

WORLD BRIEFS

INTERNET THREATENS TRINIDAD'S POSTAL SERVICE

PORT OF SPAIN, Trinidad and Tobago (IPS) — The advent of the Internet is being blamed for the diminishing importance of Trinidad's postal service. For years, inadequate facilities, poorly managed operations and decreasing revenues have contributed to serious problems in the service.

Now, with declining computer prices and greater Internet access — a situation fueled by keen competition among computer companies and Internet service providers — the postal service is facing an unprecedented challenge. Consumers are finding that e-mail and private delivery services such as DHL International, Federal Express, and United Parcel International are faster, more reliable, and in the case of e-mail cheaper. For instance it costs a Trinidadian 50 cents to mail a letter to the United States and 42 cents throughout the Caribbean. But depending on usage, sending an e-mail message could be a fraction of that, as on average it costs about \$11 per month for Internet service of up to 10 hours. The postal service employs close to 1,300 persons and spends about \$8 million annually, more than 75 percent on wages and salaries. In turn, it earns under \$6 million, a figure which even with recent postage increases is declining.

ZAMBIA'S TEENAGE PREGNANCY RATE BECOMING A PROBLEM

LUSAKA, Zambia — A United Nations study on teenage pregnancies in Zambia estimates that two-thirds of Zambian women have either had children or are pregnant by the time they are 19. The study says teenage pregnancies contribute significantly to the high fertility rate of 6.5 children per woman. The Zambian government has said that it hopes to reduce the fertility rate to 5.4 by the year 2000, but the U.N. has said this will not be possible unless some serious action is taken to educate people on birth control and family planning. The report said that under Zambia's present conditions of widespread poverty, fertility rates were unlikely to decline. "Experience from other countries suggests that the improvement of people's economic well being is usually the major factor in the lowering of fertility rates," the report says. The Society for Family Health, a local non-governmental organization, recently launched a program called "Operation Reach" aimed at reducing the number of teenage pregnancies and unwanted births. The program involves incorporating traditional birth attendants and community health workers in the distribution of family planning pills and condoms. They also hope to take contraceptives to the far flung areas of the country, instead of concentrating only on the urban areas.

AFRICA'S DEFENSE CHIEFS CONFERENCE IN HARARE

HARARE, Zimbabwe — Africa's second conference of defense chiefs began officially on Oct. 24, amid fears of attempts by some Western countries to derail the continent's peacekeeping initiatives. Organization of African Unity (O.A.U.) Secretary-General Salim Ahmed Salim made renewed calls for Africa to take responsibility of its own security, while insisting that sub-regional organizations have to cooperate to enhance preparedness and overcome resource constraints. "All these experiences lead me to believe that O.A.U. member states can no longer afford to stand aloof and expect the international community to care more for our problems than we do, or indeed to find solutions to those problems which, in many instances, have been of our own making," he said. O.A.U. Chairman Robert Mugabe said, in a speech read on his behalf by Zimbabwe Defense Minister Moven Mahachi, that the United Nations had sometimes totally ignored the African continent.

MOZAMBIQUE ASKS FOR TRUTH ABOUT MACHEL'S DEATH

MAPUTO, Mozambique (PANA) — The Mozambican government said Oct. 24 that it hoped the current dialogue and good cooperation with South African authorities could lead to uncovering the truth about the circumstances that led to the plane crash that killed President Samora Machel on Oct. 19, 1986 within the borders of that country. Speaking at a press briefing in Maputo, Prime Minister Pascoal Mocumbi said that Mozambique had never accepted the conclusions of the unilateral inquiry into the crash held by the former apartheid government of South Africa. The inquiry ignored evidence that Machel's Soviet-built Tupolev jet was diverted from its correct flight path by a radio beacon transmitting on the same frequency as the one at Maputo airport. The judge blamed the disaster on pilot error. "We are not satisfied with that report and we want the truth to come out," Mocumbi said.

INTERNATIONAL

Summit shy on Nigeria, lukewarm on development

By Dipankar De Sarkar
Special to Sentinel-Voice

EDINBURGH, Scotland (IPS) — A three-day meeting of Commonwealth leaders ended in the Scottish capital on Oct. 27 with some critics contending that the body failed to take the one step that might have given them some credibility: The expulsion of Nigeria for contravening "democratic principles."

Instead, as the Commonwealth Heads of Government (CHOGM) meeting closed, the Summit communiqué confirmed only that the suspension will be maintained, in the hope that Nigeria will, as promised, complete the transition to democracy by Oct. 1, 1998.

