be subject to clinical trials (24 February). She warned against using what she called Western protocols for research and development. The minister has been heavily criticised for suggesting garlic and beetroot can combat HIV.

South Africa's suspended police commissioner, Jackie Selebi, appeared in court on corruption allegations (1 February). Mbeki has been accused of trying to protect him. Days later, the security minister proposed in parliament that the FBI-style Scorpions unit that had investigated Selebi be disbanded. In January, a court threw out corruption charges against Gerrie Nel, the man investigating Selebi.

The Tanzanian high commissioner to South Africa was beaten unconscious by armed robbers at his own farewell dinner in Pretoria (29 December). Emmanuel Mwambulukutu was left in a serious condition in hospital.

Tanzania

President Jakaya Kikwete named a new prime minister a day after dissolving his cabinet in the wake of a corruption scandal (7 February). Mizengo Pinda replaces Edward Lowassa, who resigned with two ministers after being implicated in a 2006

deal to provide emergency electricity. MPs found the government was losing more than \$100,000 a day to the US firm, Richmond Development.

The central bank governor, Daudi Ballali, was sacked after an independent international audit revealed that \$120m was improperly paid by the bank to dozens of local companies, many of them reportedly fictitious (10 January).

Saed Kubenea and Ndimara Tegambwage, two editors of the weekly *Mwana Halisi*, were attacked in their newsroom in Dar es Salaam with machetes, knives and iron bars after naming several members of the ruling party accused of stealing public funds. Kubenea also had acid sprayed in his face, threatening his eyesight (5 January).

Uganda

The government and the rebel Lord's Resistance Army signed a permanent ceasefire, the latest step aimed at ending more than two decades of war (23 February). The rebels and government have been holding talks in Juba in Sudan. On Friday they struck a deal allowing rebels to be considered for government, diplomatic and military posts. Joachim Chissano, former president of Mozambique, who is mediating the talks, described the agreement as the end of the rebellion. Amnesty International called for suspected LRA war criminals to face trial at the International Criminal Court. The deputy leader of the rebels, Vincent Otti, was confirmed dead, allegedly killed at the orders of the leader, Joseph Kony.

Zambia

A British satirist who has Zambian residency said he would continue mocking the country's leaders after the supreme court ruled against an attempt to deport him for comparing President Levy Mwanawasa to a "foolish elephant". Roy Clark said: "It was important to demonstrate that you can criticise the government" (25 January). Zambia declared a national disaster when floods in January displaced thousands of people and destroyed roads, crops and livestock.

Zimbabwe

President Robert Mugabe launched his re-election campaign by calling the opposition "witches, prostitutes and charlatans" (29 February). The 84-year-old independence leader also called them "traitors and two-headed creatures", telling supporters in the capital, Harare, that he was certain of victory in the March presidential and parliamentary polls. The head of the prison service in Zimbabwe, Paradzayi Zimondi, ordered staff to vote for Mugabe.

His main challengers are the opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai, one of two leaders of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), which split three years ago, and a former finance minister and long-time Zanu-PF minister, Simba Makoni, who Mugabe dismissed as a "prostitute" and a "frog".

Makoni is seen as competent and relatively clean of the corruption tainting the government and appeals to both ruling-party and opposition supporters, especially the urban middle class and the young. However, some see him as a means to further

split the opposition vote, one faction of which backs Makoni. It will also be difficult for Makoni to overcome Zanu-PF's grip on the rural vote through control of land and food aid.

Both MDC factions said they felt betrayed by the Southern African Development Community, which had been trying to facilitate dialogue with the Mugabe government (21 January). They said dialogue foundered in December when it became clear that Zanu-PF was reneging on an agreement to enact a new constitution before elections.

Zimbabwe's inflation hit an annual rate of 100,000% in January, official figures showed (20 February). Shortages of food and fuel helped drive inflation from December's rate of 66,000%. At least 2,000 cholera cases were reported in Harare as power cuts disrupted water treatment. China said it would send 5,000 tons of food aid. More than 25% of the population depend on UN food aid and unemployment is believed to have reached 80%.

