

# THE EPOCH

Spring 2010 Volume IV, Issue III

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The Gem of Africa Moves Beyond Its  
Diamond Age

Tex Pasley

Also Inside: *Cleaning Up The Mess: The Aftermath in Haiti* • *Japan Confronts Student Suicides* • *Don't Bank On Gordon Brown*



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 **ISRAEL / PALESTINE** A Jewish human rights organization is trying to build a museum on top of a centuries-old Muslim burial ground. Palestinians have, obviously, filed a petition with the UN in protest. The two sides have been fighting over the location since 2004.

 **YEMEN** A cease-fire agreement was reached between the government and Houthi rebels after six years of fighting. The government is motivated to bring stability to the conflict in order to focus on many Al Qaeda members operating within the country.

 **IVORY COAST** Five years after President Laurent Gbagbo's term officially expired, another planned election was cancelled by Gbagbo. In the process, Gbagbo dissolved the government.

 **SOUTH AFRICA** President Jacob Zuma fathered his 20th child with three different wives. Zuma, a traditionalist Zulu who practices polygamy, has come under fire for this lifestyle; critics say that it sends a bad message when Zuma is simultaneously working to lower the HIV/AIDS rate in his country.

# The Gem of Africa Moves Beyond Its Diamond Age

by Tex Pasley

 **BOTSWANA**

"I'm sure that the results explain themselves. The country is thriving," says Joshua Tim, a native of Botswana who is currently going to school in Canada. Given the flood of negative news that flows out of Africa, most probably wouldn't think Tim is describing an African country. But he's speaking of Botswana, where the world's largest diamond supply and a stable democratic government have turned a land-locked, oil-free country into an African success story.

"Many people have the common misconception that every country in Africa is ripped by political strife. This is in fact, not applicable to Botswana."

In April of 1967, less than a year after Botswana gained independence, the Orapa diamond pipe was discovered. Two months later, the De Beers Botswana Mining Company was formed. By 1971, a diamond mine at Orapa was officially commissioned. Within five years, little Botswana had found its path to big success lying underground.

Botswana boasts a Gross Domestic Product per capita of \$13,900, one of the



highest in Africa, and is ranked as the least corrupt African country in Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI); every election since independence has been fairly contested, with no history of contested results, vote-tampering, and voter coercion.

Of course, all that success can be traced to one thing "Diamonds play a major role in our economy; most of Botswana's revenue is obtained from the diamond industry," says Bahati Letlhogonolo Mwemutsi of Gaborone,

Botswana. "We would be hard hit really [if we didn't have diamonds]. Other sectors like agriculture and tourism are still underdeveloped and contribute a small part of the country's total income."

And in 1990, the then Minister of Mineral Resources and Water Affairs, A.M. Mogwe, said: "The diamond mines were a Godsend, and rapidly transformed the economy, increasing the revenue of the country from less than P10 million (Pulas, Botswana's currency) a year at





Independence to over a billion today."

Botswana's diamond wealth, unlike the much-publicized "blood diamonds" of West Africa, translated into prosperity for the entire country, and not a wealthy few. Absent also are the reports of violence and child labor that taint the product in other diamond-producing nations. Currently, all four diamond mines in Botswana (see map) are managed through a 50/50 partnership between De Beers Consolidated Mines, Ltd. and the Botswanan Government.

But just like oil, diamonds are a non-renewable resource—some estimates see Botswana's diamonds running out within a generation.

"As diamond revenues decrease Botswana needs to have developed a diversified economy," says John Gibson of Maun, Botswana. Gibson is a brand

manager for Chobe Holdings, Ltd., which operates two safari companies in Botswana: Desert & Delta Safaris, and Ker & Downey. "The domination of the economy by a capital intensive industry such as diamond mining needs to be addressed. In terms of developing a wider economic base, the ability to benefit the country's raw materials will be important as that is where the country has a comparative competitive advantage."

Recently the global economic recession exposed Botswana's need for new economic thinking. A luxury good, such as diamonds, will not lead the country through both good times and bad.

"Diamond prices were at an all time low and we recorded the highest budget deficit in a very long time," says

Mwemutsi. "So I think we as Batswana (a plural form referring to the citizens of Botswana) should play a key role in tackling sustainability; we should not solely rely on the government to provide resources."

Where should Botswana look to plan for a sustainable future? Disregarding what's underneath the ground, Botswana is still a country half-covered in desert. It imports most of its food, water, and oil.

