

## **C'wealth split over Zimbabwe**

JOHANNESBURG, Dec. 9. — The Commonwealth was today split wide apart over Zimbabwe, with southern African members blasting those who voted to prolong its suspension as "dismissive, intolerant and rigid" and warning that the body's unity was at stake.

Twelve Commonwealth members who also belong to the 14-nation Southern African Development Community expressed "displeasure and deep concern with the dismissive, intolerant and rigid attitude" of members who had taken a hard line.

Although the statement did not name the members, such countries would include Australia and Britain. The SADC statement said their position was backed by an unspecified number of other members. — AFP

# Pakistan democracy sermon to Commonwealth

IMTIAZ GUL

Islamabad, Dec. 8: Pakistan today described the Commonwealth ministerial action group's decision to keep its membership suspended as regrettable and demanded the organisation "demonstrate a bit of democracy within its own ranks."

"The criteria followed at Abuja, Nigeria, to exclude Pakistan from the Commonwealth does not make sense," foreign office spokesman Masood Khan said at a regular press briefing. He said the Commonwealth decision was regrettable because civilian rule had returned to the country as a result of general elections in October last

year. Without naming India, Khan said one or two countries were "blocking the will of the majority of members which favour Pakistan's re-entry into the organisation."

Khan said Britain and Australia were among those countries which, he claimed, are supporting Pakistan's case.

New Zealand Prime Minister Helen Clark had told reporters in Abuja on Saturday that there would be no change in the Commonwealth's position vis-a-vis Pakistan, criticising President Musharraf's continued refusal to step down as army chief.

"The Commonwealth will not re-admit Pakistan until President Pervez

Musharraf steps down as army chief and addresses other Commonwealth demands for democratic and judicial reforms," she said.

The 53-member Commonwealth — a grouping of Britain and its former colonies — had suspended Pakistan's membership after the October 1999 coup by Musharraf.

The organisation had promised to revive the membership after full restoration of parliamentary democracy in Pakistan.

However, the Commonwealth ministerial group did not approve the restoration of Pakistan's membership during a meeting in New York in September. The group announced that "a

deadlock between the government and the Opposition makes it clear that more needs to be done towards restoring a democratic civilian government in Pakistan."

The decision had caused ripples back in Pakistan with senior foreign ministry officials condemning the Commonwealth for interfering in the country's internal affairs.

Commonwealth secretary general Don McKinnon had on Thursday raised Pakistan's hopes of readmission when he said that ministers dealing with the issue felt the country was certainly moving in the right direction.

"If differences between govern-

ment and opposition on certain issues is a reason to maintain the suspension, the Commonwealth should know that the difference of opinion is an essential ingredient of democracy," Khan said.

He, however, said Pakistan would not pull out of the 54-member Commonwealth.

"It will be premature to think on these lines," he said, adding that it is Pakistan's right to be a member of the Commonwealth.

The spokesman also referred to a British White Paper on nuclear non-proliferation and denied any cooperation between Pakistan and Britain on the issue.

# Zimbabwe quits Commonwealth

Harare: Zimbabwe slammed the door on the Commonwealth after the 54-nation group of mainly former British colonies announced it was prolonging Zimbabwe's suspension from the club.



R. Mugabe

"Zimbabwe has withdrawn its membership from the Commonwealth with immediate effect," the government said in a statement.

"This is unacceptable. This is it. It (Zimbabwe) quits and quits it will be," the information ministry quoted President Robert Mugabe as telling the presidents of Nigeria, South Africa and Jamaica when they telephoned him to tell him of the Commonwealth's decision.

The information ministry said in a statement the three leaders had tried to persuade Mr Mugabe to keep his southern African country within the group but Mr Mugabe had said the extension of Zimbabwe's suspension was unacceptable.