ASIA

Pakistan

The main party backing President Pervez Musharraf admitted defeat in elections (19 February). The two main opposition parties, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) of the assassinated former prime minister Benazir Bhutto, and the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), led by another former premier, Nawaz Sharif, have a clear majority and began talks on forming a coalition government. Sharif said he wanted "to rid Pakistan of dictatorship forever" but the PPP has been more equivocal, despite the polls being seen as a referendum on Musharraf's rule. With a two-thirds majority in parliament, a new governing coalition could impeach Musharraf.

The PPP, now led by Bhutto's widow, Asif Zardari, won a third of seats, and the PML-N about a quarter. The Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid-i-Azam (PML-Q), the party aligned with Musharraf, won just 16%. Musharraf said he wished to stay and work towards stable democratic government in Pakistan. He said the polls had strengthened moderate forces in the country. The PML-N said Sharif, who is banned from being PM again, would stand for parliament in a by-election. Zardari ruled himself out as prime minister. He is a deeply divisive figure in Pakistan who has spent years in prison on corruption charges and is not an MP.

Don McKinnon, Commonwealth secretary-general, congratulated Pakistan on the relatively peaceful elections on 18 February. "These elections are an important step in Pakistan's journey towards full democracy," he said.

The elections brought nationalists back into the mainstream, largely at the expense of religious parties. The secular Pashtun Awami National Party (ANP) won the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) from the right-wing Muttehida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) coalition of Islamic parties after militant Islamists were blamed for bringing chaos to the NWFP. The PPP also did well in the province. The two also made inroads into the semi-autonomous tribal areas where the MMA-backed clerics were nearly routed, largely because of the unpopularity of their ban on entertainment, including singers, actors, CDs, DVDs and advertising. Militants had bombed music shops. In Baluchistan, most nationalist groups boycotted the elections.

At least 12 people, including suspected militants, died in a missile attack on a South Waziristan village near the Afghan border (28 February). Sources said there were at least four Arabs, two Turkmen and two Pakistani militants, known locally as Punjabi Taliban, among the dead. In January, a top al-Qaeda militant, Abu Laith al-Libi, was killed by a similar missile strike, believed to have been carried out by an unmanned US aircraft. The army said dozens of Taliban militants and several soldiers were killed in fighting in the autonomous area. It said Baitullah Mehsud, a militant leader accused of planning last December's murder of Benazir Bhutto, had been leading attacks on army forts there. Meanwhile, in the Swat valley, where the army has been battling pro-Taliban militants, a roadside bomb killed 13 members of a wedding party and injured about a dozen.

Security forces arrested a militant linked to al-Qaeda over a previous attempt to kill Bhutto (26 February). Qari Saifullah Akhtar was seized in connection with the attack in Karachi last October. Bhutto survived the suicide bombing, which killed 135 people, but was killed in a similar attack blamed on Islamists in Rawalpindi. The interior minister, Hamid Nawaz, said he was "most probably ... involved in the attack on Benazir Bhutto's rally. He is a big character." Bhutto accused Akhtar of plotting against her in her posthumously published memoirs.

The Pakistani army's top medic, Lt Gen Mushtaq Baig, was killed by a suicide bomber in Rawalpindi with at least eight others. Another suicide bomber killed 37 PPP supporters on the last day of campaigning before the elections.

A British aid agency suspended operations in Pakistan after at least three staff were killed (25 February). Plan International said gunmen stormed into its Mansehra office, firing indiscriminately. The children's charity was deemed un-Islamic by clerics and pro-Taliban militants for providing education and health facilities to girls.

The Pakistani military said it had successfully test-fired short-range and medium-range ballistic missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads. The latter has a range of 700km.

A hoard of false legs found under the floor of a house in Dorset, Britain, is on its way to help victims of the 2005 Kashmir earthquake (25 January). A plumber found more than 100 artificial limbs, crutches and walking frames hidden in the cellar.

Bangladesh

The anti-corruption commission filed new charges against the detained former prime minister Khaleda Zia (27 February). They relate to a Chinese firm's 2004 contract to operate a coal mine. The commission said Zia, and ministers including Motiur Rahman Nizami, head of the Jamaat-e-Islami, Bangladesh's leading religious party, as well as several prominent members of Khaleda Zia's own Bangladesh Nationalist Party, caused losses of \$23m. A spokesman for the two parties said the charges were politically motivated. Zia is already in detention, along with about 200 other politicians and businessmen, on bribery charges.