"I think they are putting in a fair deal of effort," says Mwemutsi. "In order to achieve sustainability, it is essential for the government to work hand in hand with its people. For example, Botswana imports most of its food products from South Africa. This costs the government a lot, money which could be spent to develop the agricultural industry in Botswana."

While it's miraculous that they've proven to be successful so far (large mineral wealth doesn't always correspond with stable governance and a productive middle class), the success would be more miraculous if they can continue to be an economic leader in Africa beyond the diamond age.

"Skills development remains a primary group focus," says Gibson. "Telecommunications have improved considerably allowing us to centralize a number of functions that were previously externally based. We are now looking at improving skills to take advantage of this. The principles of Vision 2016 are at the heart of our operations. As a growing company many of our goals are in common with a growing country."

"Vision 2016" is a program sponsored by the Botswana government that sets out seven strategic goals that Botswana hopes to achieve by the year 2016. While the goals are appropriately vague (e.g., "An Open, Democratic, and Accountable Nation," "A Prosperous, Productive, and Innovative Nation," etc.), the specifics at least point to a government that is aware of the problems of sustainability. There are signs that the government is taking

the practical steps necessary so that in 2016 "Botswana will have diversified its economy, with mining, agriculture, industry, manufacturing, services and tourism all making a substantial contribution. Botswana will have an vibrant and energetic economy that is able to meet the competitive demands of the 21st century, and attract investors," as their website states.

"Botswana is heavily concentrating on Health and Education," says Tim. "There are hospitals being built and the Government sponsors students to do their tertiary education in world-renowned Universities. Also Botswana is trying to get good world relations and trade. The president of Botswana recently visited the USA and had a meeting with President Obama. He also traveled to Singapore as to improve trade relations between the two countries."

When it comes to sustainability, better national health will be an essential step in stabilizing Botswana. The country has the world's second highest HIV/AIDS adult prevalence rate (the percentage of adults in the country with HIV/AIDS). Nearly a quarter of the adults in Botswana are infected. By 2016, Botswana wants to have no new HIV infections.

"At one time the HIV/AIDS epidemic threatened many of the gains that Botswana had made since independence," says Gibson.

"Intervention by government, often in partnership with the private sector, has however wrestled the initiative back and Botswana can now look forward to a much brighter future. A great deal of human capital was lost during the early years of the epidemic, the effect of which remains to be seen. I believe however that efforts to diversify the economy have been hampered."

Desert & Delta Safaris, one of the two safari companies under Chobe Holdings, Ltd. (Gibson's employer), was singled out in a report by the International Labor Organization for their success in dealing with AIDS prevention. 99% of Desert & Delta Safaris employees have participated in voluntary counseling and testing (VCT), compared to a 51% rate for Botswana as a whole.

Botswana has been finding economic success in the tourism industry. The country's wildlife and stable governance have made it an attractive place for safari companies to ply their trade.

"The tourism sector is booming," says Mwemutsi. "With great attractions such as the Okavango delta, and rock paintings of the indigenous Basarwa tribe. The government has allocated a substantial amount of funds to try and develop this sector."

There are also development programs being put in place to help those entering the job market find positions outside the diamond industry.

"There is one Entrepreneurship program that has been going on for quite some time now called CEDA, the Citizen Entrepreneurship Development Program," says Tim. "Basically a young citizen (21-35) is given a loan of up to a million Pula depending on the project/business/venture he wants to create. He or she is then given 25 years maximum to repay the loan. This program started off extremely well, businesses, farms, etc. were being created everywhere. Although some people defaulted on their loan repayments, most people were able to pay back their loans."

One challenge that industries face will be transitioning into a more free, competitive market. As the diamond wealth owned by the government becomes less of a crutch for the rest of the economy to stand on, businesses will need to compete in a less regulated market.

"The government does have quite a bit of control over the main sectors of the economy," says Tim. "Most large parts of the economy are controlled by either parastatals or local municipalities. But I would not say that they control every resource. Merely supervise that things may run efficiently."

As was indicated earlier, political stability has been essential to the growth of Botswana; every election since independence has been freely and fairly contested. This political landscaped,

## A History of Diamond Discovery in Botswana

1967

The Orapa diamond pipe is the first discovered in Botswana.

1965

1968

De Beers Botswana Mining Company is formed.

1978

De Beers Consolidated Mines Ltd. and the government of Botswana form Debswana, a 50/50 partnership between the two groups.

1996

Vision 2016 is unveiled by the government of Botswana, with the intent of making Botswana competitive with developed countries.

2001

Debswana becomes the first company in the world to offer anti-retroviral HIV treatment to its employees.

