

A LONE HAND BY THE COMMONWEALTH

IN DECLINING TO revoke Pakistan's suspension from its membership, the Commonwealth has become the only significant international political force that continues to pressure the military regime to fulfil its promises in regard to democratisation. The decision taken by the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) at its recent meeting not to revoke the suspension — which was triggered by the military coup of October 1999 — has struck a blow to the military regime's hopes that the general elections held last month would be universally acknowledged as a significant step towards the restoration of democracy. More so since a report by a Commonwealth observers group which monitored the elections provided the key inputs into the CMAG's decision. While these observers did note that the process of polling itself was free and fair, certain key decisions taken by the military regime (in particular the "extra-constitutional" measures introduced by the Legal Framework Order 2002) prior to the polls were seen to have had a "limiting effect" on the process of restoring democracy. Measures that were taken after the poll — which appeared designed to promote the interests of a political formation that is widely seen as a favourite of the military regime — could not but have strengthened the CMAG's inclination to reply in the negative to the observer group's query whether a limited democratic dispensation was consistent with the Commonwealth's fundamental political values. However, the CMAG has indicated that the transfer of effective executive power from the military regime to an elected civilian Government could be a vital development that would induce it to reconsider the question of Pakistan's participation in the councils of the Commonwealth.

An adverse judgment by the Commonwealth might not count for very much in a context where this body is viewed as an anachronism, especially by those outside its fold. Nevertheless, the CMAG's decision does take on rele-

vance when it is seen in relation to two other aspects of the global situation. For one, the Commonwealth's judgment in respect of the progress towards the democratisation of Pakistan, and of the efficacy of the general election in the promotion of the process, reflects the assessment of the European Union as well. Second, Islamabad's keenness to obtain the approval of the Commonwealth was evident from the manner in which it had highlighted the positive points in the observer's report when it was first released. Therefore, and irrespective of the gloss that it might now try to put on the affair, Pakistan's military regime will be greatly disappointed with the Commonwealth's decision. Chagrin at its failure to move the Commonwealth towards a more charitable assessment would not of itself push the military regime to loosen its control over the process of political change in Pakistan. So long as the U.S. administration sticks to its diametrically opposite view — that the general elections advanced the democratisation of Pakistan — the military regime would not feel hard-pressed to change its approach.

If the primary responsibility for the failure of democracy to take root in Pakistan is that of the military, an international community that has periodically failed to deter putschists cannot be absolved of blame either. But, in constantly blaming those other than themselves, the mainstream democratic forces in Pakistan cannot hope to conceal their own culpability. Parties that had sworn to oppose the military till a full democratic dispensation had been restored in Pakistan have been scrambling to be included in the Government to be formed though they well know that no elected Ministry will be free from the diktat of the military given the underlying constitutional changes that have been wrought. Neither the Commonwealth nor any other external force can help those who claim to stand for democracy in Pakistan unless they first show that they are capable of helping themselves.

India's hard line prevails at the Commonwealth

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, NOV. 2. The Commonwealth Foreign Ministers' decision here on Friday to keep Pakistan in the deep freeze until democracy is fully restored by its President, Pervez Musharraf, was the result of a hard-driven compromise in which India is understood to have played a critical role.

There were sharp divisions and, according to informed sources, it was the tough line taken by India and two African countries that swung the balance against what at one stage looked like a "done deal" in favour of revoking Pakistan's suspension after the formation of a new government in Islamabad.

One highly-placed source said India was "in the minority of one" when the discussions started, but gradually — and with not a little help from Nigeria and Botswana — others agreed that Pakistan must do much more to prove its democratic credentials before its suspension is reviewed. India is believed to have made effective use of a letter from the former Pakistan Prime Minister, Benazir Bhutto, to the Commonwealth Secretary-General complaining that the process, preceding the recent

elections in her country, had been distorted to produce a tailor-made result.

India's stress on "full restoration" of democracy, the sources said, meant that the mere formation of a new government would not be regarded as a sufficient ground for a review of Pakistan's case. A crucial test, as Botswana's Foreign Minister, Mompoti S. Merafhe, who chaired Friday's meeting pointed, would be how much of the executive power, which Gen. Musharraf now enjoys, would be handed over to the elected government.

The External Affairs Minister, Yashwant Sinha, acknowledged that it was "pretty hard" to persuade other members but said that India simply took a "principled position on democracy." He did not think that it would further embitter India-Pakistan relations and pointed out that India was in fact not even a member of the Foreign Ministers' group — the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) — when the original decision to suspend Pakistan was taken.

All that India did, he said, was to insist that the CMAG should not compromise on its own principles that led to Pakistan's suspension after the October

1999 coup which brought Gen. Musharraf to power.

"Our position is that Pakistan was a democracy which was overthrown and it must be restored," Mr. Sinha told journalists. The election process, as reported by the Commonwealth Observers' Group, was "flawed" and Gen. Musharraf had "fundamentally" altered the Constitution before the elections, he said.