Her rival, Sheikh Hasina Wajed, has also been detained for extortion and misuse of power since July. Hasina and two relatives deny receiving \$435,000 from a businessman between 1996 and 2001, when she was prime minister. They say the allegation is the army's attempt to force popular politicians out of politics. Earlier,

the high court ruled that Hasina's corruption trial was unlawful as emergency laws could not apply to alleged crimes that took place years before the military-backed government seized power last year. The government is appealing.

The army chief said the country needed its "own brand of democracy". Gen Moeen U Ahmed said Bangladesh had tried "Westminster-type parliamentary democracy" for 15 years and had fallen victim to vote-rigging. The generals have yet to lift the state of emergency and declare a date for the parliamentary election promised by the end of 2008. The US-based Human Rights Watch has called on the caretaker government to tackle what it called the endemic problem of torture. It said tens of thousands of people were being detained arbitrarily and tortured.

The bird flu epidemic spread to more than half of Bangladesh's 64 districts. The Indian state of West Bengal, which borders Bangladesh, said the virus had been detected in 13 of 19 districts and that more than 2.5million birds would be culled.

A boy died in a heavy exchange of fire between Indian and Bangladeshi border guards lasting seven hours (29 January). India said it began when its border guard was kidnapped by smugglers from Bangladesh but the Bangladeshi border force said it was sparked by unprovoked firing from India.

Three Dhaka university lecturers jailed in December for three years for inciting students to protest at emergency rule were spared prison when President Iajuddin Ahmed signed a clemency order (22 January). A fourth professor was acquitted. They denied leading rallies in Rajshahi in August against the government. Four prominent advisers to the junta resigned, with three saying they did so on the orders of the regime. Meanwhile, judges will now be appointed by the supreme court rather than by politicians.

India

New Delhi is to cancel the entire debt of small farmers in a giant scheme that will cost 600bn rupees (\$15bn). The budget will also increase spending on education by 20% and on health by 15% (29 February).

Robert Gates, US defence secretary, visited India to bolster military ties and promote US arms sales. As he arrived, India announced that it had successfully tested a new ballistic missile.

Himadri Sen Roy, alias Comrade Somen, a top Maoist leader, was arrested in West Bengal and charged with waging war against the government. About 6,000 people have been killed in violence linked to Maoist rebels over the past 20 years. Authorities said 11 Maoists and six police were killed in heavy fighting in Chhattisgarh; at least 20 Maoists and three security personnel were killed in Orissa, and 13 policemen were killed when 500 Maoists attacked a police base in the same state. Meanwhile, a Gurkha political group set up roadblocks in Darjeeling demanding a separate state. The Gurkha Liberation Forum opposes an autonomy plan for the region finalised by the government with the Gurkha National Liberation Front, which controls the local council. The GNLF fought for a Gurkha state for seven years until it signed an agreement with the Indian government in 1988.

Pakistan and India agreed to increase the number of passenger flights and destinations between the two countries in a sign of warming relations. Prime

Minister Manmohan Singh visited China for the first time since taking office in 2004. Both countries promised to increase trade and military co-operation.

Malaysia

The home affairs minister, Radzi Sheikh Ahmad, said Indian migrant workers were still being issued visas, contradicting his own officials. Attempted murder charges against 31 ethnic Indians arrested at a rally in Kuala Lumpur in November were dropped. At least 8,000 people had protested at perceived discrimination against the two million Hindu Indians in Muslim-majority Malaysia.

Maldives

A 15-year-old boy scout saved President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom from an assassination attempt when he blocked a knife attack with his hand. Gayoom, leader since 1978, intends to ban the full veil and foreign preachers. A Maldivian Democratic Party spokesman in London said this would “exacerbate extremism”.

Hong Kong

The chief executive, Donald Tsang, said Beijing planned to allow the special region to directly elect its leader by 2017 and legislators by 2020.

Papua New Guinea

At least six people were killed and several seriously injured in ethnic violence between Western Highland Jiga tribesmen and Engan settlers after a Jiga man was killed in a fight in Mount Hagen town.

Singapore

The suspected leader of the Islamist militant group Jemaah Islamiah escaped from prison, sparking a huge manhunt (27 February). Mas Selamat Kastari is accused of planning attacks on Changi airport, official buildings and foreign targets in Singapore.