"In response, President Mugabe indicated to each of the three leaders that the decision was unacceptable, as ... Zimbabwe would settle for nothing short of (the) removal of the Commonwealth suspension and agenda," the statement said. During the summit, members of the so-called "white Commonwealth", including Britain which advocated a tough line on Zimbabwe, locked horns with countries such as South Africa which wanted it to be reinstated immediately. Agencies

ABUJA SUMMIT / ZIMBABWE QUILTS COMMONWEALTH

# Harare comes down on U.K., 'white allies'

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**HARARE/ABUJA, DEC. 8.** The Zimbabwean President, Robert Mugabe's ruling party railed at Britain and its "white allies" today saying they had forced Zimbabwe into a no-win situation which had left it with no choice but to pull out of the Commonwealth.

"Whatever our detractors and critics are saying, for us this is like an escape from hell because Britain and its white allies have turned the Commonwealth into a Zimbabwe lynching club," Didymus Mutasa, external affairs secretary of Mr. Mugabe's ZANU-PF party, told Reuters.

The group of 54 mostly former British colonies renewed Zimbabwe's suspension yesterday, demanding that Harare seek reconciliation with the Opposition and respect human rights, prompting a furious Mr. Mugabe to carry out a threat to withdraw.

Zimbabwe was suspended early last year on the grounds that Mr. Mugabe (79), who has ruled the country since independence in 1980, rigged his reelection in 2002 and persecuted his opponents.

Commonwealth leaders said they regretted Mr. Mugabe's response. Membership in the Commonwealth confers political prestige on an international stage for poor nations and some modest trade and aid benefits. Members see exclusion from the "gentleman's club", which highly values cordial diplomacy, as an insult.

But ZANU-PF's Mutasa was



**A woman reads a newspaper declaring Zimbabwe's withdrawal from the Commonwealth, in Harare on Monday. — Reuters**

non-plussed by what he saw as the Commonwealth's 'hypocrisy'. "We withdraw our membership and they say we are wrong and we should stay, but stay suspended so that they can demonise our government," he said. Zimbabwe's main Opposition party said today that Mr. Mugabe's decision to leave the Commonwealth was illegal and urged the world to help bring back democracy to the impoverished nation.

"The decision to withdraw from the Commonwealth was taken without cabinet approval in terms of the Constitution of Zimbabwe and is therefore unlawful," said the secretary-general of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), Welshman Ncube. Mr. Ncube's

statement said all that "the international community and the people of Zimbabwe require Mugabe to do is to restore ... the right to elect a government of their choice free from intimidation, violence and electoral fraud. Mugabe still wants to play politics at the expense of the people," it added.

The decision was a "knee-jerk reaction" by Mr. Mugabe, said an MDC spokesman in Abuja.

"We all knew that is how he would react, in a knee-jerk manner. After all, this is a man who specialises in the destruction of his own country, so we're not surprised that this is the step that he has taken," he said in an interview with the BBC. — Reuters/AFP

# Zimbabwe quits, blames it on Britain

**Harare/Abuja, Dec. 8** (Reuters): President Robert Mugabe's ruling party railed at Britain and its "white allies" today, saying they had forced Zimbabwe into a no-win situation which had left it with no choice but to pull out of the Commonwealth.

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Zimbabwe was suspended early last year on the grounds that Mugabe, 79, who has ruled the country since independence in 1980, rigged his re-election in 2002 and persecuted his opponents.

Commonwealth leaders said they regretted Mugabe's response, with British foreign secretary Jack Straw warning it would hurt Zimbabwe's people the most.

"It's entirely in character, sadly, with President Mugabe," Straw said. "I think it's a decision which he, and particularly the Zimbabwean people, will come to regret," he added.

Membership in the Commonwealth confers political prestige on an international stage for poor nations and some modest trade and aid benefits. Members see exclusion from the "gentleman's club", which highly values cordial diplomacy, as an insult. But Zanu-PF's Mutasa was nonplussed by what he saw as the Commonwealth's "hypocrisy". "We withdraw our membership and they say we are wrong and we should stay, but stay suspended so that they can demonise our government," he said.