2009





which seems to be closely related to the monetary success, will need to pair this optimistic economic future with an optimistic political future.

"Botswana has a history of inclusive government," says Gibson. "Free and fair elections since independence coupled with a vocal opposition has allowed for real debate on the national agenda and developed an accountable government that is in touch with the needs of its population. Government has also been frugal and far-sighted, saving for the future. Politicians are viewed as servants of the people."

But the political landscape has its downsides. The Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) is the only party to ever hold majority power, and the current president, Ian Khama, is the son of Seretse Khama, who served for 14 years as Botswana's first president. While others

might view such political stagnation to be harmful, the Batswana are content with political stability.

"It doesn't matter as long as we are being ruled in Democracy," says Tim. "I would rather be under one ruling Party in a growing and stable economy, than have various different ruling parties destroy our land. Most Botswana are happy with that."

At this point, there is little sign that a major political shift will sweep the country, bringing a new political party to the forefront.

"I think it would be far too difficult [for another party to take control]," says Mwemutsi. "I mean if the ruling party has more seats in parliament it would be close to impossible for opposition representatives to try and make any progressive amendments."

Mwemutsi continues, "I can't say

if I'm happy or not, there really is no perfect party. Each and every party has its accomplishments and flaws. BDP has had its times of well ordered rule and also questionable decisions."

The western press has recently focused on Zimbabwe, Botswana's neighbor, where Robert Mugabe and inflation rates in the quadruple digits have broadcast a bleak vision of Africa to the world. It remains to be seen what these «questionable decisions» that Mwemutsi mentions will mean for the future of Botswana, or if visions of a bright future can be transformed in realities. \*

*The following people were interviewed for this article: Joshua Tim - Botswana native studying in Canada; Bahati Lethlogono Mwemutsi - resident of Gaborone, Botswana; John Gibson - resident of Maun, Botswana*

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"We're here."



 **CANADA** At the end of December, Prime Minister Stephen Harper announced that parliament would not reconvene until March, instead of returning at the end of January. The decision means that all bills that were in the process of moving through parliament must be reintroduced, leading many to think that the decision by Harper was cynical and politically motivated.

 **HAITI** An earthquake on Jan. 12 ripped through Port-au-Prince, the capital and largest city. See adjacent story for further reporting.

 **COSTA RICA** Laura Chinchilla was elected president on Feb. 7, making her Latin America's fifth female president.

 **PERU** Flooding in January caused the destruction of an estimated 20,000 homes, and made Machu Picchu, Peru's main tourist attraction, inaccessible by rail or car. Floods have recently hit much of Latin America, with the blame being placed on El Nino.

## Cleaning Up The Mess: The Aftermath in Haiti

by Erin Shadowens

 **HAITI**

Joseph Alcidas was heading home from the airport in Port-au-Prince when the bus began to shake.

"The bus was jumping. I think [the jumping came from] the driver who was playing with the brake and everybody started to jump off the bus."

Luckily, no one was hurt. However, the earthquake that ravaged Port-au-Prince, Haiti and the surrounding area on January 12 was not equally kind to the rest of the capital. The Haitian government estimates that 150,000 died in the quake and its aftermath.

Anna Cerulli arrived in Port-au-Prince two weeks after the earthquake hit to find the neighborhood around her shop decimated.

"The houses [were] entirely destroyed. We have a store, rented by Unibank, near the central bank. The building [was] destroyed completely."

Haiti, one of the world's poorest countries, suffered almost a complete loss of infrastructure, buildings,



bridges, roads, etc in Port-au-Prince, its most developed region. Now what is left, as Cerulli describes, is "bad odor, we can't breathe."

Or, as Alcidas put it: "Mess."

Haiti's coast is familiar with nature's fury, experiencing annual hurricanes that make building stable businesses and economic solvency extremely difficult. However, non-profits and NGOs working in Haiti have encountered some of the most

significant setbacks due to this earthquake, the worst in over 200 years. The earthquake was centered on a fault line that runs right by Port-au-Prince.

"One of our schools on Delmas 28 is flat - it was a four story building - primary and secondary school," says Debbie Vanderbeek, the program director for Hope for Haiti's Children, "Our school in Cite Soleil has damage to the structure - not sure of the extent



of it at this time. At least one of our children died, we have not been able to find all [of the children] yet. Many lost their homes, family members and had injuries. Many others have left for the provinces."

While Vanderbeek cannot measure the extent of the damage yet, organizations that are not equipped to provide aid to victims, such as Hope for Haiti's Children, are limited by their lack of supplies and training.

