This week in history: April 3-9

This column profiles important historical events which took place during this week, 25 years ago, 50 years ago, 75 years ago and 100 years ago.

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25 years ago: Suharto signs IMF deal

On April 7, 1998, following three weeks of tense negotiations with International Monetary Fund (IMF) officials, the Suharto regime in Indonesia agreed to sign a revised package of economic measures in return for the resumption of US$43 billion in emergency funding.

A previous deal signed in January 1998 collapsed when the IMF suspended a US$3 billion payment to Indonesia due March 15. Jakarta was accused of failing to meet deadlines and prescriptions for the restructuring of the economy. The new agreement was identical to the one signed in January, effectively placing the Indonesian economy under IMF control. It consisted of a comprehensive plan for restructuring the finance and banking sectors, the removal of trade, taxation and other barriers facing international investors, and stringent budget guidelines.

The IMF, backed by the US, seized upon the Asian economic crisis to advance long-held plans for prying open the Indonesian economy to foreign investors and dismantling monopolies, tax concessions and trade barriers enjoyed by the Suharto family and its close business cronies.

During the ensuing standoff between the IMF and Indonesia, the US press reported that top-level meetings were taking place regularly in the White House to weigh out various options, including Suharto's removal. The prospect of a complete economic and political breakdown in Indonesia provoked alarm and divisions in ruling circles.

The Australian government warned that the IMF plan could trigger a social explosion under conditions where no viable ruling class political alternative to Suharto existed. Backed by the World Bank and other IMF critics, Australia urged the IMF to modify its stance to slow the rapid rise of unemployment and poverty.

Talks recommenced and a new agreement was eventually reached, but sharp differences remained. Even as the deal was being signed, IMF deputy managing director Stanley Fischer publicly cast doubts on Suharto's willingness to cooperate. Speaking in Tokyo after visiting Indonesia, Fischer said: "We will simply have to see if the system as a whole is capable of implementing reform... It is clear that there is a question about the commitment of the Indonesian government."

He warned that the IMF would again cut off funds if the plan was not fully carried out. "The program has specific actions and deadlines with other safeguards to monitor that actions are taken. We could not continue disbursements if conditions were not met."

Fischer's comments undermined the assurances made by chief economic minister Ginandjar Kartasasmita that Indonesia would carry out the IMF agreement "to the letter... We're following through on all of the commitments. I can confirm there will be no more monopolies," he said.

Suharto criticized previous IMF deals for their failure to restore confidence in the rupiah or reschedule the country's massive US$71 billion private debt. Without that relief, many of Indonesia's major corporations, those of the Suharto family included, were technically insolvent.

50 years ago: Picasso dies at 91

On April 8, 1973, Pablo Picasso, one of the most famous and influential artists of the 20th century, died in his sleep at his home in France, at the age of 91. His life witnessed many great upheavals and catastrophes, including two world wars, the Russian Revolution, the rise of fascism, and the Spanish Civil War. At the time of his death, Picasso was preparing works that were to be presented at the Avignon Arts Festival that coming May.

Over the course of his long career, which spanned numerous modes of expression from neo-classicism to cubism to sculpture, Picasso' greatest works expressed through the medium of art the immense contradictions and political instability of his era.

Trained by his father, who was also an artist, Picasso had mastered the classical styles of art by the time he was just 13 years old. At the turn of the century, in his early twenties, he would already begin painting some of the most sensitive and impactful pieces of his career. This "Blue Period" features works dealing with the tragic conditions of the poor and social outcasts. Among the paintings from this period include *The Old Guitarist* and *La Célestine.*

Picasso had already won fame by World War I. However, unlike many other artists who joined revolutionary movements during the upheavals of this period, Picasso never participated in any political movements. Indeed, he lived through the war, the Russian Revolution, and the rise of fascism with evident indifference, at least in public.

But in 1936 at the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War and with the thuggery of Franco's fascist forces that threatened works at the Prado Museum, Picasso finally was stirred into political action. Like many artists in this period, he mistakenly came to regard the Stalinist Communist parties as a bulwark against fascism and became a supporter of the French and Spanish Stalinist parties, though it was not until 1944 that he would officially join the French Communist Party.

It was in this time, as part of the struggle against Franco, that Picasso painted *Guernica*, his depiction of the Basque town viciously destroyed by Nazi bombing in 1937. This painting, his most clearly political, became one of the most important works of the 20th century.

After the victory of Franco in the Civil War, Picasso went into exile

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from Spain. With Franco still in power in 1973, he was never able to return to his home country, living the rest of his life mainly in France.

