

Round the world

CAPE TOWN Cry Freeland

AFRIKANERS have spent their lives fighting ANC guerrillas based in Mozambique. The guerrillas dashed across the South African border in hit-and-run raids in their campaign for freedom. Now the Afrikaners are being enticed across the border by cheap land.

Mozambique's President Joachim Chissano is negotiating a deal in a plan to settle members of the right-wing Freedom Alliance on land that would be offered cheap. All the land of Mozambique is owned by the state, and land taxes are only 10p a year per hectare.

The Afrikan farmers have suffered from drought in the Northern Transvaal. The move to Mozambique would remove them from the influence of their arch-enemy, Nelson Mandela, who now heads South Africa's government.

LUSAKA CORRUPTION (1)

ZAMBIA'S Minister of Lands and Natural Resources, Chuulu Kalima, has been fired for "gross indiscipline and irresponsibility". And now President Frederick Chiluba, members of whose government have been accused of corruption, has ordered all ministers and members of parliament to declare their assets.

BANGKOK CORRUPTION (2)

THE land boom has put Thailand's banks at risk, reports Moody's Investor's Services, the US credit rating agency. Bank loans have fuelled property speculation: Thailand now has more than 350 golf courses.

The property boom peaked two years ago. Since then, premium office space

in Bangkok is 50% higher than in 1992, and rents are nearly 25% below their peak in 1992.

* Thailand's deputy agriculture minister, Suthep Thuaksuban, has resigned. This follows speculation that he influenced the allocation of land on the island of Phuket to 10 rich families - land that was supposed to go to landless labourers.

TOKYO CORRUPTION (3)

THE LATE prime minister, Kakuei Tanaka, was guilty of receiving bribes from American plane-builder Lockheed. That was the verdict returned by the supreme court on February 22 on the politician who dominated Japanese politics for most of the postwar years. He never went to gaol because of his appeals against the conviction.

* By the time Tanaka was accused of accepting a bribe from Lockheed, he had already resigned as Prime Minister after his crooked land speculation deals were revealed in the Press.

BARCELONA RUSSIAN INVASION

RUSSIA'S new businessmen are pumping profits into foreign real estate. Cyprus is one of the main targets for investment. The island is a convenient off-shore haven for financial transactions. Also on the list of favourite venues is the Spanish coast near the luxury resort of Marbella. One estimate puts Russian investment on this coast at 1,500 million pesetas (£7.5m).

SYDNEY LAND BUY-BACK

LEGISLATION designed to buy back land for Australia's aborigines is causing a constitutional crisis. Under the land fund legislation, A\$1.4bn

would be earmarked by 2004 to buy land for dispossessed aborigines who are not expected to benefit from the Native Title law that was passed in 1993.

The Senate amended the proposed legislation, which the government refuses to accept. The Senate referred the legislation to a select committee amid rumours that the government would use the land fund dispute as an excuse to call a snap election.

AMBLESIDE BUS STOP

CITIZENS of this scenic town in Britain's Lake District are up in arms over plans to build 17 shops on a site that was formerly the bus station. Five years ago, when bus companies were deregulated, the station was closed down and sold to a property company for £75,000. The citizens want to raise funds to buy the site and stop the development. But today that site, which covers less than three-quarters of an acre, is worth £1.75m.

LONDON RENT REVIEWS

THE British government has decided against legislation that would prevent landlords from imposing upwards-only rent reviews on tenants.

Historically, landlords have imposed 20-year leases with upward-only rent reviews. During the latest recession, this type of lease was criticised by tenants who were finding it difficult to survive in a harsh commercial climate.

Landlords have also been favoured by a decision of the Department of the Environment, which has decided against banning clauses in contracts that enforce confidentiality. Under the Tory government's free market philosophy, the best results are achieved when there is trans-

parency in price-setting agreements - meaning, the removal of secrecy about contractual deals. But the DoE, while arguing that openness is desirable, has decided not to make it mandatory.

* 250,000 or more people could be housed in the vacant houses in Greater London. At any one time, there are about 160,000 empty houses in the capital.

LONDON TAX RELIEF

BRITISH farmers are relieved by the news that the rate of relief on inheritance tax on land rented to tenants will be increased from 50% to 100%. Owner-occupiers had enjoyed 100% relief. They estimate that about 1.6m extra acres will become available for tenants, now that they are freed of the inheritance tax. According to Chancellor of the Exchequer Kenneth Clarke: "These proposals will reverse the decline in lettings and help younger people without much capital to take on farm tenancies".

DOVER OUT OF THIS WORLD

THE CHURCH of England was one of the biggest speculators in the land boom of the late 1980s. And one of its biggest flops was an £80m investment in 1,500 acres of farmland in Kent. The Church's outlay now runs at more than £53,000 per acre. Agricultural land in east Kent is worth about £1,500.

Church Commissioners were persuaded to invest in a development near Ashford, to exploit - they thought - the commercial benefits of the new cross-channel tunnel. But the development did not go ahead, and is not likely to do so.

The reckless investment is to be featured in a report to be published by a House of Commons all-party committee.

News in Brief