

In October, President Obasanjo will be the first Nigeria head of state to pay an official visit to Australia (fondly abbreviated Oz by its citizens). The president will first attend the commonwealth business forum in Melbourne, with a delegation of senior Nigeria business leaders, then the commonwealth Head of Governments Meeting. (CHOGM) in Brisbane. Thereafter, as an honored guest of the Australian government, President Obasanjo will pay an official visit to Australia. Altogether, he will be in Australia for two weeks, given that it takes about 30 hours flying to Australia from Nigeria via Europe and 23 hours via South Africa, it makes economic and diplomatic sense for the president to stay for two weeks in this historic visit.

Membership of the Commonwealth is an important tie between the two countries and currently both exert a profound influence in the commonwealth. Nigeria is playing a crucial role in peace-keeping commonwealth African countries and Australia in Asia. Both countries are also important in countries outside the commonwealth in their respective areas, as in Liberia and East Timor (where a Nigeria military/police unit was part of the UN peace-keeping force headed by Australia). Both nations are members of the important caucus CEMAG (Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group). Australia and New Zealand were at the forefront of the common initiative to encourage the return of democracy in Nigeria.

This week, the Australian minister of foreign affairs, the Hon. Alexander Downer M.P will meet President Obasanjo in Abuja along with several other commonwealth foreign ministers to try and resolve the political and economic crisis in Zimbabwe. This intervention is President Obasanjo's initiative, fully supported by the Australian government. According to the high commissioner to Nigeria, Mr Robert Whitty, the participation of foreign ministers, Lamido and Downer in CEMAG, has led to a particular rapport that has sensitized the Australian foreign minister to a deeper awareness of and interest in Africa. Australia took the lead in setting up and funding the commonwealth trade and investment facility. This encourages more balanced trade and investment relationships within the commonwealth to favor the less developed nations. High commissioner Whitty delivered an address titled, "Nigeria Australia and CHOGM" to the Nigerian Australian and New Zealand Association (NANZA) at the Aussie club, Australian high commission residency ground in July.

In his talk, the high commissioner reported on CHOGM 2001 augurs well: of the 543 member nations, 90% have accepted to attend to date. This includes all the other commonwealth West African nations. All preparations are in place, including the security of the venue for the retreat to which all heads of state and government will retire for private candid talks (after the official meetings), which usually produces the most important decisions at CHOGM. The theme chosen by the member nations is "Continuity and Renewal." A month earlier, the Australian capital city will host the commonwealth parliamentary association, which Whitty informed the NANZA audience, will be attended by members of Nigerian legislators.

The Australia that President Obasanjo and the CHOGM participants will encounter is a nation that has never been more confident of itself. It is celebrating the centenary of its federal parliamentary system: It hosted the world's most successful Olympiad; its role in East Timor was universally applauded (except by Indonesia) and alone in Asia. It emerged unscathed from The Asian economic collapse; An economy which until 1979 was primarily agro-based has developed into the most e-commerce-ready economy in the world (after the US) in which agriculture constitutes less than 20 percent of the GNP. The UNDP ranking of the most desirable countries placed Australia second in the world (after Canada).

Australia's export base has diversified over the last 15 years. Australia will continue to be a major community exporter but is increasingly relying on service industries like computing, education, financial services and sophisticated manufacturing industries, ranging from medical equipment to last ferries. In 1999-2000 services exports (A\$28.3 billion) and manufacturing exports (A\$57.9 billion) were worth more than 2.5 times the value of primary industries exports (A\$34.1 billion).

Australian science and innovation have shaped many aspects of society and have impacted much of the world. Australians gave the world Aspro, the first heart pacemaker and the bionic ear. Australians were the first to fly across the Pacific Ocean and invented the first underwater computer. Australia

## Nina' Mba's Insider / Outsider's Account



# The Oz Obasanjo will meet

was the fourth country in the world to build a computer and also the fourth to build and launch a satellite. Six Nobel prizes for science have been awarded to Australians for research work.

A society, which until the 1970s was predominantly European and English speaking, is today as plural or multicultural as the USA. Out of a population of 19 million, one quarter doesn't speak English as their first language. Since 1945, almost 6 million from all over the world, notably Somalia, Eritrea, Ghana, Kenya have settled in Australia and acquired citizenship. There is also a community of about five thousand Nigerians in Australia.

Because Australia is globally perceived as a desirable nation to emigrate to or seek asylum in, it receives many legitimate and illegal migrants each year. Its harsh treatment of the latter is much criticized by other countries but generally accepted within Australia. The objection of most Australians is not to the race, religion or nationality of the asylums seekers and illegals but to the fact that they have jumped the queue, i.e. they have ignored the protracted procedures which immigrants have to undergo before being processed for visas, since originally, all Australians, except the indigenous Aborigines migrated from somewhere, they feel that all immigrants should line up as they did.