"We don't believe that the formation of a government in the present situation would lead to restoration of democracy — let alone full restoration," Mr. Sinha said. Asked whether India would again oppose Pakistan's readmission into the Commonwealth if the issue were to come up at the CMAG's next meeting, in March-April 2003, he said: "We will continue to plead for restoration of democracy or it will be unfair to the people of Pakistan."

There was much speculation over the contending positions within the CMAG, comprising India, Australia, Bangladesh, Botswana, Nigeria, the Bahamas, Malta and Samoa. It is understood that Australia and Bangladesh lobbied heavily for Pakistan, but Nigeria and Botswana threw their weight behind the Indian position.

NOV 3 2002

THE HINDU

Commonwealth team in Pak to monitor poll process

449-15
11/10
By B. Muralidhar Reddy

ISLAMABAD, SEPT. 30. Even as the Musharraf Government is struggling to limit the damage caused by the comments of a team of European Union observers on the October election process, a group from the Commonwealth has landed here to oversee the poll process.

Comments by the chairperson of the Commonwealth Observer Group and Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia, Tan Sri Dato' Maso bin Hitam, that the group would take into account the 'interim report' of the EU as an input in its evaluation, should be a matter of concern to the Pakistan Government.

The controversy generated by the publication of the 'interim report' in a Pakistani daily, with details of alleged irregularities, prompted the Minister of State for Foreign affairs, Inam ul Haq, to plead with the observers not to 'pre-judge' the elections.

Addressing a news conference here, Mr. Haq drew attention to the repeated promises made by the Pakistan President, Pervez Musharraf, that the October 10 elections would be 'free, fair and transparent'. Mr. Haq said any number of international observers were welcome, but no one should jump to conclusions before the process was over. The EU had hinted that if in the assessment of its observers, the process was not fair Pakistan could face 'sanctions', essentially economic in nature. As for the Commonwealth, Pakistan stands suspended from it ever since the military coup in 1999. The Commonwealth has said that the return of Pakistan to its fold is de-

pendent on the return of the military to the barracks and take over by a civilian set-up.

The Commonwealth Observer Group announced here that on the basis of its report, the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group would meet on November 1 and make recommendations which would have a bearing on Pakistan's status in the organisation.

Mr. Hitam declined to speculate whether its report would be negative or otherwise. The 32-member group had started a series of meetings with the Election Commission, political parties and civil society. "On election day, we will visit as many polling stations as possible. We will observe the counting of the votes and the result process", he said.

Mr. Hitam said that the Commonwealth Observer Group's advance group, already in Pakistan, had listened to allegations for and against the government.

In a related development, John Cushnahan, Chief Observer, European Union Election Observation Mission, said that the document referred to in a section of the Pakistan press was not an interim report. "It is part of the ongoing briefing of the EU Commission in Brussels by the EUEOM in which we convey the concerns that have been expressed to us during the course of our observation. At this stage, the EUEOM has not come to any conclusions on these issues. Our conclusions will not be finalised until we have had the opportunity to carry out a full de-briefing of our entire observer team, following the completion of the poll count. Only then will we produce our Preliminary Report", he said.

72-1100

10/11/2002

HP A very Commonwealth summit *213*

THE COMMONWEALTH Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) at Coolum did not achieve much more than what leaders of the 51 member nations could have done sitting at home. Going by past CHOGM summits, it was predictable that this one would also end with nothing more than a wordy communiqué to show for it. If anything, the pow-wows at Coolum underlined a grave CHOGM handicap: the urgent need for a round of reforms that would make every summit more than an academic exercise. The Coolum Declaration thus routinely condemns terrorism and human rights violations, while gingerly skirting several other equally important issues.

The vexed question of resolving the Zimbabwean crisis hung heavily over the summit. With elections just round the corner, and the escalating political violence there, faultlines surfaced at the CHOGM. Opinion was sharply divided

between Britain demanding immediate sanctions, and others advising a wait-and-watch policy. While there can't be two opinions about Mr Mugabe's atrocities, it does make sense for the Commonwealth to see the election results before considering punitive action.

The Zimbabwean electorate has a real choice, between the incumbent and at least one strong opposition contender. And it is a fact that the opposition successfully fought and won almost half the elected seats in last year's parliamentary polls, and a 'no' vote in a constitutional referendum two years ago. The preponderant African voice in the Commonwealth may have stalled action against Zimbabwe for the moment. But if the Commonwealth observer team, set up to monitor the elections, finds evidence of rigging, it will be hard for the organisation not to suspend Zimbabwe and consider sanctions.

THINK IT OVER...

"Bigotry tries to keep truth safe in its hand with a grip that kills it"

RAJENDRANATH TAGORE

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

1988 202

Commonwealth divided over Zimbabwe sanctions

Vijay Dutt
London, March 5

THE DECISION forced mostly by African leaders at Chogm to defer sanctions against Zimbabwe is being seen as the worst kind of humiliation for Britain.

Realising the backlash at home, Tony Blair said before leaving Australia, "We have postponed the day of judgement on Zimbabwe and I think that is the wrong thing to do."

