Following the resumption of elected devolved government in Northern Ireland on 8 May, the Republic of Ireland was urged to rejoin the Commonwealth by two Members of Northern Ireland’s Assembly, and the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA).

Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) MLA Mr Jeffrey Donaldson and the Alliance Party’s Mr Sean Neeson, MLA, proposed on 14 May that Ireland rejoin the Commonwealth, which it left in 1948. Ireland’s return would reportedly contribute to the peace process in Northern Ireland which advanced when devolved government was resumed in Belfast.

Mr Eamon O. Cuiv, Ireland’s Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, had earlier backed Ireland’s return to the Commonwealth as a way to reassure those in Ulster who favour the continued union of Northern Ireland and Great Britain.

CPA Secretary-General Dr William Shija agreed Ireland should consider rejoining the Commonwealth and the CPA as most member states are republics and the organization promotes respect for diversity.

“We look forward indeed to when not only the other part of Ireland but other parts of the world are looking at the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association as an association which respects diversity and differences and multicultural approaches,” said Dr Shija, who was at Stormont, the seat of the Northern Ireland Democracy and the Commonwealth: A place for Ulster and Ireland?

The new Northern Ireland Executive with Democratic Unionist Party First Minister Rev. Ian Paisley (front right) facing Sinn Fein Deputy First Minister Mr Martin McGuinness (front left).
A new Strategic Plan, significant changes to key CPA practices, constitutional amendments to promote gender equality and a new communications initiative have been put forward by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Executive Committee. The Committee, which met in Limassol as the guests of the Parliament of Cyprus from 16 to 21 April, approved CPA programmes for the coming year as part of its normal management of Association affairs. But this year the Committee also looked further ahead as its meeting was preceded by the first meeting of the 2007 CPA Working Party which was charged with conducting a long-range review of the management of CPA support for Parliaments and Legislatures and their individual Members and staff.

The Working Party, which met in Limassol for two days before the full Committee meeting, reviewed the current CPA Strategic Plan, the status of the Association as a U.K.-registered charity, the way in which the annual Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference is administered and the process for recruiting and installing new Secretaries-General. The Working Party was chaired by Hon. Hashim Abdul Halim, MLA, Speaker of the West Bengal Legislative Assembly and Chairman of the CPA Executive Committee. Its membership included: CPA Treasurer Mr David Marshall, MP, of the United Kingdom House of Commons; Hon. Ntlhoi Motsamai, MP, Speaker of the Lesotho National Assembly and Vice-Chairman of the Committee; Hon. Lindiwe Maseko, MPL, Chairperson of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians and Chairperson of Portfolio Committee Chairpersons in South Africa’s Gauteng provincial Legislature and one Representative from each of the nine CPA Regions.

Consideration of the Working Party’s Report dominated the Executive Committee’s business. The Committee reviewed its recommendations, approving with minor modifications the proposed Strategic Plan 2008-12 and referring a proposal to change the method of recruiting Secretaries-General back to the Working Party’s September meeting prior to the Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in New Delhi, India. The Committee then agreed to circulate the Working Party’s amended report to all Branches to seek their further input.

The proposed new Strategic Plan will focus CPA work in the following eight areas:
- Professional Development,
Committee looks to the future

- Technical Assistance Programmes,
- Human Rights,
- Poverty Reduction,
- Environmental Conservation,
- Health and Education Issues,
- Commonwealth Promotion and
- Women, Children and Youth.

Turning to the Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference, the Working Party and the Executive Committee approved recommendations to Branches to tighten up the programme to accommodate meetings of the Executive Committee, the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP), the Small Countries Conference, the Conference of the Society of Clerks-at-the-Table and the plenary meeting in a nine-day period.

Among the many recommendations which have been proposed to Branches are: maintaining the Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference as an annual event; raising the Small Countries Conference population ceiling to 500,000 from 400,000 people; changing the name of that meeting to the Small Branches Conference; reducing the Executive Committee meeting to two days from three; staging the CWP business meeting when no other event is scheduled; enabling the host Branch, the Small Countries and the CWP to set plenary conference workshop subjects and having a plenary session held in the format of an Oxford Union debate where delegates speak either for or against a motion.

One aspect of the organization of the annual conference was also referred back to the New Delhi meeting. Both the Working Party and the Executive Committee declined to support proposals to reduce the cost borne by the Association and host Branches in staging the annual event by transferring some accommodation and travel costs to Branches.