Sri Lanka

Eleven children were among at least 18 people killed in a bomb attack on a bus in the north-west (29 January). In other attacks, a suicide bomber killed himself and injured seven others as police searched a house in the capital, Colombo, and a government minister, DM Dassanayake, died in hospital after his car was blown up in January in a roadside bombing near Colombo. The Tamil Tigers’ intelligence chief, known as Colonel Charles, was killed when his car hit a landmine planted by government troops in rebel territory, according to a pro-Tiger website. Clashes between the military and rebels have increased since the ceasefire between the government and the Tamil Tigers ended (16 January). Fighting and bomb attacks have continued for two years despite the six-year-old truce, however.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said the number of civilians killed and injured in Sri Lanka had reached “appalling levels”. The ICRC said 180 civilians died in the first six weeks of 2008, and nearly 270 more were injured. The US-based Human Rights Watch urged the UN Security Council to impose sanctions on the Tamil Tiger rebels for using child soldiers and Amnesty International said threats to journalists had increased dramatically as the country fell back into civil war. It said that in the last two years at least 10 media workers had been killed.

Vinayagamoorthis Muralitharan, known as Colonel Karuna when he was a Tamil Tiger leader, was sentenced to nine months’ imprisonment by a UK court for identity fraud. He was arrested in London last year for carrying a Sri Lankan diplomatic passport issued under a false name. The former rebel leader left the Tigers in 2004 to fight alongside government forces. Human rights groups want the UK government to try him for war crimes.

A man was released from prison after being held on remand for 50 years without conviction. PP James was 30 when he was arrested and sent to jail for stabbing his father.

EUROPE

Cyprus and Malta

Cyprus and Malta adopted the euro on 1 January, joining 13 other countries in the eurozone.

Cyprus

Demetris Christofias, of the Greek Cypriot Communist Party (Akel), was elected president, comfortably beating Ioannis Kasoulides of the right-wing Democratic Rally (Disy) party (24 February). Christofias becomes the only Communist head of state in the European Union but will be in coalition with nationalists. Christofias promised to revive efforts to unify the island, which has been split since 1974, when Turkey invaded after an Athens-inspired coup aimed at uniting Cyprus with Greece. He has asked the UN to arrange a meeting with the Turkish Cypriot leader Mehmet Ali Talat. Tassos Papadopoulos. His Greek-Cypriot nationalist predecessor was unexpectedly knocked out in the election’s first round. He had persuaded voters in 2004 to reject a unification plan backed by Kofi Annan, then UN secretary-general.

UK

Prince Harry, third in line to the throne, was withdrawn from Afghanistan after news of his secret deployment as a junior cavalry officer leaked out (29 February). The move follows the collapse of an agreement by British media to impose a news blackout over his tour of duty when an Australian magazine revealed his presence there.

Northern Rock was nationalised after bids to buy the bank, which had to be supported with £26bn (\$52bn) of public aid, were deemed inadequate (18 February). It was the first such nationalisation since the 1970s. Northern Rock became the first British bank to suffer a run on its money since 1866 because it was particularly exposed to the US sub-prime mortgage crisis.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, was widely criticised after appearing to back the adoption of Muslim sharia law in the UK (7 February). He said the adoption of some sharia law seemed “unavoidable” in areas such as marital disputes or financial matters. By contrast, the Bishop of Rochester, Michael Nazir-Ali, said Islamic extremism had turned some communities into no-go areas for people of a different religion or race. He said there was “hostility” in those areas and described the government’s multicultural policies as divisive.

The Work and Pensions Secretary, Peter Hain, who had been a minister in the Labour government since 1997, resigned when police were asked to investigate donations to his campaign for the party deputy leadership (24 January).

Metal detectors are to be installed at some schools in England as part of a drive to reduce knife crime. A few schools, including one primary school, already have scanners.

A new generation of UK nuclear power stations was given the go-ahead by the government, despite criticism that reactors were expensive, dirty and dangerous (10 January). The government said nuclear power was “affordable and provides one of the cheapest electricity options available to reduce our carbon emissions”.

British troops transferred control of Basra province to the Iraqi authorities, four-and-a-half years after the invasion.

