



U.S. Crackdown Throws Lives into Disarray

By William Fisher

NEW YORK, MAY 3 (IPS) - U.S. law enforcement agencies and prosecutors are using a term that has no standing in law but nonetheless can turn lives upside down, ruin careers, and place people in a long-term legal limbo somewhere between innocence, 'suspect' and 'target'. The term is 'person of interest'. It seems to have appeared in the 1970s and, while national statistics are not available, it reportedly is being applied hundreds of times each year to aid criminal investigations across the country.

Law enforcement officers say the phrase is neutral -- it could mean potential suspect, it could mean witness. But some legal experts say the term is intentionally vague to encourage the public and the

media to equate 'person of interest' with 'suspect'. "Unfortunately, this practice will continue as long as it's a win-win for almost everyone involved," said Brian Foley, a professor at the Florida Coastal School of Law in Jacksonville, Florida.

"The government wins by appearing to make progress in the investigation. The public wins by feeling safer, believing that someone has been identified and is being watched. The media win by having a person, rather than an event, to write about. The only loser is the person of interest," Foley told IPS. Outcomes have been varied for those labeled as persons of interest. Last year, two bodies were found on a dirt driveway in Hillsborough County, Florida. Detectives began searching for an ex-convict with a lengthy

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U.N. Highlights World's Under-Reported News Stories

By Thalif Deen

UNITED NATIONS, May 3 (IPS) - The late Tarzie Vittachi, a former deputy executive director of the U.N. children's agency UNICEF, once recounted the story of an African official who walked into his office for friendly advice on how to get Western media to cover stories having a profound effect on the continent. "My prime minister is going to address the U.N. General Assembly on major social and economic issues crucial to the survival of Africa. How can I get the story in to the New York Times?," Vittachi recalled, what the man said.

"Shoot him-- and you will get a front-page story," replied Vittachi, a onetime columnist for 'Newsweek' magazine and legendary newspaper editor in his home country of Sri Lanka. Vittachi had long argued that most Western media rarely provided in-depth coverage of issues such as poverty, hunger, maternal mortality, and debilitating diseases plaguing more than two-thirds of the U.N.'s 191 member states. These issues just weren't "sexy" enough for most newsrooms, he said. Shashi Tharoor, U.N. under-secretary-general for communications and public information, subscribes to a similar point of view. "There is still a tendency for a narrow range of stories to grab the headlines," Tharoor said Tuesday as he unveiled the U.N.'s annual list of the world's 10 most under-reported stories.

The list, released on World Press Freedom Day, highlighted 2004 stories that "the world should hear more about" but were ignored or played down by

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Despite Advances, Malaria Still a Major Killer in Africa

By Gustavo Capdevila

GENEVA, May 3 (IPS) - Despite the promising advances made in the prevention and treatment of malaria around the world, the disease continues to represent a major challenge in Africa, where the overwhelming majority of deaths now take place. The 2005 World Malaria Report, released Tuesday by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), notes that the efforts made in recent years have begun to bear fruit.

Asia and Africa have experienced a

20 percent decrease in the incidence of the disease in the last five years, noted Allan Schapira, coordinator of the policy and strategy team of the Roll Back Malaria (RBM) initiative. Yet Africa continues to bear the brunt of the malaria burden worldwide. According to statistics compiled by Mdicins Sans Frontiers, of the roughly two million people who die of malaria every year, 90 percent are African children under the age of five. The disease claims some 3,000 lives every day in sub-Saharan Africa alone.

The incidence of malaria rose in

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criminal record. The ex-convict was labeled a person of interest but later cleared in the double homicide.

But not all cases are so clear-cut. Steven Hatfill, a former researcher at the Army's infectious disease research laboratory at Fort Detrick in the state of Maryland, has been under FBI scrutiny since 2001 anthrax attacks killed five people and sickened 17 others. John Ashcroft, then attorney general, publicly called him a 'person of interest' in the anthrax probe but he has never been charged with a crime.

