

April–July 2011

INTERNATIONAL

Climate change

May 5—A paper published by climate researchers in the journal *Science* reports that agricultural yields in several countries have begun to drop due to rising global temperatures. The greatest yield drop, compared to levels that would be expected in the absence of climate change, has been observed in Russian wheat harvests, which the researchers say have declined by 10%. The paper's authors report that climate change's overall effect on agricultural production has been small so far, but that it is likely to increase over coming years.

June 1—The World Bank agrees to provide climate-related financing to 40 of the world's biggest cities, which among them produce 12% of the world's greenhouse gases. The money is meant to fund efforts to reduce emissions of the gases and to remediate warming's harmful effects on cities, which might include rising seas.

Demographics

May 3—The UN projects that the world's population, which had been expected to peak in 2050 at about 9 billion, will instead keep growing beyond that date and perhaps exceed 10 billion by 2100. One factor accounting for the changed projection is that fertility in some areas is not declining as fast as expected, particularly in Africa. That continent's population, according to the UN, could increase over the course of this century to 3.6 billion from today's 1 billion.

Financial regulation

June 25—The top oversight group of the Basel Committee on Banking Supervision proposes that the world's largest, most complex banks be required to maintain capital reserves of between 1% and 2.5% of their assets in addition to the 7% of assets that all banks would be required to maintain. An even larger reserve would be demanded of banks that grow extremely large or that engage in risky endeavors. The regulations are meant to address the "too-big-to-fail" problem that dogged economies and governments during the global financial crisis that began in 2008.

Food

June 23—The G-20's agriculture ministers agree on steps intended to stabilize global supplies of food and to minimize price swings. The steps, which are characterized as modest, include the removal of export restrictions on food sent abroad for humanitarian purposes and the establishment of research programs on wheat and rice.

Group of 8

May 27—Leaders of the G-8 nations meeting in France pledge \$20 billion in economic aid to Egypt and Tunisia. The money is intended to help stabilize the 2 countries' economies so that their ongoing processes of political reform are not "hijacked" by Islamic radicals.

HIV/AIDS

May 12—Results of a large clinical study show that people infected with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, are 96% less likely to infect their sexual partners if they begin treatment with antiretroviral drugs as soon as they are diagnosed, instead of waiting until they become sick. The results prompt speculation that

early provision of antiretrovirals may present a path toward the eradication of AIDS.

Israeli-Palestinian conflict

Apr. 6—The Palestinian Authority gets a boost in its effort to establish itself as a Palestinian state when the IMF reports its view that the Authority is capable of managing an independent state's economy. Six days later, the UN publishes a report characterizing some aspects of the Authority's administration as adequate for the maintenance of a state.

Apr. 27—In Cairo, negotiators representing Fatah (the Palestinian political movement that administers the West Bank) and Hamas (the radical movement that has held power in the Gaza Strip since it won elections there in 2006) announce that the 2 entities are reconciling. Israel reacts negatively to the news, saying that Fatah must choose between peace with Hamas and peace with Israel.

South China Sea

June 22—Cui Tiankai, China's vice foreign minister, warns the US in public comments to stay out of territorial disputes in the South China Sea, all or part of which is claimed by China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Malaysia, the Philippines, Brunei, and Indonesia. US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton last year said the US had a "national interest" in preserving international access to sea-lanes in the region.

July 15—Three US Navy ships arrive in Vietnam for joint training with that country's naval forces, sparking protest from China, whose dispute with Vietnam over the South China Sea has for months been more tense than usual.

Women's rights

July 6—The UN releases a study of women's rights around the world, reporting that more than 1/2 of working women lack basic legal protections in the workplace and that most countries, including some advanced ones, do not criminalize rape within marriage.

AFGHANISTAN

Apr. 29—The US Department of Defense issues an upbeat report on security in Afghanistan, saying that the deployment of 30,000 additional troops to the country under President Barack Obama has had a positive effect. Security gains in Afghanistan are described as fragile, but this nonetheless represents an improvement over recent years, when the security situation was seen as deteriorating.

June 22—Obama, saying that US goals in Afghanistan have largely been achieved, announces that 10,000 US soldiers will be withdrawn from the country this year, with the drawdown continuing steadily until 2014, when Afghans themselves are to assume responsibility for security. French President Nicolas Sarkozy soon follows with a similar announcement regarding his country's troops.