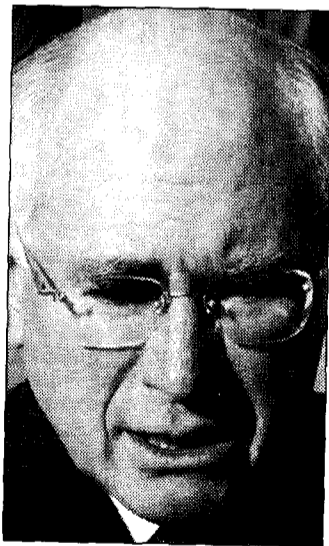
Australian Prime Minister John Howard noted, however, that it was not the first withdrawal from the Commonwealth nor was it irreversible. "Nothing is permanent," said Howard, who took a hard line against Mugabe. "You have to have consistent standards in these matters."

Talks on Zimbabwe dominated a four-day Commonwealth summit in the Nigerian capital Abuja which closed today, causing the worst split since South Africa's apartheid policies in the 1970s and 1980s and dividing members roughly on colour lines.

Commonwealth leaders spent three days carefully crafting a face-saving declaration, which did not mention the word "suspension".

It only talked of the hope for Zimbabwe's return on condition that it engage in political reconciliation and stick to Commonwealth principles including respect for human rights.

Most of Zimbabwe's backers, including South Africa, declined to comment on its decision to withdraw, but one key ally, Mozambique President Joaquim Chissano, told reporters on entering the summit's final meeting: "We are upset."



**Australian Prime Minister John Howard in Abuja.** (Reuters)

## Duma vote to strengthen Putin's hand

By Vladimir Radyuhin

MOSCOW, DEC. 6. The Russian President, Vladimir Putin, looks set to tighten his grip on power as a result of parliamentary poll on Sunday, with his loyalists heading for a strong majority in the new State Duma, the Lower House of the Russian Parliament.

A suicide bomb attack on a commuter train near Chechnya on Friday, which claimed 42 lives and injured 220 people, cast a dark shadow on the Sunday vote, but is unlikely to influence its outcome. United Russia party, a brainchild of the Kremlin, is predicted to come out a big winner in the election and sideline the main Opposition Communist Party, which has won all the previous parliamentary polls in post-Soviet Russia on party list vote. Half the 450 seats in the State Duma are allocated by party lists, the other half by single-mandate districts. Out of 23 parties and blocs in the fray, only four to six are likely to clear the 5-

percent vote hurdle to get into Parliament.

United Russia, created by the Kremlin just months before the last parliamentary election in 1999, came slightly behind Communists four years ago, capturing more than 23 per cent of the vote and together with allies controlled more than half the seats in the outgoing legislature. This time the pro-Kremlin party is tipped to win twice as many seats as Communists and with some horse-trading might even win a two-thirds majority. This will give Mr. Putin absolute control over the Lower House in the run-up to presidential elections next March.

The most remarkable thing about the United Russia success is that the party has no ideology, apart from declaring unquestioned support for the President, Vladimir Putin. "We're with the President. Vote for us!" is the main election slogan of United Russia, which is led by two senior Cabinet Ministers and has among its members half

the regional governors and a generous proportion of federal and local bureaucrats.

It is the President's enormous popularity that carries United Russia to victory. According to a November poll, 78 per cent of Russians trust Mr. Putin and 81 per cent feel positively toward him. Mr. Putin has thrown his support behind United Russia, describing it as the party on which he has relied during his four years in power.

Declining support for the Communist Party would look strange, given a distinct shift to the left in public mood as registered by pollsters, had it not been for the fact that Mr. Putin and United Russia have hijacked the slogans of the Communists, calling for a more fair distribution of the country's natural-resource wealth and a crackdown on runaway corruption. Opinion surveys show that the most popular candidate for President among the Communist Party's electorate is not its leader, Gennady Zyuganov, but Mr. Putin.

PRAISE FOR PEACE INITIATIVE WITH PAKISTAN

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# PM, Blair for representative government in Iraq soon

By Amit Baruah

**ABUJA (NIGERIA), DEC. 6.** The Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, and his British counterpart, Tony Blair, agreed today that there should be early formation of a representative government in Iraq.

During a bilateral meeting on the sidelines of the Commonwealth summit, the two leaders also agreed that there should be active involvement of the United Nations in Iraq, which would help in stabilising the security situation there.