The former Army researcher has denied involvement in the attacks, in which the anthrax spores were mailed to victims in media and government offices. He has claimed that he was fired from a job because of media coverage of the case. His apartment and rubbish bins have been searched several times. He has been under 24-hour surveillance. Hatfill sued Ashcroft and the FBI, accusing the government of unfairly singling him out for "a campaign of harassment." He also sued the New York Times Co. and columnist Nicholas Kristof, claiming the paper defamed him in a series of columns that identified him as the likely culprit.

The lawsuit said Kristof identified him as the anthrax killer to "light a fire" under investigators in their probe of the anthrax-spore mailings. No one has ever been charged in the investigation. At the end of September 2003 -- nearly two years after the attacks -- the new head of the FBI anthrax investigation said it was troubling that top law enforcement officials had publicly branded Hatfill as a 'person of interest'. "The anthrax investigation has been beset by a number of leaks," he said, adding that this was "unfortunate."

Meanwhile, Hatfill remains unemployed, and perhaps unemployable. Critics of the 'person of interest' label often cite another high-profile case from 1996 as evidence of the damage the term can do. That case involved Richard Jewell, who was working as a security guard at the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta, Georgia. A number of legal authorities and civil liberties groups see what happened to Jewell as part of a disturbing pattern of behavior by law enforcement agencies.

Jewell spotted a suspicious object and reported it to police. Before it could be retrieved, it exploded, killing a spectator and injuring others. Jewell was hailed as a hero whose quick thinking summoned authorities and prevented the bomb from killing or injuring many more. TV networks and newspapers interviewed him and it was hinted he might have a bright future in law enforcement.

But only three days after the explosion, The Atlanta Journal-Constitution newspaper published a story saying police were investigating the possibility that Jewell had planted the bomb. He was designated a person of interest. FBI agents interviewed him and searched his apartment as journalists and TV crews looked on. Jewell told reporters he was innocent. But Janet Reno, the U.S. attorney general at the time, declined to clear him. It was not until the following October that a federal judge said he thought Jewell was not a suspect. Prosecutors then told Jewell that he was no longer under investigation.

In August 1997, a year after the event, Reno publicly

apologised to Jewell and deplored the FBI leak to the media that branded him a suspect in public. But by that time Jewell had lived for months in fear of being arrested for a crime he did not commit. Having been cleared, he sued for and won at least hundreds of thousands of dollars in settlements -- the exact amount has not been disclosed -- claiming his reputation was forever ruined.

Labeling someone as a person of interest is "sending a signal without saying the words," said Jewell's attorney, L. Lin Wood of Atlanta. "No individual's name should be publicly discussed simply because they're being investigated. A lot of innocent people are investigated." Even so, the term became more widely used after the Jewell case.

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major television networks and other commercial news media. Tharoor said the stories included: progress towards peace in Somalia; the horrendous problem of obstetric fistula, a tragic blind spot in health care services for women; the humanitarian crisis in northern Uganda; the disarming of former combatants in Sierra Leone; and growth in the number of human rights institutions, with the emergence of more than 100 in recent years.

Also overlooked, he said, were: the scant chances for small farmers in Cameroon and other poor countries to get a fair price for their produce; Grenada's struggles to recover from the devastation of Hurricane Ivan, a story forgotten in the wake of the Asian tsunami; continuing violence against women; using development as an effective alternative to warfare to curb illicit drugs; and saving the environment to preserve potential cures for a catalogue of diseases.

"The mainstream media ignore or downplay certain stories for specific reasons," Tharoor told IPS. "One, because, in the opinion of editors, they don't sell; two, because they seem too remote to the concerns of the readership, viewership, or listenership; and three, because they aren't news -- i.e., they aren't sufficiently in the 'man bites dog' or 'if it bleeds, it leads' categories." "Our counter-argument would be that the audience will become interested if the stories are written in a persuasive way that showcases their relevance," Tharoor added.

What sells is highly debatable, he argued, as is the notion that only violence and scandal make for news. "Why should the Asian tsunami be more newsworthy than the victims of Hurricane Ivan in Grenada? Why isn't the horror of fistula caused by childbirth of interest to every woman in the world -- and every man, too, since we are all produced by childbirth?" he asked. Without media coverage, many "quieter" emergencies simply would not exist for those in donor governments who decide how to spend aid budgets, Tharoor said.