But his statement has failed to assuage his critics and friends alike. Blair will be under immense pressure to withdraw from the Commonwealth if Robert Mugabe gets re-elected. Simon Heffer, a well-known political commentator, said, "The



TONY BLAIR

Commonwealth was a sticking plaster for the post-imperial wound. That wound has long healed. We do not need it."

Most here do not expect much impartiality from the Nigerian

and South African heads who along with the Australian Prime Minister comprise a three-member committee to adjudge the fairness of election in Zimbabwe on March 9 and 10.

"The Commonwealth will split in two if Obasanjo (Nigerian President) and Mbeki (South African President) vote to condone Mugabe's dictatorship," said Heffer.

Blair himself said the credibility of the 54-nation Commonwealth was at issue if the organisation failed to do "the right thing" after the Zimbabwe election. "There can be no question of Mugabe being allowed to stay in power with a rigged election. That's been Britain's position throughout."

Blair will be supported by New Zealand and Australia if he decides to challenge the African countries. Heffer has been quite blunt in saying that most African nations are unlikely to be fair as most are "self-serving, corrupt and racist."

Incidentally India, of all the Third World countries has been singled out for its democratic values. "Dominated by Third World countries of varying degrees of venality and amorality, it (Commonwealth) no longer makes any pretence of requiring its members to pursue the sort of democracy and protection of human rights that civilised countries among its numbers—such as Britain, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, India and many

West Indian territories—take for granted".

The Telegraph has echoed the dismay of Whitehall in its leader. It says, "Once again Commonwealth summit stands exposed as a talking-shop." It attacked Blair for blinking first in his confrontation with Mugabe and said that no amount of bluster now can disguise the fact (of blinking).

The fact that Britain failed to get sanctions imposed on Zimbabwe despite being head of the Commonwealth, hosting its secretariat in London and spending £825 million every year for aids to Commonwealth countries, has roused more disgust against Blair and Jack Straw's diplomacy.

Commonwealth leaders vow to end terrorism

COOLUM: Commonwealth leaders on Tuesday pledged to work to stamp out terrorism as they adopted two key declarations after four days of tough talks here marred by the bitter debate over Zimbabwe.

Leaders from 51 nations adopted a declaration and a key communiqué at the end of the talks, which were overshadowed by how the body of former British colonies should tackle the political violence in Zimbabwe.

In a strongly-worded seven-page communiqué, the leader said: "There is no justification for terrorism. 'While terrorist activities are unconscionable and should be eradicated forthwith, the challenge is to understand the root cause of these despicable acts and deal with them appropriately.'" Their condemnation of the September 11 attacks, which forced the postponement and relocation of the original meeting set for October 2001, was also highlighted in a separate four-page declaration made in Coolum. The Commonwealth pledged "to work together in fulfilling our international obligations to deny any safe haven for terrorists."

The leaders also called on all governments to work together to help alleviate the effects of the global downturn in the wake of the attacks for smaller, more vulnerable members. Australian Prime Minister John Howard, unveiling the two statements, said the tough position on terrorism was important given the "spread of the Commonwealth both politically and geographically." "I think this reinforces right across the Commonwealth the detestation of terrorism," Mr Howard added.

But the wording contrasted sharply with a watered-down statement on Zimbabwe issued on Monday after three days of tough talks which cracked open a rift between the African nations and former colonial power Britain. British Prime Minister Tony Blair, backed by Australia and New Zealand, had argued from before the start of the talks that Zimbabwe should be suspended from the Commonwealth in a clear sign of protest to the government of President Robert Mugabe.

But in a decision which stunned the Zimbabwean opposition movement for democratic change (MDC), the Commonwealth leaders passed the decision on what action to take to a three-man panel of the leaders of South Africa, Australia and Nigeria. They will decide on whether to impose sanctions in the light of the report of Commonwealth observers after Saturday and Sunday's presidential polls.

The MDC spokeswoman here, Sekai Holland, said the Commonwealth were failing to apply their own principles after being bamboozled by African nations whom she accused of being Mr Mugabe's "public relations front." "We're going to win the elections. Now that the Commonwealth has endorsed Mr Mugabe, he is going to feel compelled to give up power," she said. (AFP)



Australian Prime Minister John Howard (centre) and his wife Janette (left), both wearing Aussie Akubra hats, make friends with a koala held by a keeper at the barbecue dinner for the heads of delegation and their spouses, hosted by the Howards at the Commonwealth heads of government meeting at Coolum on the Sunshine Coast of Queensland, Australia, on Monday.

CHOGM ends with rift over Zimbabwe

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COOLUM, MARCH 5. Commonwealth leaders today wrapped up a four-day summit overshadowed by deep divisions over election violence in Zimbabwe with a statement reaffirming their commitment to good governance and democracy. But a compromise deal to delay taking action over escalating violence in Zimbabwe

failed to heal rifts within the organisation, leaders said. Others insisted the debate had strengthened the diverse 54-nation group.

The Tanzanian President, Benjamin Mkapa said the Commonwealth had withstood a "bombardment for an alliance against (Zimbabwe President Robert) Mugabe, allegedly on

racial grounds."

He said the organisation "emerged really as a united Commonwealth not divided on the basis of race."