BRAZIL

June 7—Antonio Palocci, chief of staff to President Dilma Rousseff, resigns due to disclosures about a political consulting business he operated while a member of the congress between 2006 and 2009. Palocci, a centrist, was chosen for his post partly to signal to investors that Rousseff's government would not adopt left-leaning economic policies, but markets greet his departure

calmly. Within a month, a 2nd minister in Rousseff's cabinet resigns amid a corruption scandal.

CANADA

May 2—After the nation's 4th parliamentary election in 7 years, the Conservative Party, which was already the largest party in parliament, wins an outright majority. Taking 2nd place and forming the official opposition is the New Democratic Party, whose roots are socialist. The Liberals and the Bloc Québécois finish with very disappointing results.

CHINA

Apr. 28—Results of China's 2010 census are published, revealing that the country's population has grown to 1.34 billion people, 66 million below the number that the UN had expected; that China's urban population has grown by 45% in a decade; and that almost 20% of Chinese live somewhere other than where they are listed in the country's household registration system.

May 19—China's State Council admits that the Three Gorges Dam along the Yangtze River suffers from a wide range of "urgent problems" including ones related to "ecological protection and geological disaster prevention." Raising additional questions about the quality of infrastructure systems that China has been constructing at an unprecedented pace is a fatal collision in July between 2 trains operating on the country's high-speed rail system.

CROATIA

July 25—The European Commission approves Croatia's bid to become the EU's 28th member state, with accession set to occur in 2013. Croatia and the commission had been engaged for 6 years in talks, with corruption and judicial reform the key stumbling blocks.

EGYPT

July 20—The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, which has ruled Egypt since President Hosni Mubarak was deposed, announces details of a voting system for parliamentary elections to be held in the fall. The system, a hybrid between winner-take-all elections and ones in which voters choose parties rather than individual candidates, is apparently designed as a compromise meant to satisfy both Egypt's established political players and its new generation of liberals and reformers.

GERMANY

May 30—The government announces plans by 2022 to close permanently all of the nation's nuclear power plants, which produce 23% of Germany's electricity. The decision comes in reaction to the crisis at a nuclear power plant in Japan following a March earthquake and tsunami.

GREAT BRITAIN

May 6—Voters reject a reform of the nation's voting system. The proposed reform would have required voters to rank candidates for seats in parliament by order of preference—a system that, by allowing for instant run-off elections, would have helped smaller parties such as the Liberal Democrats. The measure had been strongly opposed by the Conservatives, with whom the Liberal Democrats form a governing majority in parliament.

GREECE

July 21—As part of a \$157 billion rescue plan for fiscally troubled Greece, EU leaders agree to reduce the country's debt burden in part by forcing investors to accept losses on bonds. The EU agrees to allow such investor losses after resisting

them fiercely throughout Greece's debt crisis. The plan also, to discourage investor panic, provides debt assistance for Portugal and Ireland.

HAITI

Apr. 4—Two weeks after the nation voted in a run-off presidential election, popular singer Michel Martelly is announced as the winner. Martelly received 68% of the vote, with the other 32% going to Mirlande Manigat, a former 1st lady. Martelly had been excluded from the run-off following a 1st round of voting in November 2010, but Haiti's election council ruled in February that Martelly had been left out incorrectly, in favor of Jude Célestin, the preferred candidate of outgoing President René Préval.

INDIA

June 14—The World Bank agrees to provide India \$1 billion in loans to help clean up the Ganges, a river along which 400 million people reside and which is polluted with untreated sewage and agricultural and industrial run-off. An earlier clean-up effort, initiated in 1986, produced inadequate results.

July 27—Two weeks after synchronized explosions in Mumbai had killed 24 people, India and Pakistan's foreign ministers reach agreement in New Delhi on a number of small steps intended in part to demonstrate the 2 sides' commitment to maintaining dialogue even through difficult circumstances. The steps agreed on include increasing the number of days each week that trade is allowed across the countries' de facto border in the disputed Kashmir region.

ITALY

July 15—Italy's parliament passes an austerity package meant to address the nation's fiscal crisis. Italy's sovereign debt is equal to 120% of GDP, and in a bond sale on July 14 the rates the country paid to borrow money rose to record levels. In recent weeks fears have risen in Europe that Italy's debt problems might intensify, perhaps necessitating a euro-zone bailout such as those that have been extended to Greece and Portugal.