"Goodness knows our ten stories this year are compelling but wars and major disasters, e.g. Iraq and the tsunami this year, will trump long simmering issues on a given news day, and this has been a brutally competitive news year," he said. "It's a tough call for news editors, and one that we understand."

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But if stories like those we are highlighting this year are to get the oxygen they need from public and political attention, we have to find ways of bringing them to the surface," he added. "Our list of 10 each year is a small step among many others in that direction."

Asked whether it would be helpful to have a Third World page focusing on the problems of developing nations, as a London newspaper did years ago, Tharoor said: "Having a Third World page implies a kind of ghettoisation of news that is unfair to the intrinsic merits of their story." "Worse, it means that those who do not have a pre-conceived self-image of being interested in the Third World would simply skip the page, whereas we believe these stories are of interest to everyone," he added.

+ U.N.: "10 STORIES THE WORLD SHOULD HEAR MORE ABOUT"
(<http://www.un.org/events/tenstories/>)

Vieira de Mello "En Route to Baghdad"

By Ulysses de la Torre

NEW YORK, May 3 (IPS) -- Summarizing a person's life is always a delicate task, and the balancing act required to do justice to a person's legacy is an endeavor not to be taken lightly. When the person in question is Sergio Vieira de Mello, the task is all the more formidable and Brazilian journalist Simone Duarte has risen to the challenge in her new film, "En Route to Baghdad," an hour-long documentary featured last week at New York City's Tribeca Film Festival.

Duarte, a former reporter for Globo TV who also worked for Vieira de Mello at the beginning of the U.N.'s involvement in East Timor, has created a posthumous profile of the man that many in the United Nations thought not only represented the world body at its best, but would eventually succeed Secretary-General Kofi Annan. The film, which was independently produced, has won Duarte the silver medal award from the United Nations Correspondents Association.

"I had the chance to see him in action, but at the same time I wanted to do a film, a documentary, that showed him throughout his career and through his friends and colleagues," she told IPS. "It was very important for me to show the kind of situation that the U.N. finds when it is in the field, in different countries, what the reaction is of the people, and the post-conflict resolution." The process Duarte and her team went through to make the film reflects the extent of his reach: they interviewed more than 60 people in nine countries, including his native Brazil, in retracing the path that led him to his untimely death as U.N. envoy to Iraq on August 19, 2003. From world leaders to former refugees to his family and former colleagues, the film shows how his legacy continues to shape human rights, community development and international relations.

The movie even takes a detour to North Korea, where King Sihanouk of Cambodia keeps a palace on the outskirts of Pyongyang. King Sihanouk had befriended Vieira de Mello - or "Sergio" as he was known by all - while he oversaw the repatriation of 300,000 Cambodian refugees from Thailand in the early 1990s on behalf of the U.N. Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC). "He opened a country to us that is completely closed to the world just because we were doing a film about him," said Duarte of the North Korea trip. "So even after his death, he was breaking down barriers."

In the opening sequence of the film, Duarte takes us back to the day Kofi Annan officially announced Sergio's assignment to Iraq. From there, she takes us through the three places that most defined his work leading up to the Iraq appointment: Mozambique, Cambodia and East Timor. "In general, people unfamiliar with Africa are very skeptical and pessimistic about the prospects of Africa bridging all its gaps," Sergio said in an October 1999 interview. "But I can see democratic patterns taking shape."

From his days as a student in the Sorbonne up to his appointment as the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, Sergio frequently talked of the need to infuse human rights into the implementation of international security and development issues. Graca Machel, Mozambique's former minister of education, speaks in the film about her commitment to this approach. "It is of paramount importance to combine development with those human values lying within us," she says. "Sergio was committed to that. He wanted to enhance man's dignity and improve the quality of one's life regardless of boundaries."

