

International Intelligence

Taiwan Referendum Vote Is Limited

Taiwan's Legislative Yuan backed away from a provocative bill allowing unlimited referenda, and confined any future "independence" vote to restricted circumstances, according to wire reports on Nov. 28. The bill as originally presented, pushed by President Chen Shui-bian, would have allowed referenda on independence, a constitution, the name of the country, and other issues, but these were restricted in the final bill, passed on Nov. 27.

On Nov. 26, Beijing's Taiwan Affairs Office spokesman Zhang Mingqing had warned that the original bill, creating the "legal framework" for independence, would result in an unspecified "strong response" from China.

The version passed still allows the President to call an independence referendum if the mainland uses force against Taiwan. This may still cause anger in Beijing. However, the bill gives the Legislative Yuan a veto on most referenda proposed by the Executive or by popular petition.

Worldwide Hunger Is Rising Rapidly

The annual report issued by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations on Nov. 25, titled "The State of Food Insecurity in the World, 2003," announces that hunger is rising rapidly in the world. After falling by 37 million during the first half of the 1990s, the number of hungry people in developing countries increased by 18 million in the second half of the decade. The FAO report estimates that 842 million people were undernourished in 1999-2001, the most recent years for which figures are available. This includes 10 million in industrialized countries, 34 million in "countries in transition," and 798 million in developing countries.

Only 19 countries, including China, had some success in reducing the number of un-

dernourished throughout the 1990s. The report claims: "In these successful countries, the total number of hungry people fell by over 80 million." At the other end of the scale, however, are 26 countries where the number of undernourished people increased by 60 million during the same period. In 17 countries, including some of the most populous countries in the world—such as India, Indonesia, Pakistan, along with Nigeria and Sudan—hunger is rising, and the report warns that "these countries can no longer be expected to propel progress for the developing world."

With regard to southern Africa, the report says the food crisis of 2002-03 shows that "hunger cannot be combated effectively in regions ravaged by AIDS, unless interventions address the particular needs of AIDS-affected households and incorporate measures both to prevent and to mitigate the spread of HIV/AIDS." Estimates are that 60-70% of farms have suffered labor losses due to HIV/AIDS, and lack the labor, resources, and know-how for "survival" cultivation, and in many cases have abandoned farming. The report also underscores the critical lack of water in this regard.

German Opposition Boycotting a Budget

The Christian Democratic Union (CDU/CSU) opposition in the Bundestag was boycotting the Fiscal Year 2004 budget, as of Nov. 28, as part of their strategy to force Social Democratic Chancellor Gerhard Schröder out of office. The strategy is led by Cheney-linked neo-conservative circles inside the German Christian Democrats (Roland Koch, Friedbert Pflüger, Angela Merkel), to provoke a "regime change in Berlin."

The budget for FY 2004, which was voted up by a Social Democrat-Green majority of 304-289 in the national parliament on Nov. 28, will be rejected by the CDU-led majority in the upper house, the Bundesrat. Since the Bundestag-Bundesrat mediation committee effort to get some compromise

on the planned pension reform package, has also been thrown out by the vote of the CDU-led majority in the Bundesrat, the decisive session on the FY 2004 budget on Dec. 19 will demonstrate a direct confrontation between government and opposition.

The immediate implication is that Finance Minister Hans Eichel will be able to operate only with a transition budget, with no maneuvering room for expenses beyond a minimum, on the verge of ungovernability. The opposition, which has failed to rally a majority against Schröder in the Bundestag so far, will work for a situation in which the government is unable to keep its own votes together. This can be a labor market or social reform issue, in the context of drastically rising unemployment; it can be a labor union issue (alienating the Social Democratic Party left); it can also be an environmental issue (alienating the Greens). If the German government continues its austerity course, instead of launching a Eurasian investment drive, it will dig its own grave, however.

The struggle over the burial of the European Union's Maastricht system, which the Cheneyites want to keep at all costs, may alienate some pro-austerity members of the government majority, as well.

Jewish Exodus From Israel Under Way

There is a Jewish exodus from Ariel Sharon's Israel in the wake of brutal war and economic collapse, according to a London *Sunday Telegraph* story on Nov. 29. It warned that Jewish migration from Israel has reached crisis proportions, threatening the Jewish identity of the state. While right-wing Likudniks are pushing the idea of adding a million Jewish immigrants to the Israeli population over the next decade, the reality is that hundreds of thousands of Jews are picking up and leaving the Jewish state, and projected total Jewish immigration to Israel this year is at a 15-year low of just 29,000.