The communiqué noted that the "continued existence of a military government in Nigeria was a prime source of Commonwealth concern." The Commonwealth also expressed concern about human rights abuses and the continued detention and imprisonment of many Nigerians, including pro-democracy leaders Moshood Abiola and Olusegun Obasanjo.

At the same time, the Commonwealth heads of government, 43 of the 54 were in Edinburgh for the CHOGM, noted the "positive contribution which Nigeria has made to efforts through the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in support of democratic government within the West African region."

The summit's failure to expel Nigeria

from the Commonwealth was blasted by human rights groups, including the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI), a non-governmental the Commonwealth supports.

The CHRI expressed its "severe disappointment" at the Summit's failure to take "firmer decisions on Nigeria," saying the military dictatorship must be automatically expelled from the Commonwealth if the promised presidential elections fail to meet international norms.

It also suggested that a cluster of eight sanctions recommended by a Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) should be introduced "at once."

The demanded measures include: Visa restrictions on members of the Nigerian regime and their families; withdrawal of military attaches; cessation of military training; an embargo on the export of arms; denial of education facilities to the junta members and their families; a ban on all sporting and cultural contacts and the downgrading of diplomatic missions.

These sanctions can be imposed by the CMAG without further sanctions by the Commonwealth leaders between now and October 1998. Additionally, if Nigeria does not democratize by Oct. 1, 1998, the Commonwealth nations are cleared to take three more steps: An oil embargo, a ban on air links and a freeze on the foreign financial assets of junta members and their families.

These ideas did not save the Edinburgh

Summit from criticism from an alliance of seven Nigerian human rights activists.

"We wish to state our utter sense of disappointment in the failure of the Commonwealth to live up to the expectations of the ordinary people of Nigeria who had invested some hope in the ability of the body to, in the least, speak tough if it cannot act tough," said the group in a joint statement.

The failure to expel Nigeria, they said, "has only served to give an unofficial approval to the regime of impunity that holds Nigeria in thrall."

The activists included Nike Ransome-Kuti, the daughter of jailed pro-democracy activist Beko Ransome-Kuti. She said the Edinburgh meeting had given military regimes in Africa and "people with similar intentions" a clear signal that "they can get away with it just as General Abacha has got away with it."

"The CMAG has had two extensive discussions with the Nigerian authorities, who have continued to assure it that they have a democratization program, have held local government elections in March this year, and are firmly committed to having in place by October one next year a democratically elected government," Anyaouku said.

During the course of the Summit, Anyaouku, a former Nigerian foreign minister, was forced to defend himself after being accused of taking a soft stand on Nigeria. He described the claim that he

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Mugabe, Blair discuss Zimbabwe land seizure

Special to Sentinel-Voice

EDINBURGH, Scotland (PANA) — President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe and British Prime Minister Tony Blair on Oct. 24 spent 30 minutes discussing the thorny issue of land rights in Zimbabwe as well as reviewing bilateral matters between the two countries.

Mugabe said after the meeting, his first with Blair since the British leader's Labour Party came into power in May, that the session was to acquaint the British prime minister with the land issue in Zimbabwe.

"We met to discuss a variety of issues on the Commonwealth and bilateral relations but, of course, we raised the land issue," Mugabe said.

Mugabe's government wants to seize the land of white commercial farmers to return it to landless indigenous Africans. He is asking Britain, the former colonial power in Zimbabwe, to pay compensation to the commercial farmers — many of them settlers of British descent.

During a tour of Zimbabwe's eight provinces in early October, Mugabe reiterated his government's commitment to acquire the land compulsorily, so as to settle millions of landless Black Zimbabweans, whose ancestors lost their holdings to European settlers.

The commercial farmers have been lobbying for international support for their fight to have the land acquired on a willing-buyer, willing-seller basis.

Mugabe said further detail of the land issue would be discussed by British and Zimbabwean negotiators. He said Blair indicated a willingness to discuss the issue

further once both teams of negotiators put everything together. Both sides were expected to start meeting during the Commonwealth meeting.

"We see them being sympathetic but we should give them time to study," Mugabe said. "Whatever happens we have to resolve the matter this year."

He said Blair's government was taking off where John Major's conservative government had left the land issue.

"Some agreement was reached with Major's government but it was not conclusive," Mugabe said. "Blair can start from there. We hope some position will be reached. If not, we are prepared to still move."

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