

community

ARUDOU'S ALIEN ALMANAC

Debito Arudou ranks the notable events of the year that affected non-Japanese residents (on the left). This time it's a double **Just Be Cause** column, also featuring the decade's highs and lows (down the right)

Renho joins Kan's Cabinet

Japanese politicians with international roots are few but not unprecedented. But Taiwanese-Japanese Diet member Renho's ascension to the Cabinet as minister for administrative reforms has been historic. Requiring the bureaucrats to justify their budgets (famously asking last January, "Why must we aim to develop the world's No. 1 supercomputer? What's wrong with being No. 2?"), she has been Japan's most vocal policy reformer.

Why this matters: Few reformers are brave enough to withstand the national sport of politician-bashing, especially when

exceptionally cruel criticism began targeting Renho's ethnic background. Far-rightist Diet member Takeo Hiranuma questioned her very loyalty by saying, "She's not originally Japanese" (Just Be Cause, Feb. 2). Tokyo Gov. Shintaro Ishihara expanded the focus by claiming people in the ruling coalition had foreign backgrounds, and were therefore selling Japan out as a "duty to their ancestors" (JBC, May 4). Fortunately, it did not matter. In July's elections, Renho garnered a record 1.7 million votes in her constituency, and retained her Cabinet post, regardless of her beliefs and roots.

Apology for Korea annexation

After all the bad blood between these strikingly similar societies, Japan's motion to be nice to South Korea was remarkably easy. No exploitable technicalities about the apology being unofficial, or merely the statements of an individual leader (as was seen in Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama's apologies for war misdeeds, or Cabinet Secretary Yohei Kono's "statement" about "comfort women" — itself a euphemism for war crimes) — just a prime minister using the opportunity of an centennial to formally apologize for Japan's colonial rule of Korea, backed

up by a good-faith return of war spoils. **Why this matters:** At a time when crime, terrorism and other social ills in Japan are hastily pinned on the outside world, these honest and earnest reckonings with history are essential for Japan to move on from a fascist past and strengthen ties with the neighbors. Every country has events in its history to be sorry for. Continuous downplaying — if not outright denial by nationalistic elites — of Japan's conduct within its former empire will not foster improved relations and economic integration. This applies especially as Asia gets richer and needs Japan less, as witnessed through:

Chinese tourist visas eased

Despite a year of bashing Chinese, the government brought in plane loads of them to revitalize our retail economy. Aiming for 10 million visitors this year, Japan lowered visa thresholds for individual Chinese to the point where they came in record numbers, spending, according to the People's Daily, ¥160,000 per person in August. **Why this matters:** Wealthy Chinese gadding about while Japan faced decreasing salaries caused some bellyaching. Our media (displaying amnesia about Bubble Japan's behavior) kvetched that Chinese were patronizing Chinese businesses in Japan and keeping the money in-house (Yomiuri, May 25), weren't spending enough on tourist

destinations (Asahi, Jun. 16), were buying out Japanese companies and creating "Chapan" (Nikkei Business, Jun. 21), or were snapping up land and threatening Japan's security (Japan Times, Dec. 18). The tone changed this autumn, however, when regional tensions flared, so along with the jingoism we had Japanese politicians flying to China to smooth things over and keep the consumers coming. Let's face it: Japan was once bigger than all the other Asian economies combined. But that was then — 2010 was also the year China surpassed Japan as the world's second-largest economy. Japan can no longer ignore Asian investment. No nationalistic whining is going to change that.

Suffrage hopes suffer setback

The ruling coalition sponsored a bill last year granting suffrage in local elections to NJ with permanent residency (Zeit Gist, Feb. 23) — an uncharacteristically xenophilic move for Japan. True to form, however, nationalists came out of the rice paddies to deafen the public with scare tactics (e.g., Japan would be invaded by Chinese, who would migrate to sparsely populated Japanese islands and vote to secede, etc.). They then linked non-Japanese (NJ) suffrage with other "fin-de-Japon" pet peeves, such as foreign crime, North Korean abductions of Japanese, dual nationality — even sex education.