Conference financing will be reviewed by the Working Party, the Executive Committee and the CPA General Assembly during the Indian meeting, as will comments from Branches on the proposed Strategic Plan and the Working Party’s other recommendations.

CPA Centennial approaches

The centennial of the founding of the CPA will be celebrated in 2011, and all Branches will help to determine how the occasion will be marked.

The United Kingdom Branch will hold that year’s Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference at Westminster where the CPA was founded as the Empire Parliamentary Association. But other ways to mark the anniversary will be determined in consultation with Branches, especially those which have recently celebrated milestones.

The CPA Executive Committee at its April meeting in Cyprus noted many Parliaments and Legislatures have staged a variety of events to mark similar special anniversaries in their own histories. Ghana, for example, celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of independence in March, while the Canadian Atlantic province of Nova Scotia has just begun celebrating the 250 years of representative government.

The Committee agreed that the CPA Secretariat should ask Branches how they have marked events and which ways proved to be especially successful. Branches and Regions will also be encouraged to mark the centennial in their own ways as well.

The CPA was founded as the Empire Parliamentary Association at a meeting on 18 July 1911 in Committee Room 15 of the U.K. House of Commons. As well as Members of the Westminster Parliament, the meeting was attended by representatives of the then dominion Parliaments of Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Newfoundland and South Africa.

For the 50th anniversary in 1961, the annual conference was held in the U.K. For the 75th anniversary in 1986, a history of the Association was published, a commemorative lapel pin and tie were produced and a reception was held at Westminster. The annual conference in that year was again hosted by the U.K. Parliament.

Reversing positions in P.E.I.

The Liberals turned the tables on the Progressive Conservatives to return to power with a huge majority in Canada’s smallest province, Prince Edward Island.

In voting on 28 May, the Liberals won 23 of the province’s 27 seats, reducing the former Progressive Conservative government of Premier Hon. Pat Binns to four seats. The result reverses the seat totals for the two parties going into the polls.

The Liberals, who promised to reduce tax on automobile fuel, are led by Hon. Robert Ghiz. At age 33 he becomes Canada’s youngest Premier.
Commonwealth MPs to examine democracy and the environment

Policies on climate change and global warming and procedures to improve parliamentary scrutiny of government programmes, including the involvement of women in that scrutiny, will be debated by more than 300 Parliamentarians in September in India.

This agenda for the September meeting of the Commonwealth’s oldest political gathering, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference, was decided at the mid-April meeting in Limassol, Cyprus, of the CPA Executive Committee. The meeting, hosted by the Parliament of Cyprus, agreed that the 53rd Conference in New Delhi in late September will discuss the theme: Delivering Democracy and Sustainable Development.

This year’s Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference will include a day-long Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Conference. The General Assembly later in the plenary Conference will be asked to amend the CPA Constitution to make it fully gender-neutral by replacing the title “Chairman” with “Chairperson”.

Environmental protection will feature on the agenda for the 27th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference of Members from Small Countries, which was also set by the Committee in Limassol.

The Conferences were among services and meetings agreed by the committee to reinforce the Commonwealth’s commitment to good democratic governance. This year’s programme includes: a conference in British Columbia with the World Bank Institute on anti-corruption and poverty reduction, a workshop in Kenya on African trade issues with the World Trade Organization, a June forum in Uganda with the Commonwealth Secretariat on gender issues in advance of the Commonwealth Women’s Affairs Ministers Meeting there and the publication in print and electronic media of material supporting the advancement of parliamentary democracy.

The cost of CPA services and events will continue to be financed mostly by Branch membership fees, income from partner organizations and accumulated reserves. The Committee agreed to continue limiting increases in the main source of funding, Branch fees, to an inflation rate based on the U.K. retail price index. It therefore agreed to recommend to the General Assembly a fee increase of 3.2 per cent in 2009, following a 2008 increase of 2.2 per cent agreed last year.

The Committee also placed the membership of the Parliaments of Fiji Islands and Bangladesh in abeyance until those Parliaments resume functioning. An application to join the Association from the Nigerian state of Abia will be recommended to the General Assembly in India, as will an application by Swaziland to increase the number of Members it sends to the annual Conference.

Cyprus presses for a federal solution

Cyprus supports ending the Turkish occupation of more than a third of the eastern Mediterranean island republic by uniting Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots in a “bicommunal, bizonal federation”, says the President of Cyprus’s House of Representatives.

