

commentary

from other pens...

When U.N. comes, hungry told to hide

Humanitarian relief organizations routinely monitor food deliveries to needy countries to ensure they reach the intended recipients. Until recently, one country has been exempted from these procedures: North Korea.

A senior administration official gave this account the other day when discussing how North Korea deals with U.N. World Food Program officials assigned to monitor food deliveries:

If officials wish to visit a site, they must provide the North Koreans with six days notice. Surprise inspections, the norm in virtually all other recipient countries, are forbidden. This generates concerns that the food is being diverted to pro-regime North Koreans.

In advance of any visit, the Pyongyang authorities warn the local population, often by loudspeaker, that only those citizens who are well-fed and well-dressed are allowed to appear in public.

The WFP is not permitted to bring its own Korean-speaking translators to the site. When a WFP monitor interviews a North Korean to inquire about food deliveries and nutrition levels, the monitor must rely on a government-supplied translator. It is never clear to the monitor whether the translation is accurate.

There are no assurances that, when the WFP makes a request to visit a site, it will be approved. Indeed, the North Koreans have decreed 25 percent of the country's 206 counties to be off limits.

The senior official, who asked that his name not be used, said when the WFP decided to start helping North Korea in 1995, the agency waived normal procedures because the needs were so great.

The situation worsened during the latter half of the decade, reaching crisis proportions during the 1996-98 famine; millions are believed to have died.

John Powell, former Asia director of the WFP, spoke to a House International Relations Committee hearing last spring. "We are not satisfied because we are not able to make random spot checks," he said. "We are not satisfied because we are not able to bring Korean speakers into North Korea as WFP staff members."

Weeks later, the Bush administration decided to tighten its criteria for donations for North Korea. Approval of food deliveries would be linked to North Korea's willingness to permit an expansion of independent monitoring and on competing food needs elsewhere.

Administration officials insist that the new criteria, announced last June, are unrelated to Pyongyang's nuclear weapons programs. They note that the policy change was made public about a month before the administration became aware of Pyongyang's secret program to develop uranium-based nuclear weapons. The official policy is to keep decisions on food relief free of political considerations.

U.S. food deliveries totaled 155,000 metric tons last year, but there is uncertainty about future shipments. North Korea has not responded to the U.S. demands for improved monitor access.

Budgetary considerations are another issue. The administration has asked for \$1.18 billion for food relief worldwide for 2003. If Congress takes no action, the administration would then have only \$900 million at its disposal, the same as the previous year's appropriation. This would mean that far fewer mouths would get fed at a time when the needs — especially in Africa — are increasing.