Bubbling under in 2010: Oita High Court rules that NJ have no automatic right to welfare benefits; pressure builds on Japan to sign the Hague Convention on Child Abduction; Tokyo police spy on Muslims and fumble their secret files to publishers; America's geopolitical bullying of Japan

Why this matters: The campaign resonated. Months after PR suffrage was moribund, xenophobes were still getting local governments to pass resolutions in opposition. Far-rightists used it as a political football in election campaigns to attract votes and portray the Democratic Party of Japan as inept. They had a point: How could the DPJ sponsor such a controversial bill and not rally behind it as criticisms arose? Why were the xenophobes basically the only voice heard during the debate? This policy blunder will be a huge setback for future efforts to promote human rights for and integration of NJ residents. over Okinawa's Futenma military base undermines the Hatoyama administration (JBC, June 1); Ibaraki Detention Center hunger strikers, and the Suraj case — in which a person dying during deportation — raise questions about Immigration Bureau procedure and accountability.

The Otaru onsen case ('99-2005)

This lawsuit followed the landmark Ana Bortz case of 1999, where a Brazilian plaintiff sued and won against a jewelry store in Hamamatsu, Shizuoka Prefecture, that denied her entry for looking foreign. Since Japan has no national law against racial discrimination, the Bortz case found that the United Nations Convention on Racial Discrimination (CERD), which Japan signed in 1995, has the force of law instead. The Otaru case (Zeit Gist, Jun. 3, 2008) (in which, full disclosure, your correspondent was one plaintiff) attempted to apply penalties not only to an exclusionary

bathhouse in Otaru, Hokkaido, but also to the Otaru city government for negligence. Results: Sapporo's district and high courts both ruled the bathhouse must pay damages to multiple excluded patrons. The city government, however, was exonerated. **Why this matters:** Although our government has repeatedly said to the U.N. that "racial discrimination" does not exist in Japan ("discrimination against foreigners" exists, but bureaucrats insist this is not covered by the CERD (ZG, Jun. 2, 2009)), the Otaru case proved it does, establishing a cornerstone for any counterargument. However, the Supreme Court in 2005 ruled

the Otaru case was "not a constitutional issue," thereby exposing the judiciary's unwillingness to penalize discrimination expressly forbidden by the Constitution. Regardless, the case built on the Bortz precedent, setting standards for NJ seeking court redress for discrimination (providing you don't sue the government). It also helped stem a tide of "Japanese only" signs spreading across the country.

Ishihara's sangokujin rant (2000)

Tokyo Gov. Shintaro Ishihara set the tone this decade with a calamitous diatribe to the Nerima Ground Self Defense Forces (ZG, Dec. 18, 2007), claiming that NJ (including "sangokujin," a derogatory term for former citizens of the Japanese Empire) were in Japan "repeatedly committing heinous crimes." Ishihara called on the SDF to round foreigners up

during natural disasters in case they rioted (something, incidentally, that has never happened). **Why this matters:** A leader of a world city pinned a putative crime wave on NJ (even though most criminal activity in Japan, both numerically and proportionately, has been homegrown (ZG, Feb. 20, 2007)) and even offered discretionary policing power to the

military, yet he has kept his office to this day. This speech made it indisputably clear that Ishihara's governorship would be a bully pulpit, and Tokyo would be his turf to campaign against crime — meaning against foreigners. This event emboldened other politicians to vilify NJ for votes.

The 2003-2005 Koizumi Cabinet

Fresh from re-election to his second term as prime minister, Junichiro Koizumi got straight down to business targeting NJ. No fewer than three Cabinet members in their opening policy statements mentioned foreign crime, one stressing that his goal was "making Japan the world's safest country again" — meaning, again,

safe from foreigners (ZG, Oct. 7, 2003). **Why this matters:** Koizumi's record toward NJ residents was dismal. Policies promulgated "for the recovery of public safety" explicitly increased the peace for *kokumin* (Japanese nationals) at the expense of NJ residents. In 2005, the Action Plan for Pre-Emptying Terrorism (ZG, May 24, 2005) portrayed *tero* as an international

phenomenon (ignoring homegrown examples), officially upgrading NJ from mere criminals to terrorists. Of course, the biggest beneficiaries of this bunker mentality were the police, who found their powers enhanced thusly:

Police crackdowns (1999-today)

After May 1999, when their Policy Committee Against Internationalization (sic) was launched, the National Police Agency found ample funding for policies targeting NJ as criminals, terrorists and "carriers of infectious diseases." From NPA posters depicting NJ as illegal laborers, members of international criminal groups and violent, heinous crooks, campaigns soon escalated to ID checks for cycling while foreign (ZG, Jun. 20, 2002), public Internet "snitch sites" (ZG, Mar. 30, 2004), increased racial profiling on the street and on public transport, security cameras in "hotbeds of foreign crime" and unscientific "foreigner indexes" applied to forensic crime scene evidence (ZG, Jan. 13, 2004).

