

# Round the world

## EDINBURGH Aristo-cats

**BRITAIN'S** landowning aristocracy is alive and kicking - and determined to hang onto the land.

• The 10th Duke of Atholl, owner of 135,000 acres and a castle in Highland Scotland, has decided to disinherit his nearest relative, a South African cousin. The Duke, commander of Britain's only private army, now faces legal action over the succession to the estate.

• Prince Charles, who presides over one of the largest estates - owned by the Duchy of Cornwall - is being criticised by MPs for obstructing development of the Oval cricket ground in South London. The prince is refusing to sell the freehold to the county club tenants.

• The government's new law which gives leaseholders the right to buy the leases from their landlords has infuriated Gerald, the 6th Duke of Westminster. He has ripped up his membership of the Conservative Party, accusing the Tories of having deserted their own kind: those who manage the land.

• Times are good for the rentiers. The Crown Estate, which manages property on behalf of the Queen and is one of Britain's biggest landowners, saw a £486m increase in its property, in real terms, between 1985-94.

## ISLAMABAD Political power

PAKISTAN'S government wants to introduce an income tax for farmers. The law was changed last year to make farmers liable for income and wealth taxation, for the first time in the country's history. But the provincial governments were resisting the implementation

of the law because they feared the political backlash from farmers. Observers note that Pakistan's politics are dominated by "the country's wealthy landowners, who have directly or indirectly influenced the government's decisions".

## LONDON Set-aside

**ATOTAL** of 651 English landowners, including both wealthy aristocrats and corporations, were each paid over £100,000 of taxpayers' money not to grow crops last year. Of these, 45 owners received £250,000 and £500,000. Another seven each received over £500,000, under the government's set-aside scheme to reduce food output.

This year, English farmers are being paid £125 million to allow their land to remain idle. "Meanwhile," notes the Council for the Protection of Rural England, "the quality of the countryside, particularly in arable areas, continues to decline."

## RIO DE JANEIRO Landless lose

BRAZIL'S presidential elections failed to produce the shock that would have echoed around the world. The early lead in the opinion polls for Luiz Ignacio "Lula" da Silva was finally eclipsed, leaving a radical plan for helping the landless in tatters. Lula's manifesto included the allocation of land to 800,000 families over four years.

Lula planned to incorporate into the economy the 100 million Brazilians who are "outside the market" because of poverty. About 32 million people live in absolute destitution. The connection between land and poverty was clearly seen by Lula, who said: "With

land reform we could produce much more food". By making land more accessible to people, he argued, incomes and food production would rise.

## DUBLIN Taxing problem

**HOSTILITY** from middle-class home-owners has persuaded Ireland's government to amend its plans to increase the tax burden on residential property. Houses have been leniently treated for tax purposes. The government, wanting to lower income taxes, thought it could raise the lost revenue by lowering the property tax threshold from IR£91,000 to IR£75,000. But Dubliners objected: they said this would bias the tax against them, because their properties have higher market values.

## LONDON Bank on it!

**FLAMBOYANT** property dealer Peter de Savary has little sympathy for the banks that have lost fortunes in the last property crash.

One of the bank's called in the receiver to take control of one of his company's which had debts of £145m. The repentant Mr de Savary disarmingly noted: "Nobody has lost his job and no investors have lost money. Nobody makes the banks lend money."

And in the late 1980s, when people like de Savary were making fortunes out of land speculation, the banks were handing out cash as fast as they could. One of the beneficiaries was a Hampshire developer who cheated building societies out of almost £2m.

The judge who sent him to gaol for two years said: "You took advantage of the lackadaisical way money was available at that time".

## MOSCOW Whose land is it?

**Alexander Solzhenitsyn** has become a thorn in Boris Yeltsin's side. The writer, on return from exile in the USA, has been touring Russia. And he has concluded that there has been no genuine reform since the collapse of communism.

"Reform is a constructive, thought-out system of interconnected measures," he insists.

The President is particularly angry with the writer for condemning his plan to privatise the land.

## NEW YORK Maggot Method

THE UNITED Nations estimates that 25% of the world's farmland is at risk of turning into a desert. New projects in Africa are now identifying ways of turning arid tracts into fertile acres.

One method for rehabilitating barren soil, developed in Burkina Faso, Africa, is to fill small pits with manure. The dung attracts termites which digest it. In the process, they dig holes which increase soil fertility and the land's capacity to filter water.

## QUOTE....

**MINETTE MARRIN**, feature writer for the Daily Telegraph (London), in analysing why Jane Clark has remained with her philandering husband Alan - he was a minister in Mrs Thatcher's government - explained:

"Land, not power, is the ultimate aphrodisiac".

Mr. Clark is the owner of Saltwood Castle, Kent.

## News in Brief