A defiant bloc of African nations, Malaysia and some Caribbean States yesterday resisted concerted efforts by Britain, Australia and New Zealand to have Zimbabwe immediately suspended from the 54-nation group.

Britain and New Zealand criticised the decision. "The Commonwealth has to get its act together. It has failed to wrestle effectively with Zimbabwe," the New Zealand Prime Minister, Helen Clark said. "I think there is some frustration among the smaller States." The British Prime Minister, Tony Blair said at such large meetings "there is a tendency for the lowest common denominator to prevail."

Leaders at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) yesterday agreed to await a report by 64 Commonwealth election monitors on whether the coming weekend's Presidential election is free and fair. — AP



The Canadian Prime Minister, Jean Chretien (left), his British counterpart, Tony Blair (centre), and the Australian Prime Minister, John Howard, wearing traditional bushman hats, chat at a dinner retreat at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting at Coolum on Monday. — Reuters

THE HINDU

22/3 COMMONWEALTH IN CRISIS +19-60

THE COMMONWEALTH'S DECISION to suspend Zimbabwe from the multilateral organisation's decision-making bodies may appear to have pulled it from the brink of a precipice. However, the current crisis within the Commonwealth over its role as a conscience-keeper regarding the democratic practices of its member-states continues to simmer. Outwardly, the possible emergence of an informal racial divide within the 54-member forum seems to have been averted for the present. The latest row, involving the Western bloc of countries on one side and the developing countries on the other, is all about a debate on some form of sanctions on Zimbabwe for its perceived failure to uphold the true spirit of democracy. In a narrow sense, the issue pertains to the alleged rigging and other malpractices during the latest presidential poll in Zimbabwe, a predominantly non-white country which had in the past endured racial discrimination against its majority population. In a larger sense, though, the present battle within the Commonwealth seems to have much to do with some form of a power struggle among its members. The Commonwealth is founded on a unique principle of identity without reference to the political or ideological compatibility of its members. The principle simply is one of a voluntary reconciliation between Britain and almost all its decolonised territories under the auspices of an institution for collective cooperation. What has now come under severe strain is this notion of a binding principle.

Of the inter-regional organisations on the global stage, the Commonwealth has remained among the less cohesive outfits insofar as a binding political principle or an ideological underpinning is concerned. In this sense, the British-inspired Commonwealth is different from the U.S.-oriented multilateral organisations. What the Commonwealth now faces is a frontal challenge to the "moral" authority of Britain as the informal "leader" of this forum. This explains the dismay of the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, over the Commonwealth's earlier inaction

in regard to Zimbabwe. The consensus at a recent Commonwealth summit in Australia was to defer the consideration of sanctions in respect of Zimbabwe despite allegations of malpractices in the runup to its presidential poll which has since been held. It was in that context that some African member-states of the Commonwealth raised disconcerting questions about the perceived "white supremacist" attitude of Britain and some of its close allies within the forum. Another outcry was that against London's alleged "colonial hangover".

Now, the real issues at stake, insofar as the Commonwealth as an association is concerned, do not pertain to the rights and wrongs of the political practices of the President of Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe. What the Commonwealth should, instead, seek to do at this sensitive juncture is to strike a common denominator of cooperation without getting unduly bogged down in political principles with implications for the sovereignty of the member-states. While democracy and political pluralism are certainly wholesome principles of governance within sovereign states, the Commonwealth has now entered a qualitatively new phase in promoting this ideal. It was over a decade ago that the Commonwealth resorted to a robust internal debate before accepting the importance of good governance and democracy as guiding principles of relevance to the member-countries. Thereafter, the Commonwealth has had occasions to zero in attention on some member-states following the overthrow of "democratically" established Governments there. The latest case pertains to the political integrity or probity of a "democratic" election itself in a member-nation. In this sense, the latest rumpus over Zimbabwe is not about any fears that "democracy" might be under threat as a governing principle in that country. Given the backlash within the Commonwealth to such new nuances, it is time the organisation turned the spotlight on meaningful economic cooperation as a priority if not as a possible insurance against any potential irrelevance.

THE HINDU

22 MAR 2002

Commonwealth move isolates Zimbabwe

Richard Baston/The
Times, London

Africa and other parts of the developing world, and will serve to isolate him further from the international community.

The EU and the USA have already imposed targeted sanctions against Mr Mugabe and his ruling elite, but yesterday's decision will put him at odds with many of the African countries he had once looked to for support. Last night Switzerland announced sanctions against Harare and Denmark said it would close its embassy.

Mr Jack Straw, the British foreign secretary, said: "The

Commonwealth has spoken with one voice. The message could not be clearer nor could the messenger be more significant. It is clear beyond doubt that all Commonwealth nations want to see the restoration of full democracy and prosperity in Zimbabwe."

The surprise announcement was made by Mr John Howard, the Australian Prime Minister, after several hours of heated negotiations in London with President Mr Thabo Mbeki of South Africa and President Mr Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria. The two African leaders had

visited Mr Mugabe on Monday and it was feared that they would offer him a deal that would enable Harare to escape suspension. However, British diplomats said that the tough action had taken them by surprise and that they had little warning that the key African states would harden their stance.