One facet of his personality that is a continuous topic of conversation in several of the interviews was his insistence in talking to everyone, even those commonly deemed to be undesirable. In one segment, Dennis McNamara, the U.N.'s human rights director in Cambodia in 1992, recalls a journalist who once remarked that Sergio's biography should be entitled, "War Criminals I Have Known." Duarte attributes this aspect of Sergio's personality to a certain "Brazilian openness," but in Cambodia, it also derived from an intellectual curiosity - Saloth Sar, better known as Pol Pot, along with many other high-ranking Khmer Rouge members, were fellow alumni of the Sorbonne.

According to the film, this drove Sergio in his efforts in Cambodia to explore how two people who had come from the same institution could have been driven to such opposite ends. By the end of the film, we are brought back to the themes underlining the opening sequence: Iraq, the circumstances of Sergio's death and its implications for the future. The lack of a clear mandate for the U.N. role in Iraq figures prominently in many of the discussions Duarte shows us, as does the ongoing friction between the Bush Administration and the United Nations.

"The missing person in this film is Ambassador Paul Bremer, who was really completely ignorant of the U.N., Arab cultures and operational diplomacy. Sergio was very well

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versed in two of those," former U.S. Ambassador Richard Holbrooke told IPS. Holbrooke, who is also featured in the film, added that while Bremer did listen to Sergio, he didn't listen enough and that Bremer frequently "confused himself with Douglas MacArthur," ultimately resulting in "the worst diplomatic performance I've ever seen."

Duarte said that attempts to interview Ambassador Bremer for the film went unanswered. Holbrooke continued, "Since the U.S. is the host nation, the largest contributor, we are benefited by a stronger U.N. while we have to recognize that the U.N. is not always going to do exactly what Washington wants because the U.N. is a collection of 191 members. We have two choices. Weaken the U.N. and it becomes more anti-American. Strengthen the U.N. with adequate funding and it will be better for American foreign policy - and I speak as an unapologetic American here - the U.N. serves American national interests to a good extent and Sergio certainly proved that".

What he was doing was in the U.S. national interest, but he was also serving the U.N." In the film's finale, we are treated to a flurry of commentary regarding the implications of Sergio's death. Bernard Kouchner, founder of Doctors without Borders and U.N. representative to Kosovo in 1999, among many other positions, summarizes Sergio's legacy. "What's changed? A certain innocence has been lost. In the face of extremism and terrorism, which for me has nothing to do with Islam, we can no longer rely solely on the image of the U.N. flag. We are all targets," he says.

"What hasn't changed? If you claim to free a nation you can't use any means. To resort to sheer force, it has never worked. At times up in the battlefield, sure, the strongest can win, but then you need to make peace. And it's a lot more difficult to make peace now in Iraq. You need to deal with civilians, the international community, the U.N., the Security Council. It's a hard task but Sergio excelled at it." "Sergio knew that the U.N. was not perfect, Sergio knew that the U.N. hadn't achieved its potential yet, and that it has its bad parts and that it has its good parts, but he believed in it," said Duarte. "He believed in multilateralism." *En Route to Baghdad* will be available in the U.N. Bookstore and other outlets shortly.

First Regular Bus Service on the Earth's Highest Point

*By Akhilesh Upadhyay **

KATHMANDU, May 3 (IPS) - History was made this week as China-controlled Tibet opened the doors of its once forbidden capital to ordinary Nepalis, with the launch of the first trans-Himalayan bus service linking Kathmandu with Lhasa. Early Sunday, Nepali and Chinese officials flagged off the Lhasa-bound state-owned Sajha Yatayat luxury bus with 40 passengers on board as scores of onlookers waved and clapped. The 945-kilometer long journey, for a mere 70 U.S. dollars, traverses

the Himalayas by way of the incredible Arniko Highway that connects Kathmandu with Lhasa - with the bus, specially built for highland travel by Benz and Chinese company Yaxing, arriving in the Tibetan capital 30 hours later. "I am very excited," Sudarshan Karki, a Nepali businessman, with a briefcase in hand, told IPS He was wearing a light-red suit and a broad smile. "Nepal-Tibet ties are finally getting their due recognition."