Picasso continued to work, embracing other mediums of art in addition to painting, particularly sculpture. Though his greatest achievements came during the heights of wars and revolutions that he experienced, he never stopped working even up to the very final hours of his life.

75 years ago: Zionist paramilitary forces carry out Deir Yassin massacre of Palestinians

On April 9, 1948, Zionist paramilitary organizations carried out a brutal massacre of Palestinians in the village of Deir Yassin, killing anywhere from 117 to 254 of the village's 600 inhabitants. The onslaught included the murder of women, children and the elderly, as well as the execution of prisoners, rapes and other crimes against humanity.

The Zionist raid took place as the British were preparing to leave Palestine, which they had ruled since the end of World War I, as part of the dismantling of their colonial empire. The United Nations, dominated by American imperialism, had mandated that Palestine would be split along ethnic lines, with the creation of a Jewish state. This had provoked substantial opposition from the Palestinians who faced displacement.

In the hostilities, the Zionist groups increasingly turned to indiscriminate violence against civilians. While there had been armed clashes between Arab nationalist and Zionist organizations in April, Deir Yassin was in an area covered by a peace agreement.

Despite this, the Zionist militias Irgun and the Stern gang plotted an assault on the village, in collaboration with other organizations including the Haganah, the primary Zionist military force. The nominal purpose was to secure control over the villages in the approaches to Jerusalem. This was part of a bid to establish the military supremacy required for the defeat of the Arab nationalists and the establishment of an Israeli state.

When the 130 Zionist fighters entered the village, they encountered some limited resistance. Immediately, they began going from house to house. Grenades were thrown into many dwellings, while villagers were marched out of their homes.

Mohamed Aref Samir, a schoolteacher in the village and survivor of the attack, later stated:

"From 5:00 a.m. until about 11:00 a.m. there was a systematic slaughter, with them going from house to house. From the eastern edge of the village nobody came out unhurt. Whole families were slaughtered. At 6:00 in the morning they caught 21 young people from the village, about 25 years old, they stood them in a row, near where the post-office is today, and executed them.

"Many women who watched this horrifying spectacle went crazy, and some are in institutions to this day. A pregnant woman, who was coming back with her son from the bakery, was murdered and her belly was smashed, after her son was killed before her eyes. In one of the conquered village houses a Bren machine gun was set up, which shot everyone who got in its line of fire."

Aside from the stated military purposes of the occupation, the clear aim was to terrify the Palestinians to force them from the land. The Deir Yassin massacre thus constituted a clear example of the ethnic cleansing that was at the core of the establishment of Israel. The leader of Irgun was Menachem Begin, who would go on to serve as the sixth Israeli prime minister.

100 years ago: Harvard University bans racial and religious discrimination

On April 9, 1923, Harvard University's Board of Overseers adopted policies against discrimination in campus room and board, and in admissions. In a rebuke to Harvard President A. Lawrence Lowell, the board ruled that blacks could live on campus and dine with whites in university facilities, and that no quotas could be set for members of any race or religion.

In 1921, Lowell had prohibited six blacks admitted to the class of 1925 from moving into university housing, which was required of all first-year students, forcing them to live off campus. He also banned them from dining on university premises with whites. Lowell's racist act prompted the students to fight back by circulating petitions and bringing information about the exclusion to the press. This developed into an anti-discrimination campaign by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

Lowell had also limited Jews to 15 percent of incoming freshmen. Jews at the time made up about 20 percent of undergraduates.

In a letter to the father of one of the black freshmen, an alumnus, Lowell wrote, "We owe to the colored man the same opportunities for education that we do to the white man … but we do not owe to him to force him and the white man into social relations that are not, or may not be, mutually congenial."

In 1922, the *New York Times* published an exchange of letters between Lowell and a Jewish alumnus, in which Lowell justified his policy limiting the number of Jews as a method of combating antisemitism. "The anti-Semitic feeling among the students is increasing," he wrote, "and it grows in proportion to the increase in the number of Jews. If the number [of Jews] should become 40 percent of the student body the race feeling would become intense. When, on the other hand, the number of Jews was small, the race antagonism was small also."

In reversing Lowell's admission policy, the Board of Overseers wrote that if it were "now adopted here as a means of selection, [it] would inevitably be regarded as a covert device to eliminate those deemed racially or socially undesirable."

The board also overturned Lowell's exclusion of blacks from living and dining on campus. It declared, "all members of the freshman class shall reside and board in the freshman halls … nor shall any man be excluded by reason of his color," but added, in what was widely viewed as a concession to white students and alumni from the Jim Crow south, "in the application of this rule, men of the white and colored races shall not be compelled to live and eat together … ."

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