

Not yet spring in Cuba

Complaints about a growing wealth gap similar to those in many of the world's struggling economies are building in communist Cuba as well

This is in spite of reforms by the Raul Castro government, trying to tweak the one-party island's socialist model, to raise living standards. Economic growth last year was a nominal 3.1 percent, falling slightly short of the goal, which this year is 3.7 percent.

Castro has pried up the lid slightly on private initiative. The government still controls four-fifths of the economy, but it has given some 400,000 Cubans a small business licence. More restaurants are popping up around Havana, for instance. The government has promised to expand the range of activities people can try their hand at. But it is not spring in Cuba yet.

It is hoped a new cornucopia measure to allow unused land to be cultivated will bear fruit, since the revolutionary island cannot grow enough to feed itself. Cuba still has to import 80 percent of what it eats, and that consumes 30 percent of its hard currency, valued at 1.3 billion Euros per year.

In a country where the government has controlled wages and prices, and rationed commodities since 1959, some income gaps have narrowed. But even while recent social reforms have



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improved housing availability for instance, Odlanieris Cordero, a theatre wardrobe manager in the capital cannot get by on the monthly 20 Euros

she earns. Her husband working in Europe sends money home. Cordero said, "I can't imagine what life would be without his help." Cuba did distrib-

ute wealth more evenly, though old money and people in politics and the army enjoyed more of it. But there is a fear that the egalitarian ideal is dying.

Richard III found

DNA tests on the skeleton discovered under a car park in Leicester in the UK last autumn show that the remains are indeed those of Richard III — arguably the most reviled king in English history

Richard III was hacked to death in 1485 at the Battle of Bosworth, having only been on the throne for two years. The man who won the battle went on to become Henry VII. The discovery was made on the site of a Franciscan Friary.



Jo Appleby, an osteologist on the team, told a press conference: "The skeleton has a number of unusual features, the slender build, the scoliosis and the battle related trauma. All of these are highly consistent with the information that we have about Richard III in life and about the circumstances of his death. In addition, this individual was a man around the age of 32."

"Taken as a whole, the skeletal evidence provides a highly convincing case for identification as Richard III. We said that this may represent a slice from a bladed weapon. Our work has now shown that this is indeed the case. We cannot say for certain what weapon caused this injury, but it is consistent with being something similar to a halberd," Appleby added.

Political scandal and weak economy impact Spanish bonds

Spain's borrowing costs climbed at its latest bond auction due to an alleged corruption scandal amongst top politicians and concerns over its weak economy

However interest rates on the 4.6 billion Euros worth of government bonds that were sold remain far below previous crisis levels and demand from investors was solid. For bonds maturing in two year time, Madrid had to offer just over 2.8 percent, but that is well down on the more than seven percent reached last summer.

Spain is also being scrutinised by investors for potential political instability because of a widening corruption scandal involving of-



ficials of the ruling People's Party. A former party treasurer, Luis Barcenas, has described as fakes handwritten ledgers published re-

cently by El Pais newspaper, which accused the party of channelling payments through secret accounts from managers of building companies to its leaders, including Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy. Rajoy has also denied any wrongdoing.

Spain has been at the centre of the Eurozone debt crisis as it fights to deflate one of the highest budget deficits in the bloc through wide-reaching austerity measures, which many claim could make economic recovery harder. The government is expected to announce a public deficit of around seven percent of gross domestic product in 2012 in the next few weeks, down from over nine percent a year earlier.



Cecilia Malmström, European Commissioner for Home Affairs, described why the new law is necessary, "If we want to be credible in our efforts to fight cybercrime we need better legislation, more resources and better coordination. We have already advanced quite a lot but we need to do much more." The EU law is meant to drastically reduce cybercrimes — like hacking and malware — through a coordinated defence policy. However, companies are worried about the potential costs of implementing the new measures.

Belgian civil servants strike over natural attrition cuts

Around 10,000 civil servants took to the streets of Brussels to rally against the Belgian government's policy of natural attrition

The measure put forward by Secretary of State Hendrik Bogaert means that the civil servant workforce is reduced by not replacing people when they retire.

Peter Veltmans from the Public Service Union ACOD said, "What they are doing is, they let people go on a pension and they don't take new people. So we have a diminishing workforce, and then they say, yes, but that's no problem because we have information technology and that will



Civil servants against the Belgian government's policy of natural attrition

solve all the problems."

The demonstrators also complained that bonuses will end

from January next year. Some of the civil servants complained that the planned measures could cost

them 2,000 to 3,000 euros gross per year.

"Today's demonstration aims to give clear signal to Secretary of State Bogaert — to tell him that civil servants have rights. There must be negotiations with the unions when he wants to change the working conditions. Bogaert strips the unions and he strips the workers," said SLFP Union leader Gilles van Osthuijze. Hendrik Bogaert has responded to these criticisms by saying that the reforms are needed.