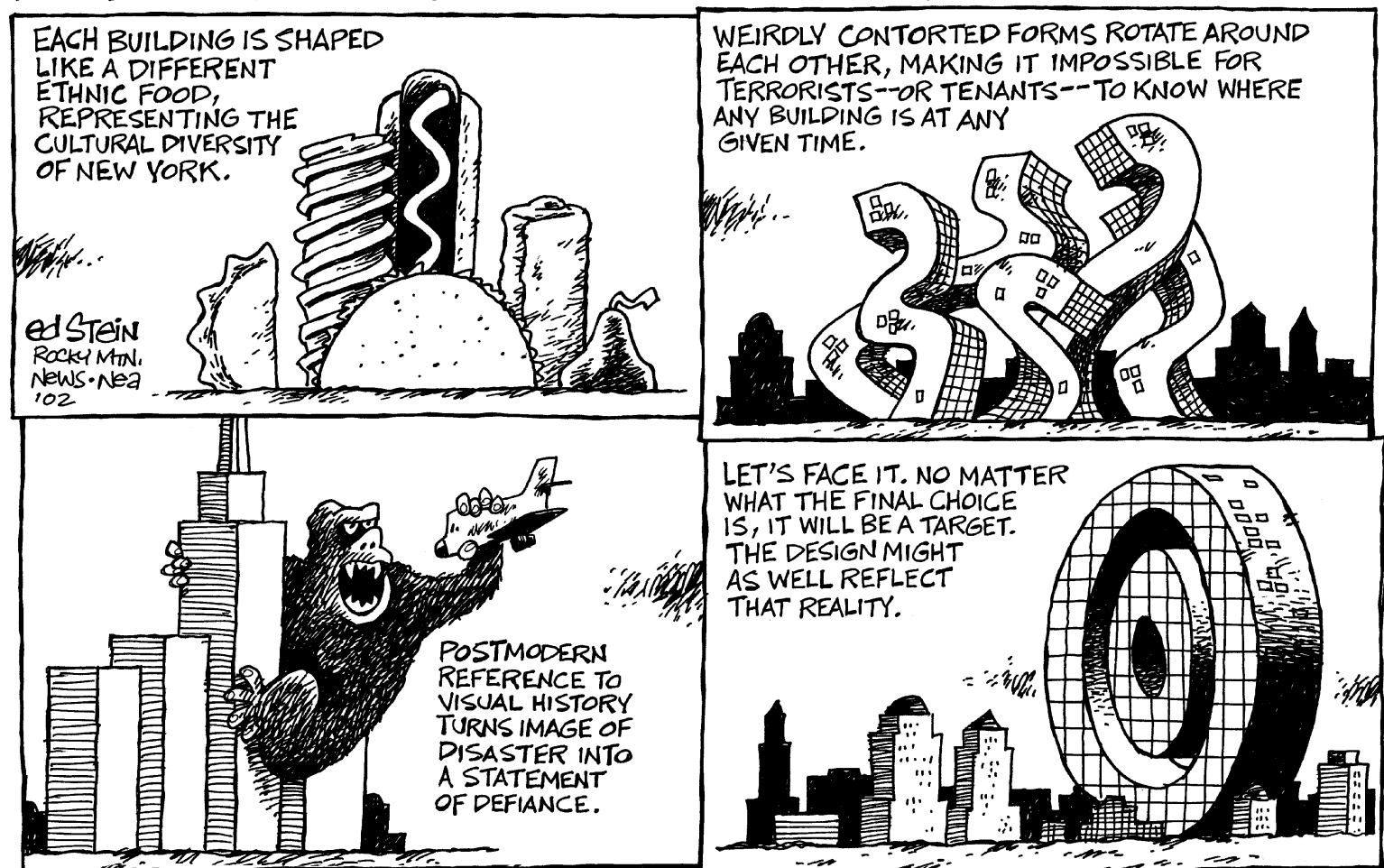
In Ethiopia, there is a developing food catastrophe, with outside needs estimated at 1.5 million tons, dwarfing even North Korea's requirements. Starvation looms in six other African countries: Lesotho, Swaziland, Mozambique, Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

So where does all this leave North Korea? It's very much up in the air, says State Department spokesman Richard Boucher.

"We certainly want to see the monitoring questions resolved," Boucher says. "If they're not resolved, that would become a factor in determining how to allocate our resources."

EDITOR'S NOTE: George Gedda has covered foreign affairs for The Associated Press since 1968.

DIDN'T LIKE THE SECOND SET OF DESIGNS FOR THE WTC EITHER? CHECK THESE OUT:



Watch for flood damaged vehicles

Dear Attorney General Stovall:

I will soon be shopping for a used car. However, I have heard that flood-damaged cars are sometimes brought into the state to be sold after floods occur in other states. Attorney General Stovall, could you give me some guidelines as to what to look for when shopping so that I can avoid a flood-damaged car?

Dear Kansas Consumer:

It is true that flood-damaged vehicles have been brought into

Kansas following natural disasters in other states. Flood-damaged cars will usually have a musty or sewage odor, or a strong scent of air fresheners that attempt to mask the odor. You should check for rust, sand, silt, mud or salt deposits under the spare tire and under the seats, check nooks and crannies for mud and sand, and be sure to check the oil dip stick for signs that water has gotten into the system and contaminated it. These areas are often missed by crews that clean up flood-damaged vehicles.

Always have the vehicle inspected by a qualified mechanic. Ask to see the title. The state where the car is coming from may require flood/salvage disclosure on its titles. Check to see if the factory warranty is still in effect. Fac-



carla j. stovall

• consumer corner

tory warranties are often voided after flood-damage. Ask your insurance agent to check for insurance claims on the specific 17 digit Vehicle Identification Number (VIN) for the vehicle in question. Insurance companies compile information on insurance claims and your agent should have access to that information.

You should do your homework so you can make an informed decision and avoid unexpected surprises.

Some general tips that apply to buying a car include the following:

- * Ask the seller to put all representations and promises in writing.
- * Do not buy a car on impulse or in response to high pressure sales.
- * Ask for a vehicle history, title history or Carfax. If possible, talk to the former owners about the car's prior history and performance record.

mance record.

* Always have the vehicle inspected before buying it.

* Examine extended warranties.

* Ask the seller about prior damage or mechanical problems.

* Inspect the vehicle to ascertain whether the normal wear and tear on the vehicle agrees with the mileage showing on the odometer.

Should you believe you have purchased a flood-damaged vehicle, contact my Consumer Protection Division at 1-800-432-2310 or (785) 296-3751.