Mr Mbeki had until yesterday been reluctant to take any action, not least because of sympathy among many South Africans for Mr Mugabe's land reform programme which has involved the seizure of white-

owned farms. However, the South African leader has been made increasingly aware of the damaging long-term impact on his country for its support of Harare. It is believed that Mr Tony Blair spelt out the economic repercussions for the whole of the region in a telephone conversation yesterday with Mr Mbeki.

Mr Howard insisted that the Commonwealth would not cease all its contacts with Zimbabwe and it would still be able to participate in the Commonwealth Games.

21 MAR 2002

The world has changed, the Commonwealth hasn't

Uneasy sits the crown

THE conclusion of another Commonwealth summit earlier this month provides an opportunity to examine the relevance of the organisation in the changing international situation. Government leaders from 51 member countries converged in Coolum, Australia to participate in the deliberations; Queen Elizabeth of England was there in confirmation of her role as the head of the multilateral forum. India was represented by Minister for External Affairs Jaswant Singh. Pakistan's participation remained in abeyance in view of the strictures imposed on it after Pervez Musharraf's overthrow of the democratically elected Nawaz Sharif Government in October 1999. International terrorism, the management of the downturn in the world economy, and the deteriorating political situation in Zimbabwe were the main items on the agenda.

The former British Commonwealth transformed its identity in the late 40s and early 50s when Britain relinquished her imperial status. Initially, the UK government remained keen on sustaining the organisation as 'a British Commonwealth' with the king or the queen retaining the status of the head of state of each of the member states of the Commonwealth. As far as the Commonwealth was constituted by the Anglo-Saxon dominions of Australia, Canada and New Zealand, there were no inhibitions on this score. But once a large number of non-White colonies of Britain became independent, the peoples and governments of these countries balked at acknowledging the British crown as the head of state. India forged a compromise. Jawaharlal Nehru insisted that India will remain part of the Commonwealth only as a republic without acknowledging the British king as the head of state. His advice that the British head of state should have a separate identity as the head of the collectivity, was accepted.

There was logic in India and other countries wishing to retain the British

connection in the 50s and 60s. The political organisation and state structures of all the non-White countries were rooted in institutions, procedures and laws inherited from British imperial rule. There was considerable dependence on England in technological, economic and defence supplies arrangements. Preferential trade arrangements and the special treatment accorded in higher education in England to young people from the Commonwealth countries was another factor that impelled the newly independent Asian and African countries to retain the British connection.



J.N. DIXIT

In recent years, the internal contradictions in the Commonwealth have made its functioning ambiguous at best and difficult at worst

All this changed with the advent of Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government in England. Even before that, UK's gradual integration with European regional arrangements had commenced, eroding the special relationship between England and other members of the Commonwealth. From the late 70s, the preferential trade arrangements between England and the Commonwealth countries diminished. During Thatcher's long tenure in office, the special and concessional relationship between UK and the Commonwealth countries disappeared. Commonwealth countries were treated at par with other countries having good relations with the UK. In a parallel development, the policies of other Commonwealth countries had also changed their terms of reference. While Britain's agenda became Euro-centric and related to the energy and economic interests in the Gulf and West Asia, the other Commonwealth countries shifted

their attention to their own regions and to other emerging political and economic power centres of the world. Symbolic and emotional attachment to the institution of the British crown has also diminished over the years, even among the White Commonwealth countries.

Today all members of the Commonwealth, including Britain, are involved with other regional groupings that serve their interests in a more substantive way. By the early 1990s, the Commonwealth attempted to re-define its role in these changed circumstances. Under Prime Minister John Major

and the then Secretary General of the Commonwealth Chief Anyake, attempts were initiated to make the Commonwealth a collective entity responding to the emerging global concerns regarding human rights, democracy, good governance, management of the environment, emerging travails of globalisation, UN reforms and peace-keeping and peace-making initiatives. The Commonwealth's agenda was recast on these lines at the Harare summit in 1991 and the Cyprus summit in 1993. The effort, however, has not succeeded.

What, then, is the relevance of the organisation today? Britain remains interested in sustaining it because it is an important instrumentality underpinning Britain's status as an important power in the context of its diminished status after World War II. The institutional, intellectual and linguistic connections between Commonwealth countries and Britain remain relevant in terms of the attitudes and inter-rela-

tionships of the power structures of the Commonwealth countries. But there is nothing more substantive than this. In fact in more recent years, the internal contradictions in the Commonwealth have made its functioning ambiguous at best and difficult at worst.

Commonwealth countries have been involved in military conflicts with each other in Africa and Asia. The Indo-Pakistan relationship is the most glaring example. There are also profound reservations about the Commonwealth's role in furthering good governance, democracy and respect for human rights, amongst the Asian and African member states.