Currently, the two cities are connected by Air China flights. But air travel is much more expensive and is operational only six months a year because of the high altitude and weather hazards. With the completion of the China-Lhasa railway, the bus service will receive a further boost as Nepal's prospect as a transit route for trade between India and China increases. Nepal and Tibet have shared centuries-old cultural and business ties. The high-altitude passes in the Himalayas were important as salt trading routes. The traders from Tibet would carry salt from the salt lakes on yaks through the Himalayas before transferring it to mules, on arriving in warmer areas. They would then ferry the salt down south to Nepalese settlements. When they returned, the traders carried with them food grains and other supplies that were not found in the Tibetan plateau.

The trade continued right through the year except in the winter when the passes were buried deep in the snow and movements became impossible. Currently, Nepal-Tibet trade is based on a system of international barter though two sides agreed in 1992 to promote cash trade as well. That year, an agreement was signed between national Nepal Rastra Bank and the People's Bank of China for encouraging cash transactions. The Nepal Bank Ltd. and the Bank of China, Tibet branch, have been authorised to open letters of credit and promote trade between the two sides through banking channels.

Already, tourism entrepreneurs on either side of the Himalayas are excited about what could perhaps be a regular passenger bus service on the highest point on earth. "The closest comparison you can make is the romance of trans-Siberian railway that you read about in classical Russian literature," said Pemba Sherpa, an entrepreneur. "It is going to be one great experience, travelling first through the Himalayas and then the vast Tibetan plateau in bitterly cold weather, which is only warm in summer."

Bikash Rauniar, a photojournalist who traveled to Tibet four years ago, remembers the long journey he made at that time. "We made three night stops before arriving in Lhasa. Nelam, a three-hour ride from the Nepal- China border, was the first point, followed by Lhatse and Sigatse," he said. The Tibetan settlements were acutely short of water and the journey was very tiring," reminisced Rauniar as he took pictures of a mother and daughter waiting outside the bus. "But the travel was worth it for the sheer visual pleasure and the pictures I was able to take. It was strange - the Himalayas look so high up from this side (from the south in Nepal). In Tibet, they are at eye-level."

Following its consolidation of power in 1949, the Chinese communists invaded Tibet and illegally annexed it to China, and giving it the misnomer of an "autonomous region". Since

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the brutal invasion, more than a million Tibetans have lost their lives. Unknown numbers are in prison for crimes such as peacefully opposing China's rule over the once sovereign country. The people of Tibet rose up against the brutal Chinese occupation in 1959. This resulted in a mass slaughter of innocent Tibetans, including hundreds, perhaps thousands, who were simply trying to escape by crossing the Himalayas into Nepal or India.

Since the strengthening of trade ties between Kathmandu and Beijing, the Nepali government stopped granting legal refugee status to Tibetans who had arrived from Tibet after December 1989. Now Tibetans arriving in Nepal are considered illegal immigrants if they do not have a visa and many have been forcibly deported back across the border. According to human rights activists, it has become increasingly difficult for Tibetans from central Tibet, particularly Lhasa, to obtain passports in recent years, although it is still possible for them to do so if they have good connections with well-placed officials or are able to afford bribes to pass onto a "middleman" who can obtain access to officials. A Tibetan from Lhasa who is now in exile told the London-based Tibetan Information

Network: "All applicants for passports and visas are screened for their background and present loyalty to China. Moreover, participation and support for the Tibetan cause is the deciding factor; one family member with a record is sufficient to create problems for the entire family."

If you are a Tibetan holding Indian or Nepali identity card, think twice before jumping on that bus to Lhasa. As far as I know, China regards us as Chinese (overseas Chinese) and may very well see our visit as returning back to the Motherland," said an exiled Tibetan, who only wanted to be identified as Champa. "They (the Chinese) certainly will not recognise your identity card and most probably will not issue a visa on it either. But you will have no trouble getting into Tibet, the only problem is your conscience, can you accept yourself as a Chinese? Can you accept Tibet as being part of China?" he asked. "Whether you'll be allowed to get out of China is another matter." Meanwhile, as the official function got under way to mark the historic occasion on Sunday, Ma Chin Xin, the Chinese driver who had drove the bus from Tibet the previous night, got busy surveying the 40-seater bus, its cargo hold, and the engine.