Briefing presspersons on the meeting, the Indian High Commissioner to Britain, Ronen Sen, said the possibility of Indian troops being sent to Iraq was not discussed at the meeting between the two Prime Ministers today. The British, Mr. Sen maintained, were aware of the Indian Government's position on the issue.

Congratulating Mr. Vajpayee on his latest peace initiative with Pakistan, Mr. Blair strongly condemned terrorism, reiterating the British position that there could be no justification for terrorism. Mr. Blair expressed warm appreciation and support for the Prime Minister's "peace initiative."

The two sides also discussed the current situation in West Asia and agreed that the

issues in the region should be addressed. Both leaders felt that a way out of the current impasse in West Asia should be found.

According to Mr. Sen, Zimbabwe only figured briefly in the bilateral discussions between Mr. Vajpayee and Mr. Blair. The British leader was quoted as telling the Prime Minister that relations between the two countries had never been better.

Mr. Blair also said that his "special envoy," Nigel Sheinwald, would be visiting New Delhi next month for talks with the National Security Adviser, Brajesh Mishra.

On Saturday, the Prime Minister held a bilateral meeting with the President of Ghana, John Kufour, and explained to him the Parliamentary commitments that had led to the cancellation of his Ghana visit (December 8-10). He promised to pay a visit to Ghana soon.

Separately, a six-member "contact group" (which includes India) set up on Friday to achieve a consensus on the divisive issue of Zimbabwe, continued its deliberations today, the Foreign Secretary, Shashank, told presspersons this evening. The External Affairs Minister, Yashwant Sinha, is representing India at the discussions.

Asked what was India's position on Zimbabwe, Mr. Shashank maintained that the

Harare Declaration and the Millbrook action programme, which dealt with non-democratic regimes, should be applied to Zimbabwe, Pakistan, Fiji and the Solomon Islands.

He was clear that the views of how African countries looked at the question of Zimbabwe would have to be taken into account by the "contact group" that is likely to continue its discussions on Sunday as well. It is likely to report to the executive session of the summit scheduled for Monday. To a question on how India had voted in the election of the Commonwealth Secretary-General on Saturday evening, Mr. Shashank said that when the current incumbent, Don McKinnon, had visited New Delhi, India had extended support to him.

"There was no other candidate at that time," he said, referring to the former Sri Lankan Foreign Minister, Lakshman Kadirgamar, who received 11 votes as opposed to 40 by Mr. McKinnon in Saturday's election.

Mr. Shashank said this was the first time that voting figures were given out by the Commonwealth. On his part, Mr. Sen said that usually, the election to the Secretary-General's post took place by consensus with one side being persuaded to "withdraw."

# Commonwealth: no change in position on Pakistan: Sinha

By Amit Baruah

**ABUJA (NIGERIA), DEC. 5.** There has been no change in the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group position on Pakistan since the Group's last meeting on September 26-27 in New York, the External Affairs Minister, Yashwant Sinha, said at the CMAG meeting on Thursday.

Mr. Sinha, who represented India at the meeting on the eve of the Commonwealth summit, said that the Group acknowledged there had been no progress since September on addressing the Legal Framework Orders (LFOs) and an agreement on the issue being passed by Pakistan's Parliament. Since there had been no change in the situation on the LFOs issue, the CMAG decided to stick to its formulation adopted in September, Mr. Sinha said.

The Minister was at pains to emphasise that India did not

look at Pakistan as a "bilateral issue" in the CMAG, whose deliberations were part of a multilateral consensus.

The Pakistan question also came up during a bilateral meeting the Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, had with his Australian counterpart, John Howard, today. Mr. Vajpayee told Mr. Howard that even as Pakistan dealt with the issue of infiltration, it had to dismantle the infrastructure of terrorism. The question of changing of names by terrorist

groups and the shifting of camps by them would have to be addressed.

At the same time, Mr. Vajpayee informed Mr. Howard of his determination to carry forward the peace process with Pakistan. Mr. Howard felt that cross-border terrorism had to end before relations between India and Pakistan could become fully normal.

