Survey shows world less peaceful

According to the 2011 Global Peace Index (GPI) released in May, the world has become less peaceful for the third consecutive year mainly due to an increased risk of terrorism and social unrest in the Middle East and North Africa.

“The fall in this year’s Index is strongly tied to conflict between citizens and their governments; nations need to look at new ways of creating stability other than through military force,” said Steve Killelea, founder and executive chairperson of the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP).

Compiled by the Sydney-based IEP, the GPI takes into account 23 indicators, such as crime levels, military strength, and war-related deaths. “Despite a decade-long war on terrorism, the potential for terrorist acts has increased this year, offsetting small gains made in prior years,” Killelea added.

On the latest GPI, Iceland regained the top spot as the most peaceful country in the world, while Somalia was the least peaceful place. The country that showed the biggest tumble on the GPI is Libya, whose rank dropped by 83 spots to 143rd.

Despite natural disasters, Japan ranked third on the GPI, behind Iceland and New Zealand. The report showed that violent crime and homicide are rare and terrorist acts are highly unlikely in Japan.
Swiss voters to keep assisted suicide

In May, voters in the Swiss city of Zurich turned down proposals to ban assisted suicide and so-called “suicide tourism.” As long as a non-physician performs it without any vested interest in the death, assisted suicide is legal in Switzerland and has been since 1941. Yet, the Swiss are somewhat uneasy that so many foreign citizens are coming to Switzerland because assisted suicide remains illegal in their own countries.

Out of 278,000 votes cast, nearly 85% rejected a ban on assisted suicide, while some 78% opposed outlawing it for non-Swiss. The majority of Swiss are in favor of an individual’s right to decide how and when to die. On the other hand, some are against what has become known as suicide tourism when foreigners travel to Switzerland to die.

Dignitas and Exit, the two assisted suicide organizations, are based in Zurich. While Exit only helps permanent residents in Switzerland, Dignitas says it has helped 1,138 clients from France, Germany and other countries end their lives in the past 13 years.

Pro-euthanasia campaign group Dignity in Dying based in the U.K. welcomed Swiss voters' “brave decision” to turn down calls to ban assisted suicide for non-Swiss. It also said that the result would come as a relief to terminally ill people, who want the choice of an assisted death when deciding to taking their own lives.
BUSINESS

Nissan minivan chosen as next yellow cabs

Mayor Michael Bloomberg announced in May that Nissan Motor Co. has won a contract to provide New York’s new yellow cabs. The NV200 boxy small van is the Japanese automaker’s winning entry in the Taxi of Tomorrow competition to select a single vehicle to serve as the city’s taxi. Nissan beat Turkish manufacturer Karsan Otomotiv and U.S. automaker Ford Motor Co.

The 10-year contract is estimated to be worth $1 billion. Officially chosen for New York’s future taxi fleet, Nissan’s NV200 will start hitting the streets in late 2013. “It’s going to be the safest and most convenient cab the city has ever had,” Mayor Bloomberg said.

“Nissan is proud to provide the next generation of taxis for the City of New York. The NV200 taxi will give Nissan the opportunity to showcase our dedication to vehicle quality and urban mobility to more than 600,000 passengers every day,” said Carlos Tavares, chairperson of Nissan Americas.

The NV200 taxi model, which will be produced at Nissan’s plant in Cuernavaca, Mexico, features a transparent roof panel. Nissan provides taxis for Tokyo and Mexico City. As New York City has picked the Nissan minivan as its next taxi, Nissan expects a marketing boost for the brand from film and TV exposure.
Superman plans to renounce U.S. citizenship

In Action Comics’ 900th issue, which was released in April, Superman said he would renounce his U.S. citizenship. After the Iranian government brands his non-violent protest in Tehran as an act of war taken on behalf of the United States, the Man of Steel declares, “I’m tired of having my actions construed as instruments of U.S. policy.”

Superman even states, “Truth, justice, and the American way—it’s not enough anymore.” Yet, he never actually renounces his citizenship in the story. He only talks about his plan to do that.

Created by Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, Superman is a fictional superhero in publications by DC Comics. He has long been considered an American cultural icon, who constantly fights evil. A visitor from planet Krypton, Superman was raised by a Kansas farmer and his wife. His civilian alter ego is the newspaper reporter Clark Kent.

DC Comics co-publishers Jim Lee and Dan DiDio said, “In a short story in Action Comics 900, Superman announces his intention to put a global focus on his never ending battle, but he remains, as always, committed to his adopted home and his roots as a Kansas farm boy from Smallville.”
The Tree of Life wins Palme d’Or at Cannes

On May 22, the 64th Cannes Film Festival was closed in France, giving the Palme d’Or to Terrence Malick’s The Tree of Life. The long-awaited film from the American director-writer explores topics ranging from family life to the creation of universe. Two of Hollywood’s biggest stars, Brad Pitt and Sean Penn, share the same screen in this film.

The Grand Prix went to Turkish director Nuri Bilge Ceylan’s Once Upon a Time in Anatolia and Belgian filmmaking brothers Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne’s The Kid With a Bike. Danish filmmaker Nicolas Winding Refn won the directing prize for Drive.

French actor Jean Dujardin took home Cannes’ best actor award. In French filmmaker Michel Hazanavicius’ The Artist, Dujardin played a 1920s Hollywood star, whose career crumbles as talkies or short movies with sound become the norm.

American actress Kirsten Dunst picked up the best actress award for her role of a depressed woman in Danish director Lars von Trier’s Melancholia. On receiving the prize, Dunst said “I want to thank Lars for giving me the opportunity to be so brave.”

From Japan, two films were in official competition at this year’s Cannes: Naomi Kawase’s Hanezu (Hanezu No Tsuki) and Takashi Miike’s Hara-Kiri: Death of a Samurai (Ichimei). Yet, neither of them won awards.

*All information is subject to change without notice.