Africa during the 1980s and 1990s as a result of increased resistance to the most commonly used medicines to treat it and to the insecticides used to kill the mosquitoes that spread it. These decades also witnessed a deterioration in the provision of health care services in the region. Between 350 and 500 million people around the world contract malaria every year. Over 41 percent of the world's population -- some 3.2 billion people living in 107 countries -- face the risk of infection.

The Roll Back Malaria Global Partnership was launched in 1998 by WHO, UNICEF, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank. Its goal is to halve the burden of the disease by 2010. The fight against malaria requires ongoing and significant sources of funding. An estimated 3.2 billion dollars annually are needed to confront the disease in the 82 countries where the majority of malaria deaths take place. Jon Liden, head of communications at the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, told IPS that his agency will contribute one billion dollars to anti-malaria efforts over the next two years.

The Fund allocates 55 percent of the total available financial resources to the fight against HIV/AIDS, 13 percent to tuberculosis, and over one-third to efforts to combat malaria. The disease costs Africa an estimated 12 billion dollars in gross domestic product (GDP) annually, and increases poverty by reducing productivity and social stability, said Liden. Nevertheless, he said he was hopeful about the possibility of defeating the disease thanks to the emergence of new prevention and treatment methods.

Chloroquine, formerly the most widely used and economical antimalarial drug, is no longer effective in most of the world because of the resistance to it that has developed. In its place, new artemisinin-based combination therapies have proven effective in saving lives, although they are considerably more costly. Another successful initiative has been the distribution of insecticide-treated mosquito nets, a highly effective means

of preventing the disease.

The agencies that make up the RBM partnership maintain that the price of artemisinin-based combination therapy (ACT), which ranges between 75 cents and 2.75 dollars per treatment, is prohibitive for many of the neediest families. But for its part, Mdicins Sans Frontires (MSF) states that treatment with ACT takes just three days and costs as little as 60 cents for a child and two dollars for an adult.

The effectiveness of these new treatments was demonstrated in a high transmission area in Angola, where hospital admissions for severe malaria were reduced by 25 percent in the year following the introduction of ACT. Over the same period, mortality decreased by 75 percent in comparison with the previous year, the group noted. In the face of this evidence, most countries in sub-Saharan Africa have changed their national treatment policies and switched from older, inadequate treatments to ACT-based therapy.

But the problem is still far from being solved, according to MSF, because effective diagnosis and treatment are still available to only a tiny proportion of those in need. For MSF, the major problems in tackling malaria are not technical, medical or scientific, because it is completely feasible to produce and distribute enough ACTs for the treatment to reach all of the people in need. However, this will only happen if there is urgent and sufficient political action, the group maintains. For their part, the U.N. agencies involved in the RBM initiative acknowledge that a lack of funds and national capacity to effectively carry out anti-malaria programmes are two major obstacles to the global implementation of prevention and treatment measures.

+WORLD MALARIA REPORT 2005

(http://rbm.who.int/wmr2005/html/exsummary_en.htm)

+ ROLL BACK MALARIA (RBM) INITIATIVE (<http://rbm.who.int/cgi-bin/rbm/rbportal/custom/rbm/home.do>)