The Commonwealth summit in Australia in the first week of March brought these contradictions to the fore again. The only major item on which the Coolum summit had a consensus was on combating terrorism. On all other issues, the consensus was cosmetic. On the most important question discussed at the Coolum summit — the internal situation in Zimbabwe — the conflict of views was insurmountable. While Britain, Australia and New Zealand wanted a collective decision to suspend Zimbabwe from the membership because of Robert Mugabe's refusal to accept external stipulations about how he should manage his country, African heads of state were more or less unanimous in questioning not just the role but also the motivations of the proposed policy. Though Zimbabwe has since been suspended from the Councils of the Commonwealth for one year after its violence marred elections, the Coolum summit showed up the organisation's deep divisions on this issue.

India tried to play a tempering and mediatory role in these controversial discussions. This might have reduced the tension in the summit, but did not lead to anything more. The New Zealand prime minister aptly summed up the Coolum summit: "I hope we do not have another CHOGM like this one ... I think the Commonwealth has to get its act together for the future."

INDIAN EXPRESS

21 MAR 2002

Commonwealth and democracy

Another Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) has taken place this time in Australia, and once again ordinary notices for the organisation are being written. Nothing very much ever seems to happen at a CHOGM.

Sometimes there is a clash that attracts passing attention, more usual is the routine sort of affair that takes place every two years to widespread international indifference. However, at the end of the Australia meeting, sparks were flying. Tony Blair's disenchantment was made known, and later there was an angry statement by Thabo Mbeki. These reactions grew out of acute disagreement on the subject of democracy in Zimbabwe.

India was not in the thick of it for disastrous events at home had compelled a last-minute pullout by the Prime Minister and the country was represented by its minister for external affairs. In another setting, this may not have made a great difference, but at CHOGM, the Heads are inclined to communicate essentially among themselves.

The Prime Minister of an island of a couple of hundred thousand individuals has a louder voice than the foreign minister of a billion people. That is the nature of the club, and the best recourse for any non-Head is to let the debate swirl around him and say little, for he will be hard pressed to make his point. Worth noting, too, is that despite all the disparagement these meetings attract, Commonwealth leaders keep coming back every two years for yet another CHOGM. There is no other international occasion quite like it.

The Heads have genuine converse with each other, they meet and talk, debate issues and do not just present views from prepared briefs. They enjoy the stimulus of vigorous discussion, even of sharp disagreement, in a forum that encourages frank rather than circumspect opinion.

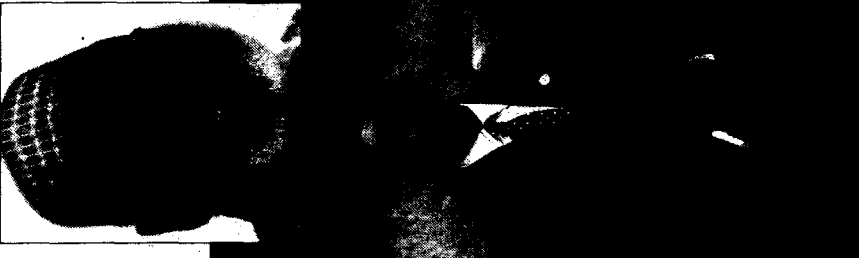
When she was head of the Non Aligned Movement, Indira Gandhi tried to arrange a similar exercise in New York, inviting a number of

leading figures from the non-aligned world to meet in a CHOGM-like grouping. It did not quite work out the way it was intended, for the Commonwealth club processes did not prove to be transferable to another setting.

The issue that caused such division in Australia is the question of democratic standards in Zimbabwe. The Commonwealth has made democracy its beat, requiring of its members that they do not fall short on this count.

It sees itself as a worldwide beacon in this respect and it can indeed claim some success in upholding and promoting democratic principles. Recently, Zimbabwe has come under pressure for what is regarded in some Western countries as growing authoritarianism and departure from democratic values.

Attention has been focused on expropriation and redistribution of choice farmland, and on the attendant law and order problems. Robert



Left to right: South African President Thabo Mbeki, British Premier Tony Blair, Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo and Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chrétien at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Coolom, Australia, on 3 March. (Inset) Abdulsalam Abubakar, head of the Commonwealth Observer Mission, said in Harare on Thursday that the Zimbabwean polls were marred by violence mostly perpetrated by government supporters. — PTI

Mugabe is accused of high-handedness and of ignoring high-level appeals for clemency and went ahead with plans to execute political prisoners even while the meeting was in progress. Though the circumstances are different, perhaps some

matters came to a head in Zimbabwe's presidential election that took place around the same time as CHOGM.

An abortive effort was made at the meeting to push the Commonwealth into taking action against supposed democratic lapses, and this caused an acute split among the members.

Commonwealth disapproval can lead to suspension or even cancellation of the membership of an errant country. In the past, Fiji has been forced to withdraw in the face of Commonwealth rejection of its racist policies.

Pakistan has been under the Commonwealth's democratic hammer. At the Auckland CHOGM in 1996, it was decided to suspend Nigeria's membership, in a sharp rebuke to the military government of the time that

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participants hoped that something similar might be agreed about Zimbabwe in Australia. However, efforts in this direction only provoked a controversy.

This was predictable, perhaps, for the Auckland decision became possible only because it was advocated by Nelson Mandela. He was at the time the outstanding world statesman, with unrivalled moral authority, and others could not fail to follow where he gave the lead.

