

International Intelligence

Hunger Grows as Rice Productivity Declines

Rice experts from 61 countries met in Bangkok, as the UN's International Rice Commission (IRC) kicked off its 20th session, co-sponsored by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Host country Thailand is the world's largest rice exporter.

"There is an increasing concern about the ability of rice production to meet popular demand in the near future," R.B. Singh, FAO's representative for the Asia-Pacific region, told the opening session. Current rice yields average just over four metric tons per hectare, Singh said. While they continue to improve, the rate of increase is steadily dropping, from 2.3% during the "Green Revolution" of the 1980s (which increased yields by breeding disease, weather and insect resistant strains) to 1.1% in the 1990s. The decline of productivity in rice production contributes to the hunger of 800 million people in the world, every day. Over half the world's population depends on rice as its major daily source of calories and protein, according to the FAO. Rice prices are currently at their lowest level in 20 years.

A potentially revolutionary development, the widespread introduction of "super rice" strains being tested by researchers, could boost crop yields "by 15% to 20% over the best plant types that we have today," said Singh. He predicted super rice could be planted in Asian paddies as early as 2007. *EIR* has reported that super rice could already be in use worldwide, but has been subverted by anti-development interests.

Breadbasket Argentina Grain Output Plummets

Argentina's grain production is expected to drop for the 2002-2003 harvest season to between 13 million and 13.8 million tons in the next harvest, season, below the 14 million the U.S. Department of Agriculture estimated in June, BBC reported on July 18.

Output for the 2001-2002 season was 15.3 million, but lack of credit, high export taxes, and increased costs for crucial inputs and services, have taken their toll.

Enrique Crotto, president of the Rural Society (SRA) told *Clarín* that farmers have been hit hard by higher costs for machinery, fuel, fertilizer, seeds, agro-chemicals, and for transportation and insurance. With the peso devaluation, the price for imported components of farm chemicals has dramatically increased. "No modern society can grow without credit," Crotto said. Although some farmers are surviving through barter arrangements, he added, "It is essential that the government immediately resolve the [problem] of the financial sector." Moreover, he added, the imposition of export taxes under the Duhalde government, has meant lost income of \$1.7 billion. Argentina produces about 10% of the world's wheat. In June, the government estimated that the total number of hectares under wheat cultivation was 6.5 million, down from an earlier estimate of 7 million.

In a related blow to Argentina's depression-wracked economy, the Rosario Port Authority announced on July 17 that it is signing a contract for Spain's Tarragona Port Authority to take over the Port of Rosario at the end of August; the Spanish agency will run it for 30 years. Rosario has historically been used for the export of grains, and more recently for wood, auto parts, coal, and containers. However, much of the industrial city's activity has shut down with the International Monetary Fund-induced economic crisis.

China Readies 'Move South Water North' Plan

All technical and field preparations for launching the China's great "Move South Water North" project have been fulfilled, announced the enterprise responsible for construction of the central route of the huge water project. The project can be launched at any time, reported the July 22 issue of *Peoples Daily*, citing Vice Minister of Water Resources Zhang Jiyao. "Consensus has been reached on all aspects of the project, includ-

ing priorities, layout, water-pollution controls, water-saving measures, protection of ecosystems, investment shares, and water pricing," Zhang said.

The first step will be enlarging the dam at the Danjiangkou Reservoir in northwest Hubei Province, already the largest man-made lake in Asia. This project, to divert water from water-rich southern China to the arid North—the center of population and China's grain belt—has been under consideration for some 40 years.

Russia, Iran Re-Affirm Nuclear Cooperation

Russian First Deputy Foreign Minister Trubnikov, visiting Tehran, said on July 20, that Russia is ready to receive and accept new proposals to build more nuclear plants in Iran. Speaking to press after talks with his Iranian counterpart Mohsen Aminzadeh, Trubnikov said that cooperation on the Bushehr nuclear power plant does not violate international accords, and would continue, reported the *Tehran Times* on July 21. Asked about U.S. President George Bush's criticism of the cooperation, and his attacks on Iran, Trubnikov said, "Russia's stance is clear; we do not accept the U.S. President's view on the 'axis of evil.' Iran has had good cooperation in regional developments generally, especially in realization of peace and campaign against terrorism."

Trubnikov was in India before arriving in Iran. At the end of his New Delhi visit, he stressed Moscow's desire for a trilateral cooperation scheme among Iran, Russia and India, with respect to Afghanistan.

The *Tehran Times'* editorial emphasized the importance of such a triangular relationship, adding that Russia and Iran must also discuss ways and means of preventing a U.S. strike on Iraq. The editorial proposed that Russia persuade Iraq to accept the UN inspectors, to deprive the United States of a pretext. The editorial also stressed the need for Russia to reaffirm its commitment to nuclear cooperation, and to consolidate the "Tehran-Moscow defense cooperation and joint infrastructure development projects."