In August 14, the Congo-Occum Rail- way (CCR) completed its 70th an- niversary. Long the principal shipping route between Brazzaville and the port of Bono, the CCR had seen its traffic drastically reduced during the past 10 years. It had re- ceived $13 million from the World Bank in January to help restore its tracks and rolling stock. The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) signed an agree- ment with the Brazzaville government in September 9 to provide electricity for irrigation and automation plants under construction in the district of Kouilou, in southern Congo. The country marked its 44th year of independence on August 15 with a huge rally and civilian parade. The presi- dents of the DRC, Gabon, Ghana, and Nigeria attended the celebrations at Brazzaville. (NAMEY ELLIEN, LAHUE)

COSTA RICA

Area: 51,100 sq km (19,730 sq mi)
Population (2004 est.): 4,252,000
Capital: San José
Head of state and government: President Abel Pacheco de la Espriella
In much of 2004, national attention in Costa Rica was rooted on the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) with the United States. By late June, the differences had more or less been smoothed out.

In November, the agreement struck its own resolution: the U.S. state monopoly status in the area would be removed by 2011. Pres. Abel Pacheco de la Espriella had third year. Although economic growth was in the 4-5% range, inflation reached an annual level of 17%—its highest rate in six years—the legislature was unable to pass a deficit-reduction package, and many sectors of the population refused to accept the terms of the CAFTA agree- ment. The legislature had not yet acted on CAFTA, but the agreement was stalled in the U.S. Congress as well. By August 2004, much of the country was paralyzed by a national strike that in- volved sectors as diverse as schoolteachers and truckers. The administration was forced to make economic concessions.

Once again in 2004 Pacheco’s admin- istration was hit by a wave of cabinet resignations. Many Costa Ricans were already focused on the February 2006 presidential election. In March 2004 former president and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Oscar Arias Sánchez an- nounced his candidacy on a platform to transform Costa Rica into Latin Ameri- can’s “first developed country.” In Octo- ber a wave of scandals rocked the coun- try and resulted in the arrest of two former presidents who were accused of taking bribes. (MICHAEI A. NELSON)

CÔTE D’IVOIRE

Area: 320,810 sq km (123,861 sq mi)
Population (2004 est.): 16,897,000
Chief of state: President Laurent Gbagbo
Head of government: Prime Minister Seydou Diara

In 2004 Côte d’Ivoire remained effec- tively split in two as a result of the civil war that erupted in September 2002. Members of the rebellious New Force alliance (FN) continued to hold the north, while the government, assisted by 4,000 French troops and about 5,800 United Nations peacekeepers, control- led the south. Spasmodic outbreaks of ethnic and religious violence domi- nated the warring parties. In late April, people di- d when fighting broke out in the western cocoa-producing area, and in June FN adherents fired on govern- ment and French soldiers paroling the dominialist zone, killing at least 7 people. Government helicopters imme- diately retaliated by launching attacks on rebel-held country. That same day hundreds of Pres. Laurent Gbagbo’s supporters demonstrated outside the French embassy in Abidjan, demanding the withdrawal of the former colonial power’s forces since they appeared to be unable to prevent rebel attacks.

On May 26 Amnesty International is- sued a report condemning, for human rights abuses, all factions in the con- flict. The United Nations launched its only inquiry in July 17 and sent a spe- cial commission to the country. On Au- gust 3 UN investigators found three mass graves near the city of Korhogo that contained at least 100 bodies of intruders who likely had been killed in clashes between rebel factional forces. Political proposals for resolving the conflict seemed to win little support. On March 25 security forces killed at least 20 opposition demonstrators and wounded several hundred more. In protest, 26 cabinet ministers represent- ing four opposition parties and the New Forces withdrew from the power- sharing government. Following a UN-brokered summit meeting held in Accra, Ghana, in late July, opposition parties and the FN agreed to return to the government. On August 9 they at- tended their first cabinet meeting since March. An extraordinary session of the parliament opened on August 11 to vote on the political reforms called for by the January 2003 Marcouxis ac- cords and the subsequent Accra agree- ment. With the exception of a law adopted on September 10 guaranteeing freedom of the press, the passage of any