AMERICAS

Antigua and Barbuda

Antigua and Barbuda won \$21m in annual trade sanctions against the US after the World Trade Organisation ruled that an American online betting ban was unlawful (21 December). A 2006 US law made it illegal for foreign internet gaming firms to trade there. Antigua and Barbuda turned to electronic commerce to end the reliance on tourism after devastating hurricanes in the 1990s. The Caribbean nation of 80,000 people is the smallest country to win a case in the WTO’s 12-year-history.

Barbados

The Barbados Labour Party, under Prime Minister Owen Arthur, lost general elections to the Democratic Labour Party, led by David Thompson, after 14 years in office (16 January).

Belize

In an election upset, voters threw out the government of Prime Minister Said Musa. The opposition United Democratic Party won 25 of the 31 seats. Musa, of the People’s United Party, was seeking a third term in office.

Canada

The country's 2,500 troops in Afghanistan would leave within four years, the government announced. Prime Minister Stephen Harper, who leads a minority Conservative government, was under pressure from the Liberal opposition to withdraw sooner. Harper had previously demanded that a further 1,000 NATO troops be sent to support Canada's troops or it would withdraw at the end of its mandate next February. At least 78 Canadians have been killed in Afghanistan since 2002. The province of British Columbia proposed a carbon tax in its budget—the first such tax in North America.

The foreign minister apologised for including the US and Israel on a list of states where prisoners are at risk of torture. Maxime Bernier said the list, which formed part of a manual on torture awareness given to diplomats, “wrongly includes some of our closest allies”.

The Arctic port of Churchill received a historic load of fertiliser from Russia—the first shipment to use a proposed new route across the Arctic from Murmansk. The town of a thousand people is expecting a boom from the effects of climate change: the Arctic is estimated to be ice-free in the summer by 2013 and the Northwest Passage became easily navigable for the first time this year.

Guyana

Gunmen killed 12 people, including three policemen, in an attack on Bartica, a small town near goldfields (17 February). Three weeks earlier, five children were among 11 killed when gunmen attacked the village of Lusignan. The attacks—the worst killings in Guyana for three decades—have been blamed on a gang leader, Rondell Rawlins, who is also wanted over the murder of a government minister in 2006. President Bharrat Jagdeo suggested the attack was intended to stir up ethnic tension as Lusignan is mostly ethnic Indian, while Rawlins and his followers are ethnic African.

PACIFIC

Australia

The government formally apologised in parliament for the “profound grief, suffering and loss” inflicted on the Aboriginal people (12 February). Prime Minister Kevin Rudd singled out the “Stolen Generations” of thousands of children forcibly removed from their families until the 1970s. The apology, beamed live around the country on TV, was met with cheers but some Aborigines say it should have been accompanied with compensation for their suffering.

Rudd said Australia would do all it could to safeguard democracy in East Timor after attacks on its president and prime minister on 11 February. President José Ramos-Horta was seriously hurt in the shooting and Prime Minister Xanana Gusmão narrowly escaped injury when gunmen ambushed his car. Canberra sent extra peacekeepers to Dili after the attempted coup.

Australia fulfilled an election promise by banning uranium sales to India because Delhi has not signed the nuclear non-proliferation treaty (15 January).

Fiji

Commodore Frank Bainimarama, who took power in a 2006 coup, appointed himself head of the country's top tribal council (19 February). He will chair the Great Council of Chiefs (GCC) and appoint representatives from each province. Fiji's top indigenous body has been extremely influential. Bainimarama suspended the GCC last April 2007 for failing to back him after he seized power from Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase.

A British lawyer visiting Fiji to assess its legal system for the International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute was deported shortly after arriving at the airport (17 January). Felicia Johnston was due to examine the state of the rule of law and judicial independence. Ten men accused of planning to assassinate Bainimarama were freed on bail after charges were dropped or reduced (19 December).

At least six people died and thousands were left without power or water after Cyclone Gene lashed Fiji in late January.

Nauru

The last asylum-seekers left Australia's detention camp on Nauru, ending the controversial "Pacific Solution" immigration policy. The 21 Sri Lankans flew to Australia after 10 months in the camp, leaving it empty. The move fulfils a pledge by Australia's Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, to end the seven-year policy of holding refugees arriving by boat in remote camps for assessment. Processing centres were set up on Nauru and on Manus Island in Papua New Guinea in 2001 by the government of John Howard in return for millions of dollars in aid.