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# Commonwealth divided over Zimbabwe

By Amit Baruah

ABUJA, DEC. 5. The Zimbabwe shadow loomed large over the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) that opened in this new Nigerian capital on Friday morning as leaders made general references to the importance of democracy and human rights at the inaugural ceremony.

Soon after the inaugural, the Nigerian President, Olesegun Obasanjo, in a restricted session with heads of delegation, took up the key issues of Zimbabwe and the election of a new Secretary-General of the Commonwealth. The former Sri Lankan Foreign Minister, Lakshman Kadirgamar, and the incumbent, Don McKinnon, are in the race.

The External Affairs Minister, Yashwant Sinha, told presspersons that Jamaica, South Africa, Australia, Canada and India had been appointed to a six-member group after discussions by Mr. Obasanjo to take up Zimbabwe and report back to the Commonwealth summit session on Saturday.

India, Mr. Sinha stressed, had been of the view that the Commonwealth should not be divided on ethnic and racial lines.

Zimbabwe, he said, should abide by the Harare principles (1991) even as India wanted to develop consensus within the Commonwealth on the issue.

Asked if 24 hours was too short a time for this group of six to reach a consensus on such a divisive issue, Mr. Sinha said: "Let us see." Asked whether India supported Mr. Kadirgamar's candidature, he said India would wait for discussions on the Secretary-General's election scheduled for late Friday.

Several African nations, meanwhile, have said they will press for Zimbabwe's readmission into the Commonwealth. On Wednesday, the President of Zambia, Levy Mwanawasa, said he would lead a campaign to ensure Zimbabwe's re-admission.

"Zambia does not support the continued suspension of Zimbabwe [and] we will raise the matter so that the suspension is lifted," he stated. The President of Malawi, Bakili Muluzi, has claimed that the exclusion of Zimbabwe would hurt only Zimbabweans and not Mr. Mugabe.

"We do not believe that the continued isolation of Zimbabwe is delivering the desired

result," the President of Mozambique, Joaquim Chissano, who heads the African Union, told presspersons.

But the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, showed little flexibility of approach. "The key thing is to maintain the suspension of Zimbabwe from the Commonwealth because that sends the right signal of strong disapproval for what is happening in Zimbabwe at the present time," Mr. Blair said after arrival in Abuja. His position is backed by the Australian Prime Minister, John Howard.

## Democracy

In her speech at the inaugural ceremony, Queen Elizabeth II of Britain said that the theme of the summit - development and democracy - was central to the Commonwealth. "Democracy gives people a choice in how they are governed, and those in the Government rule with the consent of their people."

"Underdevelopment is one of the biggest threats to democracy; the one cannot be sustained without the other...the Commonwealth is one of the great partnerships of the world where rich and poor, large and small, work together for the common

good." "This partnership remains crucial not just for peace and prosperity within the Commonwealth, but in the wider world. It puts our association in a strong position to meet the pressing challenges of our time: eradicating poverty, creating a fair and open trade environment, bridging the digital divide, combating terrorism and building a more peaceful world for us all," the Queen said.

She said the agenda before the Commonwealth was a daunting one. "...But I know that you will address these difficult issues with a serious sense of purpose and in a family spirit which have become the hallmark of these meetings."

The Queen, the Commonwealth Secretary-General, Doc McKinnon, and the Australian Prime Minister, John Howard, referred to the need to resume trade talks at the inauguration in the presence of nations which took the lead to protect their interests at the Cancun meeting.

The Secretary-General argued that there could be no justification for terrorism but, added that the war against terrorism could not be won by military force alone.