"I had a medical team here for a week. We only treated wounds, no surgeries, for people who had not yet had any treatment or who were on the verge of infection from previously treated injuries," explains Vanderbeek. "I don't think anyone can even begin to have a good handle on the level of setback for Haiti, or for individual organizations. Relief efforts are still

fuzzy as we are trying to access the needed goods to distribute. Because we are not a relief organization, we don't have set contacts in place. However, we don't have a network through which to make distributions. The food and relief need to get to the people, so many thugs take advantage and keep relief from the hands of

**"I have seen more pain, suffering and utter devastation over the past two weeks that I have in my 52 years."** - Debbie Vanderbeek

those truly in need who are not able to fend for themselves."

In the aftermath, rampant looting and corruption ensued. Although food distributions have been organized by the United Nations' World Food Program, management tends to break down amongst the hungry and the homeless. The New York Times went so far as to characterize the food

distributions as "darwinian."

Many in Haiti are further concerned by the dangers of crime in the weeks to come. In addition to looting, most of the prisons in Port-au-Prince were destroyed, freeing prisoners that remain unaccounted for.

"The day of the earthquake and the day after--the buildings were collapsed and everyone was released. The word is that prisoners left with whatever

weapons were at the prisons," says Vanderbeek. "There were many gang leaders, kidnappers...They are reorganizing themselves now."

Democracy Now reports that roughly 60 to 80 percent of the prisoners were not charged with any crime and, additionally, several political prisoners were able to obtain freedom in the earthquake. All the

## First Week of Relief Efforts in Haiti

January 14, 2010

Over 20 countries are in Haiti. However, destroyed infrastructure made food distributions almost impossible

January 18, 2010

5,800 American troops are in and around Haiti, with an additional 7,500 marines on the way.

January 15, 2010

9,000 bodies are cleared from the streets.

January 13, 2010

Relief teams from Dominican Republic, Cuba, Peru, and United States arrive in Haiti

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January 12, 2010

Earthquake hits Port au Prince, Haiti. Argentine military hospital is the only hospital that remains open.

January 16, 2010

Estimated one million Haitians are homeless. Red Cross medical Emergency Response Units (ERU) arrive.

January 17, 2010

Canada announces it would send over 1,000 soldiers to help secure Port au Prince.

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same, Haitians remain paranoid in devastated neighborhoods where they cannot lock their doors.

"With all the prisoners having been released there are more of them out there," says Vanderbeek. "People have been told to organize themselves in their neighborhoods to protect themselves. I know of many neighborhoods organizing men to provide watches throughout the nighttime hours."

While Haitians struggle to deal with these problems, a massive international relief effort is underway. People from around the world, as well as the neighbors next door, are working to put Haiti back on solid ground.

"The Dominican people made a telethon, reaching...58,000,000 pesos across [the] Sur Futuro Foundation," says Silverio. "At this time, the Dominican Republic is trying to do all we can...Our government is ready to [extend] all the help to Haiti."

Around 3,000 Haitians have been transported to the Dominican Republic to receive medical care. While the neighboring country welcomed earthquake victims, the DR has militarized in cities and around hospitals to accommodate the population influx. Moreover, the government is intent on avoiding a permanent wave of Haitian refugees.

"Right now, they [Haitians that received medical care] are here, waiting to leave the hospitals after the operations they have received," says Martiris Silverio of Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. "Some people have rented houses [for]...the Haitians, until [the] postoperative process ends."

Although the DR has not seen any influx of Haitian migrants beyond those seeking medical care, Silverio remains wary of the future.

"Haitians [won't] easily leave DR, they prefer to stay here as illegal immigrants...All over the world immigrants prefer to stay in a better country than they belong."

Nevertheless, the government has taken clear steps towards returning Haitians to their homes, or what is left of them.

Silverio explains, "In the border with Haiti, there are eight mobile clinics and the ambulance units with Diraccion Nacional de Emergencia Disastres personnel, who attend 612 patients with various trauma. At this time [they] have addressed 14,000 victims. The public health secretary...started the transfer of the sick people in recuperation to the camp established in Fond Parisien, Haiti."

The United States has been patrolling the waters between Haiti and the Florida coast to stop and turn

around any refugees seeking asylum. So far, there has been no exodus of Haitian victims yet, beyond those in need of serious medical care.

Amidst a labyrinth of adversity, no one can predict what can happen next for this desolate, poor country. While millions of dollars are donated every day towards rebuilding the capital, Haiti's long-term hopes are dependent on the reconstitution of an entire government infrastructure, not merely buildings. Furthermore, the acting government has hardly prepared for the next inevitable natural disaster, a fact of life in the Caribbean region.