Hon. Demetris Christofias, MP, told the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Executive Committee that Cyprus remains committed to the proposed federal solution which conforms with international and European law and resolutions of the United Nations. In addressing the 17 April Opening Ceremony of the Committee’s meeting in Limassol, Mr Christofias said the 1974 occupation of 36.4 per cent of the island by the Turkish army, and subsequently by Turkish settlers, has caused both Greek and Turkish Cypriots to endure 33 years of the “flagrant violation” of their fundamental human rights.

Numerous UN and other attempts to end the occupation and division of the island have so far been unsuccessful. Mr Christofias expressed regret over what he said was the withdrawal of the Turkish side from a July 2006 agreement, reached under UN auspices, to establish technical committees and working groups to prepare for new discussions leading to a settlement.

He also called on the international community to find the political will to condemn state terrorism.

In responding on behalf of the Committee, Chairman Hon. Hashim Abdul Halim, MLA, Speaker of the West Bengal Legislative Assembly, said the CPA was pleased to meet in Cyprus to demonstrate support for the Parliament of Cyprus in its quest for reunification and peaceful coexistence.

“Commonwealth Parliamentarians stand solidarity behind the people, Parliament and government of Cyprus in seeking a just and sustainable resolution of the Cyprus problem in a way that fully reflects the democratic principles of the Commonwealth and its member countries,” said Shri Halim, applauding the country for demonstrating its support for democracy by hosting the meeting.

The Committee meeting was hosted by the Parliament of Cyprus. Committee Members had an opportunity to look across the UN-patrolled “Green Line” into the occupied area. The Officers of the Association also met the President of the Republic, H.E. Mr Tassos Papadopoulos, and Foreign Minister H.E. Mr Yiogios Lillikas in Nicosia.

CPA Conference broadcast

The contribution of MPs at CPA conferences to the advancement of parliamentary democracy and the development of Commonwealth countries will be featured in a new CPA documentary.

Production of the programme was approved by the Executive Committee in Cyprus. The programme will feature discussions during the 53rd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference this September in India. Footage filmed in New Delhi will be edited into a short documentary for Parliaments to screen for their Members, offer to local broadcasters and post on their websites.

The idea was proposed to the Committee by CPA Secretary-General Dr William F. Shija to increase the communication of news about the CPA and its Members to Parliaments and the wider world.

“We need to promote and strengthen parliamentary democracy and good governance, so we will begin to use the medium of television to make sure that parliamentary activities are known by the public,” said the Secretary-General. This electronic record will supplement the printed reports of conference discussions.
Parliamentarians set environmental priority

All government policies, including development programmes, should take account of their possible impact on the environment, especially the world’s climate, recommends a Commonwealth Parliamentary Association which met in Belize in February.

Parliamentarians from Australia, Belize, Canada, India, Jamaica, Samoa and the United Kingdom gathered in Belize to examine the current status of environmental practices and discuss all aspects of climate change. In their main findings, the Group identified best practice in environmental management and determined areas which need to be addressed throughout the Commonwealth. The executive summary of the Group’s report containing its full list of recommendations is being published in Issue Two 2007 of The Parliamentarian and is available on the CPA website at www.cpahq.org.

The Group noted that parliamentary review of programmes and policies should extend to projects funded by international donors and should also cover loans agreed by governments.

Parliaments should also consider how their own procurement and other administrative practices could be changed to reduce their effects on the environment, including reducing their carbon emissions in part by re-assessing their use of air travel.

The Study Group’s recommendations came out of presentations and an exchange of national and local case studies during meetings from 25 February to 1 March 2007 in Belize City. The Study Group meeting was jointly sponsored by the CPA and the Commonwealth Secretariat, with support from the Organization of American States, the Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre and the Belize Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environment.

Parliamentarians reviewed: trends in sustainable development in the Commonwealth; concerns with respect to climate change; the role of Parliamentarians as champions for sustainable development through public sector procurement; environmental impact assessment, and the interaction of Parliamentarians with constituents, local communities, local government, and other stakeholders in effecting a shift towards more sustainable approaches to development.

When the Commonwealth Consultative Group on the Environment met last year, it commended the role that Parliamentarians can have in addressing environmental issues, saying MPs should have a critical role in protecting the environment by using their powers to ratify international treaties and protocols on environmental protection and to scrutinize and contribute to development agendas, resource allocations and environmental legislation of their countries.

The Group also expressed concerns that economic growth was not leading directly to perceived improvements in the quality of life and happiness of individuals and communities. Parliaments and Parliamentarians should discuss the inter-relationship or otherwise of economic growth, social development and general wellbeing.