New Zealand

Sir Edmund Hillary, the first mountaineer to climb Mount Everest, died in Auckland, aged 88. He was given a state funeral (11 January). Two Australians became the first people to paddle to New Zealand across the Tasman Sea in a kayak (13 January). The 3,300km journey from New South Wales took 62 days.

A dolphin rescued two whales that had become stranded on a North Island beach despite efforts to free them. The tired pygmy sperm whales had repeatedly beached when the dolphin appeared, communicated with the whales and led them to safety. The bottlenose dolphin, called Moko by locals, is known for playing with swimmers.

Solomon Islands

MPs elected Derek Sikua as Prime Minister, after Manasseh Sogavare was ousted on 13 December in a no-confidence vote. Sogavare's defeat allowed the extradition of Julian Moti, the Solomon Islands' former attorney-general, to face child sex charges in Australia. Moti, an Australian citizen, had been given safe haven by Sogavare, a close friend, leading to accusations by MPs of bringing the country into disrepute. Sogavare accused Australia of acting like a regional bully with the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands. The Australian-dominated coalition of

15 Pacific countries had intervened in 2003 when heavily armed rebels threatened to devastate the Solomon Islands but stayed on to help develop economic stability and infrastructure.

Around the Commonwealth

Bangladesh's Inspector-General of Police, Nur Mohammad, said the human rights training workshop recently conducted by the Commonwealth Secretariat in Dhaka would help police safeguard human rights while enforcing the law.

The regional shortlists for this year's Commonwealth Writers' Prize were announced.

Professor Michael Kelly of Zambia delivered the keynote address at the Third Commonwealth Teacher Research Symposium in Maputo, Mozambique, in February. He called for a strong rights culture in schools as well as education for girls, which he argued would provide a "second vaccine" against Aids.

A workshop for Malawi magistrates organised by the Commonwealth Secretariat's Human Rights Unit was held on implementing international human rights.

The Malaysian capital, Kuala Lumpur, hosted the Pan-Commonwealth Conference on Professional Services Trade in February. Ideas were shared on this growing sector and on the key issues of the global regulatory environment, competitiveness and marketing strategy.

Commonwealth ministers met in Monaco on 20 February under the auspices of the Commonwealth Consultative Group on the Environment and called for establishing demonstration projects and partnerships that delivered innovative financing to stop the destruction of forests in member countries.

KD Knight, former Jamaican foreign minister, led a Commonwealth Expert Team to observe February's elections in Belize.

New Commonwealth Secretariat publications (www.publications.thecommonwealth.org)

Naila Kabeer, *Mainstreaming Gender in Social Protection for the Informal Economy*, 412 pages, ISBN 978-0-85092-840-2.

RoseMarie-Rita Endeley and Devindra Ramnarine (Eds), *Growth and Success through e-Governance: Best Practice from Cyprus and Malta*, 84 pages, ISBN 978-0-85092-876-1.

Fareeha Zafar, *Achieving Education for All: Pakistan – Promising Practices in Universal Primary Education*, 52 pages, ISBN 978-0-85092-833-4.

Climate Change and its Implications: Which Way Now?, 23 pages, ISBN 978-0-903850-23-0.

Engaging with Faith: Report of the Commonwealth Foundation Project on Improving Understanding and Co-operation between Different Faith Communities, 2005-2007, 29 pages, ISBN 978-0-903850-28-5.

Ramya Subrahmanian, *Gender in Primary and Secondary Education: A handbook for policy-makers and other stakeholders*, 168 pages, ISBN 978-0-85092-864-8.

Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships for Gender Equality: Perspectives from Government, 156 pages, ISBN 978-0-903850-25-4.

Chris Milner, *Trading on Commonwealth Ties: A Review of the Structure of Commonwealth Trade and the Scope for Developing Linkages and Trade in the Commonwealth*, 88 pages, ISBN 978-0-85092-875-4.

Transforming Commonwealth Societies to Achieve Political, Economic and Human Developments: Civil Society Perspectives, 33 pages, ISBN 978-0-903850-26-1.