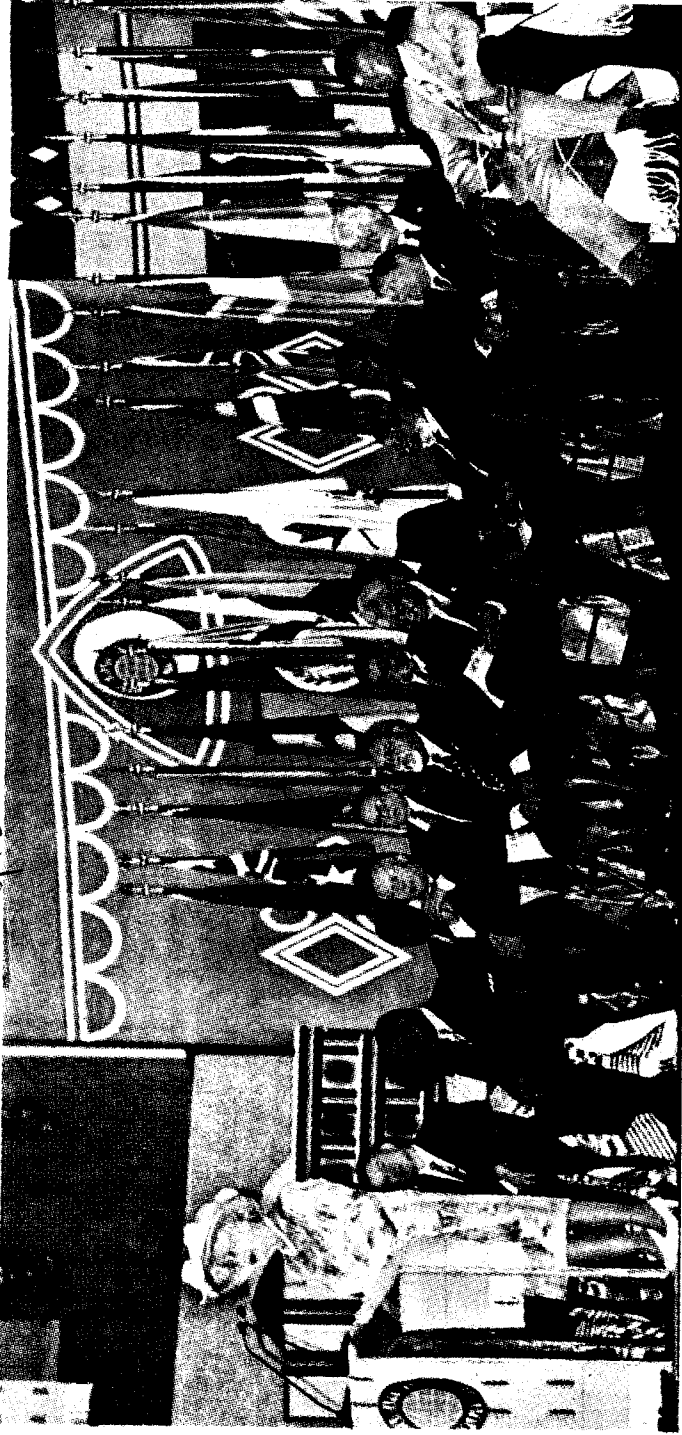
# C'wealth summit opens amid discord

Nilova Roy Chaudhury  
in Abuja

Dec. 5. — The lively dancers and warm words of welcome from hosts, Nigeria, at the International Conference Centre in Abuja, failed to mask the discord that has almost threatened to split the 52 member Commonwealth along ethnic and racial lines.

Two members, Pakistan and Zimbabwe, continue to remain suspended from the councils of the Commonwealth because of flaws in their democratic process. Pakistan's continued suspension was endorsed at a meeting of the CMAG (Commonwealth ministerial action group), of which India is a member, because the legal framework order not being acceptable to Pakistani parliament.

Meanwhile, Zimbabwe became an emotive issue, with African members suggesting the Anglo-Saxon members have been too harsh on President Mr Robert Mugabe. To try and end the impasse, a restricted session of heads of government, meeting shortly after the inauguration, formed a committee of six to adjudicate on Zimbabwe's status within 24 hours. The six members of the committee are India, Jamaica, South Africa, Mozambique, Australia and



Queen Elizabeth II addresses the opening session of the Commonwealth summit in Abuja on Friday. — AFP

Canada, all to be represented by their heads of government. Nigerian President Mr Olesgun Obasanjo, personally sought Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee's presence on the committee, before the inauguration.

The Sri Lankan President, Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga, nominated former Sri Lankan foreign minister, Mr Lakshman Kadirgamar, for the post shortly before the summit and

wrote to leaders, including the Indian Prime Minister, to support his candidature. Until then, a second term for the current incumbent, Australia's Mr Don Mackinnon, appeared almost certain.