Uncertainty in Bangladesh

Bangladesh’s army-backed interim government has promised to announce in mid-July a timetable to return the country to democratic rule after earlier saying elections would not be held before late 2008.

Following Commonwealth and other international pressure, the interim government that took control of the country in January for an indefinite period promised in mid-June that it would end speculation in a month as to the future of democracy.

The interim government took office on 12 January after the opposition Awami League announced it would boycott the 22 January election and the caretaker government appointed to run the country during the election campaign resigned. Under Bangladesh’s constitution, a caretaker administration governs once an election has been called. This arrangement began in 1996 so the Awami League and its main rival, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), could both be sure of a fair election.

The caretaker administration normally remains in office a few weeks. The caretakers appointed on 29 October 2006, however, were accused by the Awami League and its allies of failing to produce an honest electoral roll so they withdrew from the election claiming it would be rigged in favour of the BNP. The caretakers resigned, an interim government stepped in apparently with military backing and a major shake-up of the country’s political system, including a new voter role and photograph-ic identity cards, was launched.

More than 60 Parliamentarians, including former Ministers, and hundreds of party stalwarts have been arrested on corruption charges. The government’s Adviser for Information and Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, Barrister Mainul Hosein, said in June that the country needs more than a roadmap to an election: “We want a roadmap to democracy as well.”

Bangladeshi politics is marked by hostile relations between the main parties and their female Leaders, Begum Khaleda Zia of the BNP and Sheikh Hasina Wajed of the Awami League. Both parties have a history of boycotting Parliament and calling general strikes when the other is in office.
Commonwealth Secretary-General Rt Hon. Don McKinnon and others have called for a definite timetable to return to elected government. The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association placed the CPA Bangladesh Branch in abeyance as Parliament is not functioning.

Parliamentary supremacy

India’s Supreme Court on 10 January upheld the right of the Indian Parliament to expel Members guilty of misconduct.

The Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha had expelled 12 Members caught in two scandals. The Supreme Court rejected their appeals that their rights had been violated.

Lok Sabha Speaker Hon. Somnath Chatterjee had rejected the court’s right to hear the appeals, saying this violated parliamentary privilege.

Lesotho pressures

An increase in politically related crime and a court dispute have hit Lesotho after it returned the governing Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD) of Prime Minister Hon. Pakalitha Mosisili to office on 17 February.

The LCD took 82 of the 120 constituency and proportional representation seats. Its tally of 61 constituency seats compared to the 2002 election when it won in 79 out of 80 constituencies. The governing party took 21 proportional representation seats with its National Independent Party ally.

By late June, however, tensions had escalated and a curfew was imposed after attacks on political figures. New political alliances had been challenged in the courts and a ruling on their legality was awaited.

The vote was called after the government was left with 61 of the 120 seats following the defection of 17 MPs and the resignation of ex-Foreign Minister Hon. Tom Thabane in October. Mr Thabane then formed the All Basotho Convention. In the election, it won 17 constituency and 10 proportional representation seats, the latter in alliance with the Lesotho Workers Party.

The Basotho National Party secured three seats, while three other parties each won a seat.

Nationalists gain in Scotland and Wales...

The Labour Party and the electoral system suffered setbacks in voting on 3 May which gave no party a majority in the Scottish Parliament or the Welsh Assembly.

In Scotland, a historic result for the pro-independence Scottish National Party was marred by the loss of up to 100,000 spoiled ballots out of about 4 million votes cast. A new electoral system and combined Scottish Parliament and local council elections confused electors and overwhelmed a vote-counting computer, but the Scottish National Party (SNP) led by Mr Alex Salmond edged past Labour led by First Minister Hon. Jack McConnell to become the Parliament’s biggest party.

The SNP gained 20 seats to take 47 of the 129 seats, while Labour lost four to elect 46 MSPs. The Conservatives won 17 and the Liberal Democrats 16, each losing a seat. Green Party representation dropped to two from seven and one seat was taken by an independent.

Mr Salmond was seeking to form a government, likely with Liberal Democrat and Green support. He campaigned on a pledge to hold a referendum on Scottish independence within four years, but following the close result he said the SNP could be flexible on that. The SNP won came a few weeks before the 300th anniversary of the Act of Union between England and Scotland.

In Wales, Labour lost three seats to hold 26 in the 60-seat Assembly, while the Welsh nationalist party Plaid Cymru gained three to take 15 seats. The Conservatives won 12 seats, one more than they held going into the poll, and the Liberal Democrats remained unchanged on six seats. One independent was elected. Forward Wales’ one Member lost his seat.