"I have seen more pain, suffering and utter devastation over the past two weeks than I have in my 52 years. Even in the midst of all this though, I see hope...The ability of the Haitian people to survive is incredible. We treated a lady who was trapped under her collapsed house for three days, with her dead five year old beside her and she was still praising God." \*

*The following people were interviewed for this article: Joseph Alcidas - Port au Prince, Haiti; Anna Cerulli - Port au Prince, Haiti; Debbie Vanderbeek - Program Director Hope for Haiti's Children, Haiti; Martiris Silverio - Student, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic*







**PAKISTAN** More than 30 police officers were killed in two suicide attacks in two days. The attacks took place in the Northwest Frontier Province, which borders Afghanistan. The Pakistani Taliban has been previously responsible for violence in the region.

**CHINA** The first ever Gay China Pageant was shut down by the government, due to a lack of necessary permits. The organizers of the pageant had not sought government approval, knowing that if they had, their request would have been denied. China held its first gay pride celebration this past summer.

**JAPAN** Toyota recalled over 8 million vehicles after accidents were reported with cases of "unintended acceleration," where cars continued to accelerate even after the driver had let go of the gas pedal.

**SRI LANKA** General Sarath Fonseka, a challenger in the recent presidential election, was arrested in a raid on his office. Supporters of Fonseka say the arrest was politically motivated, but the official word is that the arrest is related to events at the end of Fonseka's military raid.

# Japan Confronts Student Suicides

by Shikshya Adhikari



"One day I was coming from a public library," shares James Ronald, a Ugandan college student in Japan, "and I saw this guy standing on top of a wall about to jump onto the road. He was surrounded by people who were trying to calm him down. It scared the wits out of me."

"That's... quite a subject," says Funakoshi Jushirou, a college student in Japan. When asked about the possible reasons behind the high student suicide rate in Japan, he answered, "in my opinion, they seem to run away from reality to put an end to all the 'darkness' in their lives."

"Well, as for myself, I do not see any genuine reason for that," says Ronald.

An average of 100 Japanese people are said to commit suicide each day. In 1955, Japan's suicide rate peaked at 25.1 suicides per 100,000 people. Since then, the rate steadily decreased until the year 2000, when it returned to 1955 levels. Statistics from 2007 peg the rate at 24.4 per



*Trains can be held up for hours because of suicides*

100,000, giving Japan one of the world's highest suicide rates (the number in the United States, for comparison, is 11.1 per 100,000, according to the most recent data).

"Depression among students is one of the most significant reasons. I do not think this is anything new.

Having said that, the social structure of Japan is what leads these kids to depression. Now, this is something new to me," adds Ronald.

"If you want to know about suicides here, you need to get into Japanese culture," says Kevin Broderick, an English language teacher



in Japan. "It's very repressed. I mean conformity is the way here. Yes, there are people who are out of the box but no one here is confrontational and you are always supposed to think about the other person," adds Broderick. He gives us a picture of a social gathering in Japan. "Think about going out to eat and having a glass of beer. They order big bottles of beer. However, you are never supposed to pour for yourself. The other person should somehow notice that you are done and then should offer to pour you some more and you never say no. It will be regarded as too confrontational."

So how does this kind of repression lead to suicide among children and teenagers? It is reported that even elementary school children have committed suicide.

"The surprising thing is that it is totally different in college. The pressure is more on the children in school level, whether it be the ones in elementary, middle or high school", says Jushirou.

"Yes, it is a repressed society and that puts a lot of pressure on children at a young age. This kind of pressure has eventually led to many cases of suicide," says Hennepin Marquette, a language teacher in Japan. He adds, "You are expected to excel at everything. Japanese school students have to appear for a lot of tests as well to enter into good high schools and colleges. With long school days and evenings and mandatory after school clubs and study groups, you hardly have any time to do other things which you might enjoy. There is no freedom to do anything but school-related activities. Also, the birth rate in Japan is so low currently that extra pressure is put on the children born to either follow their parents' footsteps or make them proud in any way possible."

Broderick says, "you are not supposed to say anything to your parents either and are also supposed to keep your emotions and opinions to yourself." He continues, "here, it is more like if you are the teacher, you

speak first even though you are in a conversation-based school. Everyone seems to be too focused on their sentences being perfect and it is like pulling teeth a lot of the time."

