

December 2007

INTERNATIONAL

Climate Change

Dec. 3—Immediately after being sworn in, new Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd signs documents ratifying the Kyoto Protocol on climate change, leaving the US as the only major industrialized nation that has not ratified the accord.

Dec. 15—Representatives of 187 countries, after negotiating for almost 2 weeks in Indonesia, agree on a climate change proposal that requires no specific actions by individual nations but acknowledges that “deep cuts in global emissions will be required” to avoid the worst effects of global warming. Many officials accused the US of being obstructionist during the talks; the agreement is considered something of a concession by the Bush administration.

Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

Dec. 17—At a conference in Paris, 87 countries and international organizations pledge to provide the Palestinian Authority with \$7.4 billion in aid over 3 years. Many past promises of aid have never materialized.

Trade

Dec. 9—Meetings in Lisbon among EU and African leaders produce no agreement on preserving some African countries’ tariff-free access to EU markets, which without an agreement will soon expire under World Trade Organization rules.

AFGHANISTAN

Dec. 10—After several days of fighting, Afghan and NATO troops expel Taliban forces from the southern town of Musa Qula, the last significant population center to have been held by the radical Islamist group. The Taliban still control large sections of the countryside.

Dec. 31—Year-end statistics show that 110 members of the US military died in Afghanistan in 2007, along with 111 soldiers from other coalition nations. The number of Taliban suicide attacks reached a record 140.

ALGERIA

Dec. 11—Thirty-seven are killed when 2 car bombs explode near a UN compound in Algiers. Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, an Islamist terrorist group, claims responsibility.

BELGIUM

Dec. 19—A temporary government is formed after 192 days of parliamentary deadlock, with the Flemish liberal Guy Verhofstadt set to serve as prime minister. The country suffers deep divisions between its French- and Dutch-speaking sections and at times in recent months has appeared on the verge of breaking apart.

BOLIVIA

Dec. 15—Tens of thousands of demonstrators in 4 relatively affluent lowland provinces demand greater autonomy from the central government. The demonstrators believe a proposed new constitution advocated by President Evo Morales would discriminate against them in favor of the nation’s poorer, indigenous population.

CHINA

Dec. 8—For the 10th time this year, the Central Bank increases the reserve ratio, or the amount of cash that banks are required to keep on hand. The increase is the largest such move in 4 years and is part of an ongoing effort to control inflation.

IRAN

Dec. 3—Sixteen US spy agencies release a combined National Intelligence Estimate concluding that Iran halted its nuclear weapon development program in 2003 but continues to enrich uranium. The finding contradicts a 2005 intelligence estimate that presented Iran’s quest for nuclear weapons as active.

Dec. 17—Russia delivers enriched-uranium fuel rods to Iran’s nuclear power plant at Bushehr, an event the US had long sought to prevent. Iran claims the fuel rods will be used only for producing nuclear power.

IRAQ

Dec. 12—In Amara, the capital of Maysan province, 3 car bombs kill at least 27. Britain had recently handed over security responsibilities in the area to Iraqi forces.

Dec. 16—Turkey launches fighter jet and artillery attacks against targets within Kurdish Iraq, striking at positions occupied by the Kurdistan Workers’ Party, a militant separatist group. The US government is given notice of the attacks ahead of time.

Britain transfers control of Basra province to the Iraqi government. Basra had been the last area in the country still under British control.

Dec. 29—US Gen. David Petraeus reports that violent attacks in Iraq have fallen by 60% since June 2007. Observers attribute the security improvement in part to heightened US military presence, as well as to growing Iraqi opposition to the presence of foreign jihadists.

KENYA

Dec. 27—After a contentious presidential campaign, official election results show incumbent Mwai Kibaki beating challenger Raila Odinga by 46% to 44%. The results are widely regarded as dubious, and violence breaks out among the Kikuyu and Luo tribes, of which the 2 men, respectively, are members. Hundreds are killed, and the unrest continues into the new year.

KOREA, NORTH

Dec. 30—The US State Department announces that North Korea has not yet revealed all its nuclear activities and disabled its nuclear facility at Yongbyon, as it had promised to do by year’s end under an October agreement.

KOREA, SOUTH

Dec. 17—Two days before a presidential election is to take place, Parliament opens a fraud investigation into the leading candidate, Lee Myung-bak. Lee, a former Seoul mayor, represents the conservative opposition Grand National Party.