Welsh First Minister Hon. Rhodri Morgan was expected to seek to form a government by reviving Labour’s partnership with the Liberal Democrats in the first Welsh Assembly elected in 1999.

The elections, which were held at the same time as local government elections in many parts of Scotland and England, were seen as a warning to the Labour government of British Prime Minister Rt Hon. Tony Blair. Mr Blair, in office since 1997, announced before the polls that he would step down as Labour Leader. He was succeeded in late June as Leader and Prime Minister by Rt Hon. Gordon Brown, a Scot.

In England, Labour and the Liberal Democrats lost hundreds of local council seats to the Conservative Party led by Rt Hon. David Cameron.

Scotland’s electoral problems were blamed ironically on attempts to attract a higher turnout by making voting easier. But voters had to cast an X to elect 73 constituency MSPs by the first-past-the-post system, a second X for a party to allocate 56 proportional seats and a series of numbers to elect local councillors by the single transferable vote system.

A 2006 commission concluded this type of vote would be confusing. There were also delays and software problems with vote counting scanners. The turnout ranged regionally between 29 and 56.5 per cent.

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Returning to office in Saint Lucia

The former Prime Minister who took Saint Lucia to independence in 1979 came out of retirement to lead his party back into office in the 11 December 2006 election. Sir John Compton, Prime Minister from 1964 to 1979 and from 1982 to 1996, came back at age 82 to lead the United Workers Party (UWP) to victory with 11 House of Assembly seats, up from three won in 2001. The Saint Lucia Labour Party (SLP) of Prime Minister Dr the Hon. Kenny Anthony failed to win a third term, retaining six seats, four of them held by newcomers.

Labor Party wins in New South Wales

The Labor Party won a fourth consecutive term in office in New South Wales, Australia’s most populous state, in elections on 24 March.

After a campaign dominated by public transport system and water issues, Premier Hon. Morris Iemma and his party won 53 seats to 21 for the Liberal Party, 13 for the National Party and 6 for other candidates.

Turks and Caicos

On 9 February the incumbent Progressive National Party (PNP) led by Premier Hon, Michael Misick was re-elected for a second term in office. The PNP won in 13 of the 15 single-Member constituencies. The opposition Peoples’ Democratic Movement (PDM) led by Hon. Floyd Seymour won two seats.

Keys to success in scrutinizing government accounts

Factors crucial to the success of parliamentary reviews of public spending have been identified in a survey of Public Accounts Committee (PAC) Chairpersons by the World Bank Institute (WBI).

Dr Rick Stapenhurst, Senior Public Sector Management Specialist at the Institute, recounted the factors in a presentation to a February seminar on “Strengthening Parliament – Parliamentary Financial Scrutiny” held in Australia by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, the Centre for Democratic Institutions, La Trobe University in Victoria and the WBI. The factors were based on a survey of PAC Chairpersons conducted over the last three years. The survey results were presented to about 40 PAC Members and clerks and representatives of audit offices from eight Commonwealth nations and two non-Commonwealth countries.

Dr Stapenhurst told the seminar that the first factor related to the scope of PAC inquiries. They are most productive when they focus on financial management problems, not just individual lapses in spending. This enables committees not just to expose problems but also to correct why spending or accounting went wrong in the first place.

The second factor identified by PAC Chairpersons was independence. Committees must be free to investigate government mis-spending without having to rely on government directions as to what to investigate.

Dr Stapenhurst said effective analysis requires the authority for committees to conduct analyses and hold investigations in the field where they are able to question witnesses. They must then have full authority to report to Parliament.

Finally, he said the survey found committees must have solid technical support and the resources to conduct their work.

Four main constraints on the effectiveness of PACs were also identified: a highly partisan political environment in the committee in which government Members want nothing exposed and opposition Members are intent only on attacking the government; a negative government attitude toward parliamentary oversight; a lack of media or public involvement so PAC work is not widely known, and the lack of a strong ethical base for Parliamentarians that generates public trust that they will expose failures or wrongdoing in public spending.

The survey found three ways to ensure a committee operates successfully, said the WBI official. First, there must be follow-up processes to ensure PAC recommendations are implemented. PACs could track the implementation of their recommendations, or link budget approvals to audit recommendations. Departments could be required to report back to the PAC on its recommendations. He added that PACs could work with the media and civil society groups to monitor follow-up. Dr Stapenhurst noted that in Ghana each government departments has an audit implementation office.