Jushirou points to the fact that these student suicide cases are spreading widely, and the depression is infectious to the whole country, especially the student population. When an 18-year-old singer, Okada Yukiko, committed suicide in 1986, a series of copy-cat suicides, known as 'Yukiko Syndrome' spread through Japan.

"I don't understand. It's just so absurd. This thing is spreading like virus. I think suicide has become more of a trend," says Jushirou.

One explanation for the recent spike is technology. Young people who have access to chat rooms and instant messaging are able to bring their suicidal instincts into contact with other like-minded peers.

"Technology is supposed to make things convenient for the society and make the life of the people comfortable as much as possible. However, I think technology is worthless when trying to prevent these kinds of situations. Instead, it has made things worse," says Jushirou, pointing to a trend of mass suicides which originated over the internet.

While this anecdotal evidence is troubling, can the rise in the suicide rate over the past decade be directly related to increased use of the internet?

"I think it is more or like wanting to join and be a part of the community where you find other children of more or less your own age sharing the same problems as you do. This results especially from the feeling of being shunned, misunderstood or out of place in your own community," says Marquette.

Almahr Hasan, a Saudi Arabian student in Japan says, "notice that

we are talking about big cities like Tokyo, Osaka and others. Parents here work a lot. Sometimes, they are out for the whole day and come back as late as 11 pm. So, I guess that would make the children feel unwanted due to lack of close communication."

At one point, seven young people were found to be dead in a van outside Tokyo by the Japanese police. This was believed to be Japan's largest group suicide.

In 2004, six people were found to have died of carbon monoxide poisoning by burning charcoal stoves in their cars in the city of Fukuoka. It seems like

many people across Japan meet online looking for people to die with.

"It is just ridiculous. Yes, technology is a means but I do not think it is wholly responsible. I think it all depends on the personality and psychology of that certain person," says Jushirou.

Not only has the suicide rate been increasing, but the suicides follow specific patterns. And while people have trouble explaining them, they know the patterns are there.

"The cases of people shooting themselves are very rare here. But most of the time, we hear about people jumping in front of moving trains. And, it happens most in certain times of the year and it gets so bad that train delays will be common. Sometimes, you wait for an hour for your train to arrive. I have experienced it for a good amount of time in the past two years," says Broderick.

While depression and the inability to meet high standards affect children all around the world, what about Japan makes the suicide rate so much higher? The answer, some think, must lie in the cultural atti-

tudes.

Broderick says, "there is a lot of pride here. Although more and more cultures are getting mixed in Japan, there is definitely some level of pride that needs to be taken away first."

This "level of pride" takes shape on the playground, where who wins and who loses adversely affects the psyche of those who lose.

"Bullying has to be eliminated but at the same time it is very dif-

**"One day I was coming from a public library and I saw this guy standing on top of a wall about to jump onto the road. He was surrounded by people who were trying him down. It scared the wits out of me."** - James Ronald

ficult to do so. I have seen some kids with fierce independence but the majority of kids have been taught to work together as a team and to think that individuals are not as important as the whole. People that are different in any way are very easy to single out. Thus, these kinds of bullying can lead to choices children would not normally make in everyday lives such as joining in to bully other students. And, students who become the target commit suicide," says Marquette. Tokyo had started alternative schools for bullying victims and it is said to have reduced some kind of pressure from the students.

The pride that Broderick mentions extends to the next stage. If a child is beaten up by a bully, the victim is often too proud to seek out help, or to call on someone else to help fix their problems. Help for those contemplating suicide might be available, but it's no help if nobody uses it.

Jushirou says, "well, there are counselors who are willing to help children with problems. However, reluctance to acknowledge the problem in the first place is what leads

people to be involved in such activities. There are people who very readily provide help unlike some people in the society who consider the suicide cases nothing but spectacle. I believe the responsible ones should step up more and try to get rid of this problem."

Broderick says, "I know for certain that there are rehabilitation centers which would work very effectively provided people accept their help." It is reported that psychiatric care is most available to students from January till May, the examination months, which are highly stressful for Japanese students.

Marquette says, "I am sure the government is working to change things. But, every Prefecture in Japan does things differently and I can imagine that it would be a very difficult problem to solve or work on."