Hence, the current international crisis over the four hundred-odd Afghan asylum seekers on the Norwegian freighter stranded in Australian territorial waters. If the crisis is not resolved by the time CHOGM takes off, it may well be subjected to commonwealth diplomatic intervention!

It is to be hoped that the Abuja meeting achieves some measure of success in its interaction with the Zimbabwe representative. Readers may be interested to know that Alexander Downer is no stranger to political conflict, having served as leader of the opposition in Australia during the Keating Labour government. However, divisions within his liberty party forced Downer to step down for the current prime minister, John Howard and he became shadow minister for foreign affairs in March 1996. Alexander Downer, a member of the federal parliament since 1984, was appointed minister for foreign affairs when the liberal national party coalition was elected to government.

An economist by training, Downer was once active in the Australian chamber of commerce and has extensive experience in international finance, trade and banking. Such a background may predispose Downer to recognize the potential of Nigeria for Australia expertise extensively involved in the mining industries and agriculture. Australia is already extensively involved in the mining industry in Ghana. The Ashanti Mining Company is quoted on the Australia Stock Exchange and there are hundreds of Australian miners working in

Ghana, why not in Nigeria as well...?

At the end of his talk, High Commissioner Whitty quotes a telling story

told by former Secretary-General, Emeka Anyaoku at the commonwealth meeting of ministers for women affairs held at Trinidad where he, as Australian high commissioner to the English-speaking Caribbean states, was representing the Australian state minister. Anyaoku buttressed his opinion that discrimination based on race, gender and region, arises in part from individual perception and attitudes, with the story of a child at a barbecue in Lagos who raced back from the stream where the children were playing to inform the parents that new

**'Since 1945, almost six million immigrants from all over the world, including notably Somalia, Eritrea, Ghana, Kenya have settled in Australia and acquired citizenship. There is also a community of about five thousand Nigerians -Australians'**

friends had been made. "How nice," said the parents. "Are they boys or girls?" The child responded, "I don't know; they are not wearing their clothes."

Isn't this appropriate for the Durban conference on racism?

### Past Motions...

The Vanguard of August 29, 2001, carried a report of a heated argument between Oyo State governor, Alhaji Lam Adesina, and a former first republic minister, Chief Richard Akinjide, as to whether Chief Anthony Enahoro or Chief S.L Akintola was the first to move the motion in the Federal House of Representatives for the independence of Nigerian. Both men referred to the source, i.e. the proceedings of the Federal House of Reps. Akinjide cited the proceedings of 26th March 1957 to support his contention that it was his former colleague, Akintola who moved the motion and Adesina cited those of March 31st, 1953 to support his argument that it was Enahoro who first moved the motion.

The proceedings show that there is no basis for any argument. It was Anthony Enahoro, of Ishan constituency in the Western Region, who on March 31st, 1953, was listed as requesting the house to endorse as a primary political objective the attainment of self-government for Nigeria in 1996. The motion, which was at Enahoro's personal instance, was supported by his party, the Action Group and the Na-

tional Council of Nigerian and the Camerons (NCNC) members were opposed by the members of the Northern People's Congress (NPC). The motion and that session of the house led to a political crisis in which three AG members in the central government, one of whom was S.L. Akintola, resigned.

Exactly four years later, on March 26, 1957, Chief S.L. Akintola moved a motion in favor of immediate self-government (Note that neither motion used the word "independence"). Whereas the 1953 motion was a dramatic historic event, the 1957 motion was more of an anti-climax because the decolonization of Nigeria was well underway. Had it not been for the Foster Sutton Tribunal in the Eastern region and the issue of the creation of a separate state for the Benin Delta provinces in the Western Region, the two regions would have been self-governing. However, Akintola's motion was not accepted until it was amended to read "self-government in 1959 in order that Nigeria may speak in one voice".

In both instances, the intentions behind the motions were not realized. I am reminded of T.S Elliot:

**"Between the idea  
And the reality  
Between the motion  
And act  
Falls the shadow."**

Speaking of the subtleties of language, Australian English like Nigerian English can be quite different from standard English. President Obasanjo may find the following explanations useful.

Australian	English
Banana bender	Queenslander
Barbie	Barbecue
Bonzer	Good/Great
Sheila	Female
Dill	Idiot
Dinkum	Genuine
Bush man	One who understands living in the bush
Bush ranger	Robber
Cobber	Mate
Crook	Unwell
Mozzie	Mosquito
Kiwi	New Zealander
Pommy	English person

So, President Obasanjo, have a bonza walkabout down under, don't get crook, be careful of bushrangers. Fair Dinkum, Ozies are your cobbers.

G'day