The second measure he had identified aimed to improve relations between the PAC and the Auditor General. Auditors General could have parliamentary liaison offices and could place staff in Parliament.

The final ingredient in a successful PAC is resources. Funding, staffing and training are critical, as is consistency of membership during the life of a Parliament. Media coverage of PAC meetings will reinforce the committee’s work with publicity. Additionally, PAC effectiveness is augmented when committees working in different jurisdictions share information. National and state or provincial committees do this now in Australia, Canada, Pakistan and South Africa, and regional consultation is also done in southern and eastern Africa, he said.
Gender issues in the Maldives

The Maldives’ laws should be amended to remove discrimination against women and introduce equal opportunities, including reserving People’s Majlis seats for women, a CPA-Commonwealth Secretariat workshop urged in mid-April.

The workshop on “Balancing Political Participation: Moving Towards Gender Equality” agreed the Indian Ocean nation’s government, its Majlis (Parliament) and the Special Majlis reviewing the constitution should include a gender review in the country’s reform programme. In the move to multiparty politics, workshop participants urged the Special Majlis to adopt a quota system temporarily to meet the Commonwealth target of at least 30 per cent of parliamentary seats occupied by women. Parties should also ensure women hold at least 30 per cent of key posts.

Participants called for an end to discrimination in the constitution, which requires that the President and Vice-President be men, and in other laws and practices, such as those governing inheritance.

The workshop was organized with the Maldives’ Ministry of Gender and Family.

Elections to five state Assemblies produced two victories for the Indian National Congress, the leader of the national governing coalition, but both were in small states.

The Congress retained office in Manipur in voting in February, taking 30 of the 60 seats and relying on support from four Communist Party of India and three Rashtriya Janata Dal MLAs.

Voting in Goa in June gave the Congress and Nationalist Congress Party coalition 19 of 40 seats, two more than in 2002.

The BIP won 14 seats, down three, with the Maharashtrawadi Gomantak Party, Save Goa Front and the United Goans Democratic Party and independents claiming the rest.

Punjab rejected its Congress government, reducing it to 44 seats from the 62 it won in 2002. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Congress’ main national rival, with 19 seats and the Shiromani Akali Dal with 49 in the February vote combined to form a new government in the 117-seat Assembly.

In Uttarakhand, the BIP defeated another Congress government in February voting, winning 34 of 70 seats, up from 19 seats in 2002. Congress won 21 seats, down from 36.

Uttar Pradesh in March and April elected the Bahujan Samaj Party to office with 206 of 402 seats in the Legislative Assembly. It won 98 seats in 2002. The Samajwadi Party dropped to 97 seats from 143 and left office. The BIP won 50 seats, down from 88, and Congress won 22, a loss of three.

Norfolk Island changes leaders

Norfolk Island voted out over half its Legislative Assembly in a 21 March election held after a year of uncertainty over self-government in the Australian territory.

Five Members of the previous Assembly, including one who had served since it was established in 1979, were defeated as islanders elected four new Members and returned a fifth who had served earlier. One of the nine Members is female.

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President Musharraf called on south Asian nations and their MPS to co-operate to bring peace and development to the region when he opened the CPA Asian-Indian Regional Conference.

The President outlined to the March conference the progress he said his country has made in its return to democratic government and he urged MPs from south Asia’s Parliaments to work together to reduce poverty and create new jobs.

The Islamabad conference was the third joint meeting of the two CPA regions which together cover India and all its states and territories, Pakistan and its provinces, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and the Maldives.

President Musharraf urged developed nations to help governments in developing countries to bring development, and through it peace and stability, to all their people. They should meet the United Nations target of contributing 0.7 per cent of their national gross domestic product to poverty reduction and social services programmes in developing countries by 2016.

The Chairman of the Pakistani Senate, Sen. the Hon. Mohammadian Soomro, said greater parliamentary involvement improves poverty reduction programmes by ensuring they are properly directed and effectively delivered. He noted, for example, that the Parliament of Pakistan has legislated minimum levels for poverty reduction spending and requirements to double health and education spending over the next 10 years. It has also required that the deficit be wiped out by 2008 and set maximum levels for public debt.

The CPA conference discussed “Knowledge Sharing and Networking among Regional Parliaments”. About 125 Parliamentarians attended the meeting, which was also attended by Hon. Hashim Abdul Halim, MLA, Chairman of the CPA Executive Committee and Speaker of the West Bengal Legislature, and by Dr William F. Shija, CPA Secretary-General.