There was no comparable figure in Australia. As a result, efforts to bring pressure on Zimbabwe bore only bitter fruit. The "old" (that is, white) members lined up against the others and the argument about democratic practice in Zimbabwe took on unfortunate racial overtones. Since CHOGM concluded, the presidential elections in Zimbabwe have once more returned Mr Mugabe to power.

He led his country to independence and is the only President it has ever known. This election, however, unlike earlier ones, has been condemned by the Commonwealth observer team sent there to certify that proper procedures had been maintained. Mr Mugabe has been sworn in but there are loud cries of foul. This can only encourage the demand for action against his country, including the possibility of sanctions. Yet one cannot lose sight of the fact that leaders from the neighbours, including South Africa, were present at the swearing-in ceremony.

Their presence affirmed support for Mr Mugabe and heightened the racial divide within the Commonwealth on the issue of democratic propriety in Zimbabwe. This remains a live concern and we may well see further attempts to force Zimbabwe to pay a price for perceived rigging of the polls. India has not been called on to take a position thus far but that immunity will be difficult to maintain if calls for sanctions gain momentum.

(The author is a former Foreign Secretary.)

19/3

wide angle
SALMAN HAIDAR

Commonwealth hints at strong action

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, MARCH 15. Fears of a racial split in the Commonwealth over Zimbabwe are being played down in the run-up to a meeting here next week of the South African President, Thabo Mbeki, the Nigerian President, Olusegun Obasanjo, and the Australian Prime Minister, John Howard, who will decide whether Harare should be suspended from the 54-member body following widespread allegations of rigging in the recent presidential elections. They will meet in London on March 19 to discuss the final report of the Commonwealth observers' group which monitored the elections whose outcome has already been rejected by most of the white Commonwealth members, including Britain.

In its interim report, the group has sharply criticised the manner in which the elections were conducted saying it "did not adequately allow for a free expression of will". It accused the President, Robert Mugabe's ruling Zanu (PF) party of "exploiting" state resources for its own benefit and said "thousands" of citizens were "disenfranchised as a result of lack of transparency" in the electoral process.

The group's final report is being keenly awaited and a Commonwealth statement issued here today fuelled speculation by hinting at the possible course of action if it turned out to be adverse. The action, it said, could range from "collective disapproval to suspension" in accordance with the Harare Commonwealth Declaration and the Millbrook Commonwealth Action Programme. "Anything less than suspension would trigger a furious response from Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand," a commentator in *The Times* said pointing out that, on the other hand, suspension would evoke an angry response from African members of the Commonwealth.

When leaders from Australia, South Africa and Nigeria meet



The Zimbabwean ruling Zanu-PF supporters celebrate the victory of their party in the presidential elections in Harare on Thursday. The third chimurenga is a phrase coined by the President, Robert Mugabe, referring to the revolutionary struggle. — AP

here next week, they will have their work cut out, given the divisions within their own ranks. While Mr. Mbeki is strongly opposed to inflicting a severe

"punishment" on Zimbabwe as he fears that a crisis in his neighbourhood could have domestic repercussions, Mr. Howard has been pushing for

Zimbabwe's suspension, saying Mr. Mugabe "ought to go".

Mr. Obasanjo has taken a neutral position stressing that Harare set its house in order but stopped short of calling for action. He is likely to oppose Zimbabwe's suspension.

Observers, however, discounted a "black-and-white" divide and said Africans were equally concerned about the situation in Zimbabwe but did not favour any action that might hurt the ordinary people of Zimbabwe. The British Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw, said, "Not just the white West but black Africa" had also condemned the way the elections were conducted. *The Independent* reported that South Africa and Nigeria were pressing Mr. Mugabe to form a "national government" with the Opposition Movement for Democratic Change as a compromise. Britain and the U.S. were "backing" the plan, it said.

16 MAR 2002

C'wealth condemns Zimbabwe poll

PF 11
15/3

Harare, March 14

A COMMONWEALTH observer group on Thursday issued a scathing condemnation of Zimbabwe's election, saying it did not reflect the free will of the people and was held in a climate of fear.

The group, issuing a preliminary report on the three-day election that returned President Robert Mugabe to power on Wednesday, listed a series of violations by supporters of the ruling ZANU-PF party and said it was particularly concerned about the activities of paramilitary youth groups.

"All of the foregoing brings us to the conclusion that there was not a free expression of will by the electorate," said the report, read to reporters by Nigerian group chairman Abdulsalami Abubakar.

The report said thousands of Zimbabweans were disenfranchised and a systematic campaign of intimidation against opposition supporters "created a climate of fear and suspicion."

The US Secretary of State Colin Powell said that Washington would broaden sanctions against Zimbabwe. "There is overwhelming evidence that the

March 9-11 presidential election in Zimbabwe were neither free nor fair," he said yesterday.

"The US will consult closely with other governments to develop appropriate responses to this major setback to democracy in Zimbabwe," Powell said adding "among the responses we are considering is a possible broadening of sanctions against those responsible for undermining democracy in Zimbabwe."