IVORY COAST

Apr. 11—Forces aligned with Alassane Ouattara, who won a presidential election in November 2010, take into custody Laurent Gbagbo. Gbagbo was president at the time of the voting and refused to cede power, which led to national crisis, armed conflict, and the intervention of the French military.

JAPAN

Apr. 12—The Japanese government raises the nuclear severity rating of an accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power station to 7, the highest rating on the international scale. The government and the company that maintains the plant have struggled since a March earthquake and tsunami to bring the crisis at the plant under control, so far with limited success.

May 10—The government announces that it has abandoned existing plans to build 14 additional nuclear power plants by 2030.

LIBYA

Apr. 23—Rebels aligned against Libya's dictatorial leader, Muammar el-Qaddafi, capture Misurata, the country's 3rd-largest city, when Qaddafi's forces withdraw after 2 months of fighting. Skirmishes continue in the area for 3 more weeks, until the rebels take the city's airport.

June 9—Nations including Italy, France, Turkey, and Australia pledge in excess of \$1 billion to support the rebels.

July 15—The US formally recognizes the rebels as the country's official government, which frees for their use \$30 billion in Libyan assets held in the US.

NIGERIA

Apr. 16—Incumbent President Goodluck Jonathan, who rose to his office from the vice presidency after the death of his predecessor in 2010, wins a presidential election, gaining 59% of the vote. His main challenger, Muhammadu Buhari, wins 32%. The election is judged the cleanest in Nigeria's history but the results are greeted with considerable violence.

PAKISTAN

Apr. 5—The Obama administration delivers to Congress a harsh assessment of Pakistan's internal efforts against Islamist militant groups, saying that in Pakistan "there remains no clear path to defeat the insurgency."

May 1—In Abbottabad, a short distance from a Pakistani military base, US operatives kill Al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden, the man most closely associated with the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in New York and Washington. Suspicion is widespread that bin Laden could not have lived so close to a Pakistani military installation without the aid of individuals within the country's military, government, or security agencies.

PERU

June 5—A run-off presidential election is won by Ollanta Humala, a former military officer who espouses moderate leftist views. Humala wins 51% of the vote, compared to the 49% won by Keiko Fujimori, daughter of the disgraced former president, Alberto Fujimori.

PORTUGAL

May 3—The government of Portugal reaches agreement with the IMF, the European Commission, and the European Central Bank on a \$116 billion plan that will allow the country to maintain its sovereign debt payments as it enacts an austerity program.

June 5—In an election, the governing Socialists lose control of the country's parliament to the Social Democrats, who are expected with a 3rd party to form a center-right coalition and embark on a campaign of austerity.

ROMANIA

May 3—Romanian and US officials agree on a plan to base anti-missile interceptors in Romania. The antimissile system is purported to counter a threat from Iran but some Russians worry it

FROM THE ARCHIVES

What Current History authors were saying . . .

5 years ago

It remains to be seen whether current leaders have the courage and wisdom to overcome the party's long-standing distrust of an organized citizenry. One thing, however, is certain. Until they secure the right to defend themselves in organized groups, Chinese villagers will continue to launch more and more "collective incidents" to uphold rights that they believe they have, but which are not being respected by local officials. Beijing may wish to keep the rural population as apolitical and passive as possible, but it must understand that this is fast becoming an impossible task.

LIANJIANG LI

Driven to Protest: China's Rural Unrest
September 2006

10 years ago

[S]igns of erosion and dissipation in China's coercive system are evident. Both Beijing's control over the coercive system, as well as that system's capacity to maintain social control, appear to be slipping—perhaps irreversibly. These changes are undermining many key elements of China's internal security strategy. . . . China's state coercive system still shows an impressive capacity to target and suppress specific individuals deemed threatening to the state. But beneath the surface, this system is facing unprecedented challenges to central control, effectiveness, and discipline, all of which could produce a growing crisis of governability for Beijing in the next decade.

MURRAY SCOT TANNER

Cracks in the Wall: China's Eroding Coercive State
September 2001

may undermine their nuclear deterrent. The system is expected to be deployed by 2015.

RUSSIA

July 22—The Obama administration imposes a visa ban on 60 Russian officials believed connected to the death in prison of Sergei Magnitsky, a lawyer who had exposed an embezzlement scheme involving Russian tax money. The Russian government says that the US move endangers the diplomatic “reset” in which the countries have been engaged since Obama became president.