Sri Lanka being a close friend and neighbour, India "would consider the matter sympathetically", but would ultimately "hope for a consensus", a senior official said.

Inaugurating the summit of Commonwealth heads of government, the Queen Elizabeth II, the titular head of the organisation (that comprises former British colonies), said the Commonwealth needed to adapt itself to the changed circumstances of the 21st century, while upholding the "principles of democracy, human rights and the rule of law". She added: "The Commonwealth"

## McKinnon re-elected

Former New Zealand foreign minister Mr Don McKinnon was today re-elected for a second four-year term as the Commonwealth's secretary ge-

she said, is one of the great partnerships of the world where rich and poor, large and small "work together for the common good".

MASVINGO/ HARARE, Dec. 5. — Zimbabwe's ruling party came out in strong support today of President Robert Mugabe's threats to quit the Commonwealth, with Vice-President Mr Joseph Msiika saying "to hell" with the club from which the southern African country has been suspended for close to two years.

Mr Mugabe, opening the party's annual conference, told the 3,000 or so delegates that Zimbabwe "cannot brook interference with its sovereignty" by the 54-member grouping currently holding a summit in Nigeria. Several other senior party officials said Zimbabwe didn't need the Commonwealth as rank-and-file members of the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union—Patriotic Front demonstrated against the Commonwealth outside the conference venue in the southern town of Masvingo, a party stronghold.

"If the choice was made, one, for us to lose our sovereignty and become a member

neral despite stubborn opposition from some African countries. "It was a vote and he

## 'To hell with the club'



Mr Mugabe: The 'club' can go... Zimbabwe will join another club

of the Commonwealth or, remain with our sovereignty and lose the membership of the Commonwealth. I would say, let the Commonwealth go," Mr Mugabe declared.

The huge crowd of loyalists erupted with cheers as he repeated the threat.

The 79-year-old president said his foreign minister had told him that African countries attending the Commonwealth summit were lobbying for Zimbabwe's re-admission to the club, but "we don't want to be preoccupied with this," he said. — Agencies

won," Canadian Prime Minister Mr Jean Chretien said after the first day of the CHOGM.

# Australia presses for Mugabe's resignation

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CANBERRA, Dec. 3. Australia on Wednesday urged African leaders attending a summit of Britain and its former colonies this week to pressure Robert Mugabe to resign as President of Zimbabwe, a member of the 54-nation grouping.

Zimbabwe was suspended from the Commonwealth's decision-making councils following alleged intimidation and vote-rigging in Mr. Mugabe's 2002 re-election.

Speaking ahead of his departure for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in the Nigerian capital Abuja, the Australian Prime Minister, John Howard, said he wanted "strongly increased inter-

national pressure" on Mr. Mugabe to resign.

"I'm rather hopeful that at the Commonwealth conference, those leaders that are closer to him in Africa will understand the strength of world opinion and will bring pressure to bear on him to depart the scene," he told a Perth radio station.

Mr. Howard lobbied leaders at the previous summit hosted by Australia in February 2002 for Zimbabwe to be suspended from the group if the March 2002 presidential elections were not declared fair by a Commonwealth observer group.

Mr. Mugabe, who was not invited to this week's summit, sought support from fellow

African leaders to be allowed to attend. Queen Elizabeth II—who remains head of state of most of the Commonwealth countries—and the Prime Ministers of Britain, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and Pacific nations said they would boycott the meeting if Mr. Mugabe attended.

The Nigerian President, Olusegun Obasanjo, said last week Mr. Mugabe was welcome to visit his country, but would not be allowed to attend the Dec. 5-8 summit.