"The pre-election period was marked by a sustained, government-orchestrated campaign of intimidation and violence, and the numerous and profound irregularities in the electoral process itself resulted in an outcome that did not reflect the will of the people of Zimbabwe," he said.

Powell said, "For over two years, the Mugabe regime has systematically subverted democratic principles and processes. His government's policies and actions have been marked by a blatant disregard for the rule of law, serious human rights abuses, a broad repression of the Zimbabwean electorate, and, ultimately, the disenfranchisement of thousands of Zimbabwean voters."

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THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

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Charles blasts C'wealth stand on Zimbabwe

Vijay Dutt
London, March 10

THE COMMONWEALTH is "drinking in the last chance saloon," feels Prince Charles. His rather blunt comment, made known to ministers, is said to have been prompted by the refusal of Commonwealth leaders at CHOGM to suspend Zimbabwe. Most of those who resisted suspension were from Africa.

Prince Charles who would head the organisation when he succeeds the Queen is quoted in the *Sunday Times*. "If the Commonwealth could not stand up for liberal democracy and human rights, it deserves to be treated with international contempt."

He further commented that the election and how Zimbabwe was treated by Commonwealth "was the biggest test since it was created". He is said to be appalled at the way Tony Blair was treated at the recent CHOGM in Australia. Prince Charles is also upset at

Robert Mugabe's anti-white remarks, which he considers "disgusting". Mugabe was shown on television calling Blair as that little, arrogant man who has messed up the Zimbabwe issue. Mugabe praised Margaret Thatcher who he recalled said, come, sit down, let's talk.

Prince Charles believes the Commonwealth's failure to act over Zimbabwe will raise doubts about its purpose for existence. People realise that "dictators shuffling round the place is unedifying" but the Commonwealth failed to do anything and that has damaged its credibility.

Charles's controversial comments coincide with the Commonwealth Day celebrations on March 11 that will include a service at Westminster Abbey and a reception at Buckingham Palace. Commonwealth leaders, particularly from the Third World, have in the past expressed their reservation about an automatic succession of Prince Charles as head of the organisation. They believe it is not hereditary and a new head should be chosen through election. Charles's comments will further anger African leaders who support Mugabe.

There have been some demands here also for Britain to re-think about continuing as member of Commonwealth. It is argued that hundreds of millions of pounds are provided by it for developments in member countries. Yet, the proposal by Britain to impose sanctions on Mugabe was rejected primarily by African leaders.

Voting resumes after first day chaos

Harare, March 10

VOTING IN Zimbabwe's acrimonious Presidential elections resumed early on Sunday but polling in some pro-opposition areas of the capital had continued all night after angry clashes with police.

In one polling station in the big township of Kuwadzana, in Harare's suburbs, there were 2,000 people in queues at 7 am, the official time for voting to begin. "We have been open all night and people have arrived steadily to join the queues," an electoral official said.

Pressure on President Robert Mugabe's Government has mounted to extend the two-day election beyond Sunday's 7 pm deadline.

Chaotic delays hit voting on Saturday in urban areas where opposition candidate Morgan Tsvangirai must win overwhelming support to stand any chance of unseating 78-year-old Mugabe.

Tsvangirai blamed the marathon queues on deliberate foul play by Mugabe's ZANU-PF party to diminish his urban vote. "ZANU-PF is now engaged in a last-ditch effort to stop people from voting it out of power by ensuring that the voting process in MDC strongholds is slowed



AP PHOTO
Zimbabweans wait for their turn to vote at a polling booth in Ratingora, 150 km west of Harare, on Saturday.

down," Tsvangirai said after visiting polling stations accepting only 30 votes an hour.

Police clashed with angry voters outside the Kuwadzana polling station on Saturday. At dawn on Sunday detachments of riot police were still keeping a watchful eye on the tired queues.

Many voters were wrapped in blankets to protect them against the chill.

Political analysts say Tsvangirai has mounted the most serious challenge to Mugabe since Zimbabwe won independence from Britain in 1980, when the former guerrilla leader took office.

Reuters



PRINCE CHARLES

14 MAR 2006

C'wealth panel finalises draft plan on terror

Press Trust of India

LONDON, Jan. 29. — India and nine other members of the Commonwealth Committee on Terrorism today finalised the draft Plan of Action to deal with the growing menace of terrorism. The draft plan is to be submitted to the four day-long Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Australia, starting 2 March.

External affairs minister, Mr Jaswant Singh, attended the one-day meeting which focused broadly on ways and means of tackling global terrorism in the wake of the 11 September terrorist attacks on the USA. *30/1*

During his two-day stay here, Mr Singh will meet the British foreign secretary, Mr Jack Straw, and discuss bilateral and regional issues. *S.T. 6*

The Commonwealth Plan of Action centres on seven areas including legal assistance and capacity building to Commonwealth members to implement the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1973, Mr Alexander Downer, foreign affairs minister of Australia and chairman of the committee, told reporters here.

Asked whether the terrorists attack on India's Parliament or the recent terrorists assault on the American Centre in Kolkata came up for discussion, Mr Downer said: "We did not discuss any specific case except the 11 September terrorist attack."

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