Dec. 19—Lee gains a resounding victory, winning 49% of the vote compared to the 26% won by his closest rival. Lee’s election is expected to result in the country’s taking a tougher line on North Korea.

NEPAL

Dec. 28—Parliament votes to abolish the country's monarchy after the next round of elections, tentatively scheduled for April 2008. Three months previously, former Maoist rebels demanding the monarchy's end had left the government.

PAKISTAN

Dec. 3—The federal Election Commission announces that Nawaz Sharif, a former prime minister, will not be allowed to run in parliamentary elections scheduled for Jan. 8, putatively because of a hijacking conviction. Hours later, Sharif and former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto join with other opposition parties in threatening to boycott the elections because of recent anti-democratic actions by President Pervez Musharraf.

Dec. 9—The parties led by Bhutto and Sharif say they will participate in elections after all but will do so under protest. Sharif, though he will not be allowed to run for office, will nonetheless lead his party through the campaign.

Dec. 15—Musharraf lifts the national state of emergency that has been in place for 6 weeks and restores the constitution, but not before altering it to prevent courts from challenging any of his recent actions.

Dec. 27—Bhutto is assassinated after a rally in the city of Rawalpindi. The attack involves both gunshots and a suicide bombing that kills over 20 people. The assassination ignites unrest across the country that causes 23 deaths and heightens fears of political instability. Over coming days the government says Bhutto's assassination was carried out by extremists linked to the terrorist group Al Qaeda; this assertion, along with official reports on the exact cause of Bhutto's death, meets with suspicion within Pakistan and abroad.

Dec. 30—The Pakistan Peoples Party chooses Bhutto's son, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, 19, to succeed her as party chairman. Bhutto's widower, Asif Ali Zardari, says he will manage the chairmanship for at least 3 years while his son completes his university education. The party vows to proceed with its participation in upcoming elections.

Dec. 31—The Election Commission suggests it will postpone the legislative elections for several weeks.

RUSSIA

Dec. 2—In parliamentary elections, President Vladimir Putin's party, United Russia, wins 64% of the vote. The Communist Party, which finishes in 2nd place, receives under 12% of the vote.

Dec. 10—Putin, who is obliged by the constitution to resign as president when his current term ends, endorses Dmitri Medvedev, a 1st deputy prime minister, as his successor. The endorsement virtually guarantees Medvedev will be Russia's next president. Medvedev, however, has little political capital

of his own; most observers believe Putin intends to make decisions behind the scenes.

Dec. 11—Medvedev announces he would like Putin to serve as prime minister in a Medvedev administration. The prime minister's position is at present largely administrative, but it is assumed Putin as prime minister would hold the bulk of the power.

SOUTH AFRICA

Dec. 18—The African National Congress chooses Jacob Zuma as its new leader, pushing aside President Thabo Mbeki. Zuma is tapped as a strong favorite to succeed Mbeki as president when his term expires in 2009.

Dec. 20—Prosecutors announce that, following a lengthy corruption investigation, criminal charges are expected to be filed against Zuma. A conviction would bar him from serving as president.

SUDAN

Dec. 28—President Omar Hassan al-Bashir swears in a new cabinet, formally bringing back into the government representatives of a former rebel movement in the country's south. The former rebels had walked out 3 months before because they believed the government was not abiding by the promises it had made in a deal to end a civil war.

THAILAND

Dec. 23—In legislative elections, the People Power Party of deposed Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra wins 233 of 480 parliamentary seats. The Democrat Party, the party of the generals who deposed Thaksin in September 2006, wins 165 seats. The People Power Party will now seek to form a coalition government.

Dec. 25—Thaksin says he plans to return to Thailand from forced exile within the next few months, but to stay out of politics.

UNITED STATES

Dec. 7—The Labor Department announces that the US economy added only 94,000 jobs in November, down from the 170,000 gained in October. The news, while signaling that the economy is not in recession now, raises fears that an intensified slowdown, at the least, could be on the way.

VENEZUELA

Dec. 2—In a major setback for President Hugo Chávez, 51% of voters reject a constitutional referendum he endorsed. If approved, it would have augmented the president's powers by, among other things, abolishing presidential term limits, granting the president power to appoint local officials who are currently elected, and giving the government increased control over the economy. ■