Jushirou offers an explanation: "I believe that it all comes down to a person. No matter what, I do not think it will be easy to trace and analyze what a person is thinking or what one goes through. I would like to emphasize what I said earlier. Yes, there is help available. However, that all depends on how much of it you are willing to accept. One should be able to look at the positive side, I guess. \*

*The following people were interviewed for this article: Funakoshi Jushirou - a college student in Japan; Kevin Broderick - English language teacher in Japan, from America; James Ronald - A Ugandan student studying in Japan; Almahr Hasan - A Saudi Arabian student studying in Japan; Hennepin Marquette - A language teacher in Japan*

## Suicide in Japan

2000-2010

**180** people have been found dead in 61 reported cases of internet-assisted group suicide in Japan.

**2000** Japan has had nearly 2000 suicides by jumping in front of moving trains; 6 % of all suicides nationwide

**27** out of every 100,000 Japanese people take their lives—the highest number among industrially developed nations.

**30,093** people committed suicide in 2007, showing 2.9% increase in a year.

**32,552** people committed suicide in 2005.

In 2003

**+57.6%**

The suicide rate for elementary and middle school children rose by 57.6%, representing 93 innocent lives.


**+29.3%**


Among high-school students there was a rise of 29.3%, representing 225 lives lost.


**+22.0%**


The overall suicide rate among people 19 or younger rose by 22%.



 **RUSSIA** A natural gas pipeline that will lead through the Baltic Sea from Russia to Germany has been given the go-ahead for construction. The pipeline will deliberately skip politically unstable Eastern European countries so Russia's plentiful natural gas supplies can reach Western Europe more reliably. In the past, Russia has cut off supplies which flow to Western Europe, in order to send a political message to countries on the pipeline, such as Ukraine.

 **ROMANIA** 8,000 documents from an anti-communist revolution in 1989 will be declassified. Many hope that the declassification will lead to more convictions for human rights violations during the revolution.

 **ITALY** 100 African immigrant workers in the southern town of Rosarno rioted on Jan. 7. The riot was in response to a shooting incident, where two African farmworkers were injured by townspeople, with no apparent motive. It was not the first racially motivated shooting in the town. A few days after the riot, all of the African farmworkers had been evicted.

 **UKRAINE** Victor Yanukovich was elected president on Feb. 7. The election was significant because Yanukovich had previously been defeated by Victor Yuschchenko in 2004 during the so-called "Orange Revolution," where Yanukovich was viewed as representing the "old" Ukraine and its Soviet ties, while Yuschchenko and the Orange Revolution were meant to symbolize a new Ukraine more connected to the west.

# Don't Bank on Gordon Brown

by Gordon Greer and Kurt Strom



UNITED KINGDOM

"It really sucks when the Government seems to take more interest in the rich than the middle class," says Thomas Randolph, who resides in London, England.

Last April, a man was killed, bank windows were shattered, and bankers were attacked. Randolph speaks about the day: "From my window I could hear sirens all day and saw thousands of people being chased by officers. Everyone was throwing bottles, the police were using their batons and pepper spray."

Heather Golding, who lived in Britain and worked for the British Labour Party at the time, was also present at this incident. "The news people were saying 'stay in your homes, if you are a businessman do not leave your house' and 'they are attacking people wearing suits.' In fact, I believe one guy died that day when the police came in against the protestors."

Golding continues, "and the thing is, it wasn't one mob based



*A crowd demonstrates against financial institutions in London*

on one political philosophy, there were numerous groups of different backgrounds forming one collective mob. They were shocking; it's shocking that the people could get so riled up that Conservatives were

marching with Marxists and Socialists with members of the BNP."

Randolph relates a similar tale: "I was afraid people were gonna get killed, I think a few people did actually die, but I didn't partake in



## Fallout of Financial Crisis

1997

Labor Party comes into power under leadership of Tony Blair. Gordon Brown becomes the British Exchequer.

October, 2008

Collapse of American investment banks leads to turmoil within RBS (Royal Bank of Scotland), Barclays, and Lloyd's of London.

Mid 2008

Certain elements within the Labor Party attempt a failed coup to oust and replace the PM Brown in the "Lancaster Plot."

1997

2010

1997-2006

Under Blair and Brown's guidance, the UK moves closer into alignment with the United States, in both politics and finance.

2007

Due to rising unpopularity within his own party, Prime Minister Blair hands over the reins of government to Chancellor Brown.

2010

General parliamentary elections to be held before June 3rd. David Cameron, Conservative candidate for Prime Minister, is currently favored to win.

any of it. Wish I'd gotten pictures though. It was insanity out there in the streets. Fortunately, I'm not a banker so I didn't really fear for my life."