CONRAD BLACK faces a hostile takeover bid from Harrod's owner Mohamed al-Fayed for the *Daily* and *Sunday Telegraph* newspapers, flagships of Black's sinking Hollinger media empire, according to the *Observer* on Nov. 30. The *New York Post*, owned by Black rival (albeit fellow neo-con) Rupert Murdoch, continued its marathon coverage of Black's downfall, stemming from Black's siphoning money into management consulting operations he himself controlled.

PAKISTANI President Pervez Musharraf announced resumption of flights to India, and on Nov. 30 proposed a four-stage approach for the settlement of the Kashmir issue. This may end the 17-month row between Islamabad and New Delhi. India suspended overflights and air links on Jan. 1, 2002, in the wake of the alleged Pakistani involvement in the Dec. 13, 2001 terrorist attack on the Indian Parliament House in New Delhi. The resumption of air links was proposed by Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee on April 17.

A FACE MASK dating back 35,000 years was excavated on the Loire River bank in France, demonstrating that Neanderthal Man had art, according to two experts. An article in the December 2003 issue of the journal *Antiquity* argues that the object was clearly worked by hand to make it look like a face. The scientific establishment's view, despite evidence to the contrary, is that Neanderthals did not have the thought processes necessary to produce art.

JAPAN'S experimental maglev hit a record 361 miles per hour on Dec. 3. The magnetically levitated train is being tested in Yamanashi Prefecture (state), west of Tokyo, by the Central Japan Railway Co. and the Railway Technology Research Institute, in a project financed by the Japanese government. The new record considerably exceeds the regular operational speed of the German-built maglev now running in Shanghai, China.

This means a significant net population decrease.

One 36-year-old mother, Christine Chalev, told the *Telegraph*, "Israel is falling apart and enough is enough. I feel trapped here." Michael Jankelowitz, spokesman for the Jewish Agency, was blunt: "There is big concern about what is happening. This is why finding a peaceful resolution is so important. At the moment people do not see a solution, and this is the tragedy. The insecurity drives them crazy. It's like Russian roulette—you don't know when it is going to hit you." The newspaper also interviewed a couple whose grandparents were founders of the State of Israel, who are leaving. "I feel betrayed," said the wife, only identified by her first name, Hila. "I don't want to raise my children in such a brutal society. . . . My grandparents had such high ideals. What has become of Israel makes me so sad and bitter."

According to official Israeli statistics, there are now 760,000 Israeli citizens living abroad, up from 550,000 in 2000. In 2002, only 39,000 Jews moved to Israel—and most were recruited by radical settler movements to move directly to the West Bank. According to the understated "official" demographic data, Israel will lose its Jewish majority within the next 20 years if the current trends simply continue.

Georgia Destabilization Danger on Russian Flank

Tensions were high in Georgia after a bomb attack Nov. 29 targeted Georgia's Labor Party, a rival to the new regime. The blast outside the headquarters of the Labor Party that morning did not cause injuries. The Labor Party is a critic of both deposed President Eduard Shevardnadze, and of Mikhail Saakashvili and his *troika*, who assumed power on Nov. 23.

Georgia's new defense minister was forced to make a statement that the army supports the new leadership, on Nov. 30, after the bomb blast and Nov. 28 claims by Saakashvili, who spearheaded anti-She-

vardnadze protests, that "certain people are preparing a counter-revolution," and that disgruntled armed forces members were among them. "The army is an instrument of foreign, not domestic policy," said Defense Minister David Tevzadze defensively in televised comments; "the minister coordinates his actions only with the acting commander in chief."

Labor Party chief Shalva Natelashvili meanwhile blamed the new government for the bomb attack and said that it signalled more trouble in what could become a three-way fracas.

Russia Still Says No to Kyoto Treaty

As 4,000 delegates to the United Nations Climate Change Convention assembled in Milan on Dec. 2 for a week-long hot-air meeting on global warming, the economic aide to President Putin reiterated earlier statements that Russia will not ratify the Kyoto Protocol in its present form, because it "places significant limitations on the economic growth of Russia." Australia also reaffirmed that it would not ratify Kyoto.

The Kyoto farce specifies that countries representing 55% of the 1990 level of greenhouse gas emissions must sign on to the Protocol before its binding provisions can go into effect. So far, nations representing 44.2% of emissions have ratified Kyoto. Signers include most European countries, Japan, Canada, and New Zealand. The United States rejected the Protocol in 2001, leaving Russia's 17% as critical to having the Protocol put into effect.

The "Monopoly game" aspect of the Protocol is that countries that produce fewer greenhouse gases than in 1990 can sell the difference as emissions "credits" to countries that are "overproducing." Because Russian greenhouse emissions have decreased by 32% since 1990—a direct result of the collapse of the Russian economy as it was looted—if it signs the Protocol, Russia could make a bundle in the new international emissions market.