

August 2017

INTERNATIONAL

Indian-Chinese border

Aug. 28—India and China announce that they have agreed to pull soldiers back from a standoff near a disputed Himalayan border between the nuclear-armed neighbors. The confrontation, the worst in 3 decades in a dispute that has festered since the days of the British Empire, began in June when Bhutan, a close ally of India, observed Chinese construction crews attempting to extend a road in the contested zone where the borders of all 3 nations meet. India sent troops to stop the construction, leading to brawls between Indian and Chinese soldiers. Both sides retreat to end the impasse, but neither drops its claim to disputed territory.

CHILE

Aug. 21—The Constitutional Tribunal upholds a bill approved by Congress Aug. 8 that legalizes abortion under 3 circumstances: when the pregnancy stemmed from a rape, when the mother's life is in danger, and when the fetus has a fatal defect. The limited liberalization does not violate the constitution's "protection of the unborn," says the court, in a ruling that loosens 1 of the strictest anti-abortion laws in the world. Right-wing legislators filed the legal challenge to the bill. The conference of Chilean Catholic bishops condemns the verdict.

CHINA

Aug. 17—Three prominent young Hong Kong activists—Joshua Wong, Nathan Law, and Alex Chow—are sentenced by the territory's Court of Appeal to prison terms ranging from 6 to 8 months for their roles in inspiring pro-democracy street protests in 2014. The sentences are regarded as a major setback for activists who have pressed for autonomy within China, in keeping with the commitment made by Beijing in 1997, when it took back control of Hong Kong from Britain, to honor the principal of "one country, two systems." Tens of thousands of people take to the streets to protest the sentencing.

FRANCE

Aug. 31—Seeking to make good on a campaign promise to reform the nation's complex labor code, President Emmanuel Macron announces fast-track legislation designed to make it easier for employers, especially smaller businesses, to hire and fire workers. The reforms would allow individual firms to negotiate directly with employees on working conditions, including pay scales and work schedules, that are generally subject to industry-wide bargaining with unions under the existing rules. In response, a major labor federation calls for a daylong strike in September to protest the measures, but 2 larger unions decline to join in. Macron says the reforms will spur job creation in a nation whose unemployment rate, at 9.8%, is twice as high as Germany's.

GUATEMALA

Aug. 27—President Jimmy Morales orders members of a United Nations-backed anticorruption panel, which he had previously endorsed, to disband and leave the country. The Constitutional Court blocks the order, at least temporarily. The move by Morales comes 2 days after the head of the panel, Colombian prosecutor Iván Velásquez, said it would seek to strip the president of immunity from prosecution, alleging that Morales had not disclosed campaign contributions. Morales, a former television

star, was elected in 2015 on a pledge to root out corruption after the UN panel uncovered evidence of a conspiracy that funneled kickbacks from customs duties to top officials. That scandal led to the resignation and arrest of then-President Otto Pérez Molina, who is now in jail awaiting trial.

KENYA

Aug. 11—Incumbent Uhuru Kenyatta is officially declared the winner of an Aug. 8 presidential election. Election officials say Kenyatta won 54 percent of the vote in a race against Raila Odinga, who lost the previous 2 elections in 2007 and 2013. Odinga calls the result "a complete fraud" and vows to mount a legal challenge. Despite fears that the election would reignite communal tensions that left more than 1,300 dead in the wake of the disputed 2007 election, protests were relatively restrained this time, after political leaders on all sides appealed for calm. The Kenya National Commission on Human Rights reports Aug. 12 that 24 people were killed in election-related violence in the 4 days since polls closed.

NORTH KOREA

Aug. 5—The UN Security Council unanimously approves a resolution to impose new economic sanctions on North Korea in response to its July tests of intercontinental ballistic missiles that could put the US within range of its nuclear weapons. The sanctions ban North Korean exports of coal, iron, and other materials as well as seafood, and bar the country from sending more workers abroad, 1 of its few sources of foreign currency.

Aug. 8—US President Donald Trump threatens to respond "with fire and fury like the world has never seen" to any further threats from Pyongyang to attack the United States. Other US officials, including Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, quickly attempt to soften the threat by denying that Trump is preparing to launch a military attack. North Korea warns it could target the US Pacific island territory of Guam.

Aug. 29—North Korea test fires an intermediate-range ballistic missile on a trajectory that for the first time passes directly over Japan, where the government warns citizens via text message to take cover. The missile splashes down in the Pacific Ocean 1,700 miles from the launch site.

SOUTH AFRICA

Aug. 8—President Jacob Zuma, facing mounting corruption allegations, survives a no-confidence vote in Parliament. Although 2 dozen members of his own party, the African National Congress, join the opposition to vote against Zuma, the measure is defeated by a vote of 198 to 177. It is the closest that Zuma has come to being ousted since he was 1st elected in 2009. He had already survived several such votes, but this was the 1st to be conducted by secret ballot. His term expires in 2019.

VENEZUELA

Aug. 18—The Constituent Assembly, chosen from a list of loyalists to President Nicolás Maduro in a July 30 election that was boycotted by the opposition, grants itself the power "to legislate over matters directly related to guaranteeing peace, security, and sovereignty," in addition to the authority it already has to rewrite the constitution. The move effectively cancels out the National Assembly, which has been dominated by opposition parties since elections held last year, and follows months of antigovernment protests that have left more than 100 dead. ■