SERBIA

May 26—Ratko Mladic, a former Bosnian Serb general alleged to be responsible for the death of 8,000 men and boys during a 1995 massacre in the town of Srebrenica, is arrested north of Belgrade. The arrest of Mladic, who will face a war-crimes trial, is seen as a key step for Serbia to realize its ambition of joining the EU.

SINGAPORE

May 14—Lee Kuan Yew, the founder of modern Singapore, steps down from the country's cabinet 6 days after his party, the People's Action Party, wins 60% of the vote in a general election, its worst showing ever. Lee, who served as prime minister from 1959 to 1990, retains his seat in parliament. His son, Lee Hsien Loong, is prime minister.

SOMALIA

July 20—The UN officially declares the food crisis in some parts of Somalia a famine, 1 created by a combination of drought and a bad security environment. UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon says that \$1.6 billion is needed to address the crisis.

SUDAN

May 21—Less than 2 months ahead of the date when the southern part of Sudan is scheduled to become an independent nation, the UN reports that the north has seized the contested town of Abyei. The UN later suggests that the north may be engaged in ethnic cleansing in the region.

May 26—Salva Kiir Mayardit, who is slated to become president of the new nation of South Sudan, says that he will not go to war with the north over Abyei.

June 20—The north agrees to withdraw its forces from Abyei and allow 4,000 Ethiopian peacekeepers to establish security in the area. Negotiations on Abyei and other points of contention between Khartoum and Juba are scheduled to continue.

SUDAN, SOUTH

July 9—The Republic of South Sudan comes into existence. It is soon admitted as the 193rd member of the UN.

SYRIA

May 18—The US imposes sanctions on Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and 6 other key government figures in response to the regime's brutal crackdown against political protest. Five days later, the EU follows suit. Human rights activists say that as many as 900 people have been killed since protests began in March.

THAILAND

July 3—In parliamentary elections, the Pheu Thai Party wins a majority of seats. The next prime minister is slated to be Yingluck Shinawatra, sister of controversial former Prime Minister

Thaksin Shinawatra. The Pheu Thai Party says it intends to form a governing coalition with 4 other parties even though it will hold enough seats to control parliament by itself; the military, which has carried out a number of coups over the years, says it will not intervene in the political process.

TUNISIA

June 8—Tunisia's interim government postpones from July until October the country's 1st election since former autocrat Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali was deposed in January. The decision is made for technical reasons but is seen as likely to benefit the country's newer political parties.

TURKEY

June 12—The governing Justice and Development Party wins about 50% of the vote in legislative elections, enough to give it a 3rd term as the largest party in the country's parliament but not enough to provide it an absolute majority. The moderately Islamist party had hoped to gain a majority that would enable it, among other things, to draft a new constitution. Recep Tayyip Erdogan will continue as prime minister.

July 29—Turkey's top military commander, along with the top figures in the army, navy, and air force, resign simultaneously; Erdogan accepts their resignations. The officers step down in response to the arrests of dozens of generals on charges that they had participated in a coup plot. The military's traditionally dominant role in Turkish politics has been diminishing in recent years, and many see the resignations as symbolic of that shift.

UNITED STATES

Apr. 18—The ratings agency Standard & Poor's, while maintaining its AAA rating for debt issued by the US government, lowers its outlook on that debt to negative from stable. The change in outlook results both from high levels of US debt and from Washington's ongoing difficulties in addressing its fiscal challenges.

Apr. 28—The Commerce Department says that growth in gross domestic product slowed in the 1st quarter to 1.89%, from 3.1% in the 4th quarter of 2010. The disappointing number demonstrates that the US economy continues to emerge very slowly from an economic crisis.

July 31—Two days before the US government's authority to borrow money would have expired, President Obama and congressional leaders agree to a deficit-reduction deal that averts default on government-issued debt. The deal makes some immediate spending cuts and establishes a special congressional committee to recommend a larger deficit-reduction plan, on which the full congress will vote.

YEMEN

May 22—Negotiations involving President Ali Abdullah Saleh, his political opponents, and the Gulf Cooperation Council fail when Saleh refuses to sign an agreement calling for him to surrender power within 30 days in exchange for immunity from prosecution. The collapse of negotiations sparks serious violence, as opposition tribesmen do battle with government forces in Sana, the capital.

June 3—Saleh is wounded in an attack on the presidential palace and the next day travels to Saudi Arabia for medical treatment. Over the coming weeks, as Saleh's plans for the future remain unclear, the country experiences repeated episodes of violence. ■