Mr. Mugabe then indicated he might pull out of the Commonwealth, blaming "white" nations like Australia for excluding Zimbabwe. — AP

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## C'wealth: Obasanjo meets Mugabe

**HARARE, NOV. 17.** The Nigerian President, Olusegun Obasanjo, held talks with the Zimbabwean President, Robert Mugabe, on Monday on Zimbabwe's exclusion from Commonwealth. Zimbabwe's state media has speculated that Mr. Obasanjo might extend a last minute invitation for Mr. Mugabe to attend the Dec. 5-8 meeting in Ni-

geria of the 54-nation Commonwealth, but neither leader indicated if any decision was made at their talks. The Commonwealth suspended Zimbabwe's membership after the disputed and violent presidential election in March, 2002. Britain, Australia and New Zealand have indicated they might boycott the meeting if

Mr. Mugabe attends. Mr. Obasanjo also met the Opposition leader, Morgan Tsvangirai, it was reported. Mr. Tsvangirai, leader of the Movement for Democratic Change, refused to comment on the 40-minute meeting. "You had better go and talk to President Obasanjo," he said to waiting journalists. — AP

THE HINDU

18 NOV 2003

# Pakistan has not done enough, says C'wealth

By Rashmee Z. Ahmed  
TIMES NEWS NETWORK

London: Pakistan remained shut out of the Commonwealth for yet another indefinite spell as India's Yashwant Sinha and seven other foreign ministers decided Gen Pervez Musharraf had gone halfway, but not far enough down the path towards full parliamentary democracy.

After two days of deliberation, the Commonwealth ministerial action group (CMAG) pinpointed the controversial legal framework order (LFO) introduced by Gen Musharraf as a cause of "concern".

The CMAG's decision effectively keeps Pakistan out of the councils of the Commonwealth for nearly four years since the coup that led to its suspension.

Pakistan's foreign minister Khurshid Mehmoed Kasuri had reportedly been lobbying intensively in London till Sunday for a lifting of the ban.

The LFO, whose legality has been challenged by Pakistan's opposition parties, gives the President supreme authority, including the right to dismiss parliament.

"We have indicated our concern about the current status of these executive orders," Commonwealth secretary-general Don McKinnon told journalists.

But in an admission that yet again, Pakistan's re-admission had been a fractious issue, he said CMAG had to "debate long and hard" before arriving at a language acceptable to all the foreign ministers. "There were a wide range of views on the is-

sue," he told this paper.

A deliberately restrained Mr Sinha refused to "add" anything to the "language of the statement". "I agree with the decision and I have nothing more to add to the decision of the group," he said while replying to a question on India's reaction to the decision.

Illustrating the split on Pakistan within the Commonwealth, Australian foreign minister Alexander Downer said, "We have been pleased by Pakistan's good progress on the path to democracy."

Mr McKinnon also specified that the LFO issue would need to be resolved if Pakistan wanted to seek re-admission at the next CMAG in New York in September.

Till these orders remain in force, Pakistan's government "cannot be considered to be normal, and we don't consider that mi-

cro-managing the situation", he said. But in an attempt to sweeten the pill, he also stressed that CMAG overall welcomed Pakistan's progress in establishing democratic institutions.

The concluding statement read out by Mr McKinnon said, "The group welcomed the progress made by Pakistan in the establishment of democratic institutions, including the election of the national assembly, the senate and provincial assemblies, and the formation of democratic governments at the national and provincial levels. It also welcomed the positive measures taken for women's representation in the parliament."



Gen Musharraf

## Pakistan curbs Hizb activities

Islamabad: Pakistan on Tuesday imposed "restrictions" on the Hizbul Mujahideen, the largest militant outfit operating in J&K, even as it ruled out the extradition of 20 criminals and terrorists wanted by India saying there was no extradition treaty between the two neighbours.

Announcing the restrictions, interior minister Faisal Saleh Hayat said, "They (the Hizb) are not allowed to regroup as a militant force."

He said that Pakistan would not allow terrorist outfits "to use Pakistani soil to propagate any damaging propaganda or physical activity which could endanger the life or pose a security threat to Pakistan or any of its neighbours".

Denying reports in the local media attributed to him that a ban had been imposed on the Hizbul Mujahideen, he said, "No, for the moment, it is not a ban. There are certainly restrictions on their activities."

While observers here saw the move as a step to create a conducive atmosphere for resumption of the Indo-Pak peace dialogue, New Delhi was characteristically cautious with officials saying they would wait to see the reality on the ground. Agencies