NEWSBRIEFS

Argentina's Prison Brutality Focus of Amnesty Visit

BUENOS AIRES, May 3 (IPS) - Ongoing complaints of police brutality and violations of basic rights in provincial prisons in northwestern Argentina prompted human rights watchdog Amnesty International to send a delegation to this South American country, to begin a fact-finding tour to four provinces on Wednesday. "We are concerned because the authorities have been aware of these reports for several years, but the situation is just getting worse, and no preventive measures have been taken", Virginia Shoppe, Amnesty International researcher on Argentina, told IPS Tuesday, the day before the mission heads to the provinces of Jujuy, Salta, Santiago del Estero and Mendoza. Shoppe said the London-based human rights group documented reports of mistreatment and torture of demonstrators and labour activists who were detained by the police in Salta and Jujuy in 2000 and 2001, as well as death threats and harassment of lawyers working on human rights cases. However, no investigation was ever launched, and cases of police brutality continue to be reported, she added. A similar situation has been seen in Santiago del Estero, where incidents of police and para-police violence against rural activists and poor farmers have been denounced. The Amnesty delegates will meet with the governors of each province, human rights lawyers, social and community activists, victims of police brutality, and families of victims...

Much-Maligned DDT Still Has Supporters

MEXICO CITY, May 3 (IPS) - DDT is one of the 12 substances known as persistent organic pollutants that the international community has targeted for urgent elimination. But this insecticide, which before falling out of favour prevented millions of deaths and inspired a Nobel Prize, may yet have a long life ahead of it. For many countries, DDT (dichlorodiphenyl-trichloroethane) is still an "effective and affordable" weapon against malaria, according to United Nations agencies. Malaria is transmitted through mosquito bites, infecting 300 million people worldwide each year, and killing more than a million people, especially in Africa. Latin America feels the impact of the disease as well. More than a third of the region's population lives in at-risk zones, and each year 1.4 million people, mostly children, are infected. According to figures from the Pan-American Health Organisation (PAHO), more than 105 million dollars are spent annually to combat malaria. Some observers attribute the devastating effect of malaria to the limitations imposed by governments and environmentalists on the use of DDT, a broad-spectrum insecticide, patented in 1937 by Swiss chemist Paul Mueller. The effectiveness and long-lasting properties of DDT prevented massive crop losses and staved off hunger in developing countries, so much so that Mueller won the 1948 Nobel Prize in Medicine. But the world was put on guard against DDT in the 1970s when some studies

suggested that it is carcinogenic, leads to premature births, contaminates food and causes neurological, respiratory and cardiovascular harm to the human body...

Africa's 'New Hope' Wins Prestigious Award

BRUSSELS, May 3 (IPS) - Ousmane Sy, this year's winner of the King Baudouin International Development Prize, has given new hope to Africa through the decentralisation programme in his country Mali, judges say. Sy, a development specialist, was awarded the 2004-2005 King Baudouin International Development Prize in Brussels Tuesday. The King Baudouin International Development Prize was created in 1978 and is awarded every two years to a person or organisation making a substantial contribution to the development of countries in the southern hemisphere or to solidarity between industrialised nations and developing nations. In awarding the prize this year, the King Baudouin Foundation says it recognised the vital role Sy has played in developing future peace, stability and prosperity in Africa. The foundation was set up in the name of the king of Belgium. Described by the selection committee as a man of vision and a pioneer of action in relation to governance in Africa, Sy is a key figure in decentralisation and reform of governance in the West African country. As co-founder of the 'Governance in Africa network' set up in 1994 to enable West African countries to share experiences and learn from processes implemented by other states, Sy has used the traditional communication network of village elders to reach the country's 11,000 villages to build a consensus for democratic and locally-based governing systems...

Sierra Leone's Libel Laws Under Fire

FREETOWN, May 3 (IPS) - On the occasion of World Press Freedom Day (May 3), Sierra Leonean journalists aren't so much celebrating media freedom as girding themselves for a legal battle over press rights. "We think the time is now to challenge in court the seditious libel laws which hang as a sword of Damocles over our heads", says Ibrahim Ben Kargbo, president of the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ). These laws are inconsistent with the constitution of the republic which provides for freedom of expression. The legislation in question, contained in the Public Order Act of 1965, criminalizes the publication, distribution and even possession of material that may cause public disaffection against the president and other officials. Breach of the act is punishable by imprisonment of up to seven years and, in the case of newspaper owners and publishers, a possible ban on their publications. Since its promulgation, this colonial-era law has been used by governments of various stripes - both elected civilian administrations and military regimes - to silence those who asked uncomfortable questions about leaders of the day...