Not only were crackdowns on visa overstayers (i.e., on crimes Japanese cannot by definition commit) officially linked to rises in overall crime, but also mandates reserved for the Immigration Bureau were privatized: Hotels were told by police to ignore the actual letter of the law (which required only tourists be checked) and review every NJ's ID at

check-in (ZG, Mar. 8, 2005). Employers were required to check their NJ employees' visa status and declare their wages to government agencies (ZG, Nov. 13, 2007). SDF members with foreign spouses were "removed from sensitive posts" (ZG, Aug. 28, 2007). Muslims and their friends automatically became al-Qaida suspects, spied on and infiltrated by the Tokyo Metropolitan Police (ZG, Nov. 9). There were also orgiastic spending frenzies in the name of international security, e.g., World Cup 2002 and the 2008 Toyako G-8 Summit (JBC, July 1, 2008). Meanwhile, NJ fingerprinting, abolished by the government in 1999 as a "violation of human rights," was reinstated with a vengeance at the border in 2007. Ultimately, however, the NPA found itself falsifying its data to keep its budgets justified — claiming increases even when NJ crime and overstaying went down (ZG, Feb. 20, 2007). Hence, power based upon fear of the foreigner had become an addiction for officialdom, and few Japanese were making a fuss because they thought it didn't affect them. They were wrong.

Why this matters: The NPA already has strong powers of search, seizure, interrogation and incarceration granted them by established practice. However, denying human rights to a segment of the population has a habit of then affecting everyone else (ZG, July 8, 2008). Japanese too are now being stopped for bicycle ID checks and bag searches under the same justifications proffered to NJ. Police security cameras — once limited to Tokyo "foreigner zones" such as Kabukicho and Roppongi — are proliferating nationwide. Policing powers are growing stronger because human rights protections have been undermined by precedents set by anti-foreigner policies. Next up: Laws preventing NJ from owning certain properties for "security reasons," more tracking of overseas money transfers, and IC-chip "gaijin cards" readable from a distance (ZG, May 19, 2009).

following international treaties; the demise of the racist Gaijin Hanzai magazine and its publisher thanks to NJ grassroots protests (ZG, Mar. 20, 2007); the Hamamatsu Sengen and other statements by local governments calling for nicer policies towards NJ (ZG, Jun. 3, 2008); the

domination of NJ wrestlers in sumo; the withering of fundamental employers of NJ, including Japan's export factories and the *eikaiwa* (English conversation school) industry (ZG, Dec. 11, 2007).

The '09 drop in the non-Japanese population

For the first time in 48 years, the number of foreigners living in Japan went down. This could be a temporary blip due to the Nikkei repatriation bribe of 2009-2010 (ZG, April 7, 2009), when the government offered goodbye money only to foreigners with Japanese blood. Since 1990, more than a million Brazilians and Peruvians of

Japanese ancestry have come here on special visas to help keep Japan's industries humming cheaply. Now tens of thousands are pocketing the bribe and going back, giving up their pensions and becoming somebody else's unemployment statistic. **Why this matters:** NJ numbers will eventually rise again, but the fact that they are going down for the first time in

generations is disastrous. For this doesn't just affect NJ — it affects everyone in Japan. A decade ago, both the U.N. and Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi stated that Japan needs 600,000 NJ a year net influx just to maintain its taxpayer base and current standard of living. Yet a decade later, things are going in exactly the opposite way. It should be no surprise: Japan has

become markedly unfriendly these past 10 years. Rampant and unbalanced NJ-bashing have shifted Japanese society's image of foreigner from "misunderstood guest and outsider" to "social bane and criminal." Why would anyone want to move here and make a life under these conditions? Japan's economic vitality depends on demographics. Yet the only thing that can

save Japan — a clear and fair policy towards immigration — is taboo for discussion (JBC, Nov. 3, 2009). Let's hope Japan next decade comes to its senses, figuring out not only how to make life here more attractive for NJ, but also how to make foreigners into Japanese.