Attorney General Carla J. Stovall offers this public service to help you avoid becoming a victim of consumer fraud. Although some of the details have been changed, the cases appearing in this column are based on actual complaints. For further information or to file a complaint, please write Attorney General Carla J. Stovall, Consumer Protection Division, 120 SW 10th, 2nd Floor, Topeka, Kansas 66612, or call the toll-free Consumer Hotline, 1-800-432-2310. Leave your name, number and subject of your inquiry with the receptionist and your call will be returned promptly.

Dick Armey's farewell address

On Dec. 6, retiring House Majority Leader Dick Armey gave his farewell address at the National Press Club in Washington. I wish it had been on prime-time television.

The conservative Republican warned us all that, in the war to preserve our freedoms against terrorism, we must guard against the "awful, dangerous seduction" of sacrificing our freedoms for safety against "this insidious threat that comes right into our neighborhoods."

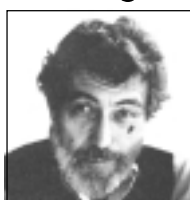
Armey emphasized that "we the people, had better keep an eye on ... our government. Not out of contempt or lack of appreciation or disrespect, but out of a sense of guardianship."

"How do you use these tools we have given you to make us safe in this manner that I'll preserve our freedom? ... Freedom is no policy for the timid. And my plaintive plea to all my colleagues that remain in this government as I leave it is, for your sake, for my sake, for heaven's sake, don't give up on freedom!"

Hearing Armey's speech, I was reminded of one of the last conversations I had with the late Supreme Court Justice William Brennan. He and Armey greatly disagreed on some issues, but not on certain essential sections of the Bill of Rights.

"Look, pal," Justice Brennan told me, "we've always known — the Framers knew — that liberty is a fragile thing."

The deepening concern about the unpredictable dangers, internal and external, of terrorism also extends to the creation by our government of what Charles Lane of The Washington Post accurately calls "a parallel legal system." That system has enlisted many conservatives to guard the Bill of Rights. I've been on some of these conservatives' radio programs to discuss the issue.



nat hentoff

• commentary

Former Republican Congressman Bob Barr of Georgia — speaking on CNN about the massive data-collecting Total Information Awareness (TIA) system being developed in Donald Rumsfeld's Pentagon — said that "millions of Americans will have their privacy invaded in ways they will never know."

An attempt by the Electronic Privacy Information Center (EPIC) to convince the Senate to stop the TIA dragnet failed. However, not only did the American Civil Liberties Union support EPIC's endeavor, but also Phyllis Schlafly's Eagle Forum, the Free Congress Foundation and the American Library Association.

Armey and Barr are working with the ACLU on privacy and other civil liberties issues. Not surprisingly, some politically correct members of the ACLU are disturbed.

As a pro-lifer, I have had profound disagreements with the ACLU, including its failure to support the free-speech rights of the pro-lifers in the current Supreme Court case *Scheidler v. the National Organization for Women*. This involves the ominous use of the harsh Racketeer Influence and Corrupt Organizations Act (RICO) penalties, normally used to battle corruption, to quell political or social protests. If upheld, this will affect diverse demonstrators both left and right.

But — as Armey and Barr have warned — the continuing invasions of basic liberties in the USA Patriot Act and the subsequent insistence by the administration to set up an additional parallel legal system, affects all of our freedoms. And the ACLU has proved essential in that battle.

Since Sept. 11, 2001, ACLU membership has swelled by 50,000 people, and the total number of dues payers is 350,000. For more and more Americans, it is no longer an epithet to refer to "card-carrying members of the ACLU." And more than 50,000 Americans are joining the rapidly growing number of the Bill of Rights Defense Committees in towns and cities across the country.

As Dick Armey says: "Don't give up on freedom!"

Nat Hentoff is a nationally renowned authority on the First Amendment and the Bill of Rights.

SADDAM RECEIVES THE FINAL GRADE FOR HIS 12,000 PAGE REPORT...



In a letter to the membership, Executive Director Anthony Romero reminded them that "throughout our 82-year-old history, we have aligned ourselves with people who can help us protect civil liberties regardless of their political party. ... The Civil Rights Act of 1991, signed into law by President George H.W. Bush, was the result of ... unlikely allies across the Democratic and Republican parties."

Romero adds that the ACLU "has no permanent friends and no permanent enemies, just permanent values." Illustrating that point is Illinois Republican Congressman Henry Hyde, who has often clashed with the ACLU. But he has worked with it to protect free speech on college campuses and to limit the right of government to seek defendants' assets in certain cases. "They are," he says of the ACLU, "a very useful and productive force in jurisprudence."

berry's world



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