These stories reflect a fed-up populace. With elections on the way, the table is set for a major shift in Britain's political landscape. Since 1997, under the leadership of Tony Blair and now Gordon Brown, the Labour party has controlled Parliament. Prime Ministers have the power to call elections whenever

they please, allowing them to take advantage of times when their party is popular. However, Brown must call an election by this summer, or Parliament will be dissolved. Given the mood of the people, this does not bode well for the British Labour Party.

From the outset of his tenure, things seemed dark for Brown. He spent the summer of 2008 squelching an attempted coup from within his own party, more commonly known in the United Kingdom as the "Lancashire Plot." Once he believed his leadership to be secure, his position was threatened by the financial crash of October 2008.

As Chancellor of the Exchequer under Tony Blair, his management of the British economy, once considered Brown's major asset, became his largest liability.

Golding, who worked for the British Labour Party, has a dark view of how the party and Prime Minister Brown will fare this upcoming election.

**"There's no way, no way Gordon Brown will be reelected, he has screwed up way too much, he really hasn't done anything and he put this election at a really bad time."** - Heather Golding

"There's no way, no way, that Gordon Brown will be reelected, he has screwed up way too much, he really hasn't done anything and he put this election at a really bad time." Ms Golding continues by relating the mistakes Labour has made, including a widespread scandal in Parliament.

"The biggest incident occurred not long ago, it was called the 'Pension Scandal.' It involved members of Parliament, particularly House of Lords members getting outrageously large pensions and other Parliament members using taxpayer money to fund their personal affairs such as house building and one bought

pornography with it which was really scandalous." Gordon Brown was not personally involved with these scandals, but they did occur while he was in power.

The Pension Scandal is yet more salt in the wound for many already dissatisfied Britons. Two of the United Kingdom's major banks, the Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS) and Barclays, were severely effected by the economic crisis. RBS, which had aggressively expanded during the 00s, watched substantial and

highly leveraged investments in banks like Bear Stearns and Lehman Brothers vaporize. Another bank, Northern Rock, completely went under, and had to be bought out by the British government.

Numerous companies have let employees go; Northern Rock laid off 1,300 employees in 2008 alone. Due to its merger with Lehman brothers, Barclays had to lay off nearly 3,000 employees. In order to repay a 20 billion British pound loan from Her Majesty's Government, RBS had to fire over 14,300 people in a single year.

The malady of these institutions can only be seen as the symptoms of

a greater crisis effecting the current economic statistics regarding the United Kingdom--the British deficit is reported to have reached over £178 billion.

Randolph continues to tell of the sacrifices he has made: "It's been hard for all, really, but I was able to keep my job. Most of the people I went to school with or living in my neighborhood weren't as lucky as I was back in 2008 and in 2009. The real trouble for me has been the increase of prices and inflation on everything, gas, food, you name it they tax it."

He tells of other who were deeply hurt by the crisis.

"My best mate from college, he lost his job and later couldn't pay rent in his flat so he came and lived with me briefly, now he's with his mum. He's still looking for work

actually, but the way things are I can't say really how he'll do with this economy."

Thus it seems likely that when Randolph's friend walks into the polling booth sometime this spring (the election must be held on or before June 3<sup>rd</sup>), he will not be looking to keep Gordon Brown in office.

"You see, when Tony Blair resigned in 2007 he appointed Brown as Prime Minister, he was never elected so that puts off a lot of people already who say 'we never voted for you, we never elected you,'" says Golding. "Also he had a chance to hold an election in 2007, and back then he was popular, because he had the support of Blair who was popular when he left, but he didn't and so when he has one now, before June, he will lose to David Cameron."

David Cameron has been a vocal opponent of Prime Minister Brown's policies both when he was Chancellor of the Exchequer and as Prime Minister. He is also the head of the Conservative Party, and will take over as Prime Minister if the Conservatives receive the majority of the vote. (The Prime Minister is somewhat analogous to the Speaker of the House in the United States, in that they are the leader of the majority party in that house. In the United Kingdom, the Prime Minister is elected to the House of Commons).

Recently, Cameron told the London Times, "our recession, the great recession, is the longest and deepest since the war and coming out of recession does not mean that our debt crisis is over. In fact far from it: Labour's debt crisis is now

Gordon Brown at the World Economic Forum







*British cops stand guard at a protest*

the biggest threat to our recovery so we will only get this recovery right if we start right now on a proper debt reduction plan."

Blame for the collapse has been wielded heavily, with Labour taking most of the hit. Randolph expresses why he feels the Prime Minister specifically is responsible: "Well, the current Prime Minister was head of money, Chancellor of the Exchequer,

before he was Prime Minister, you know?" He continues, "so if I could blame anyone I'd say that Brown sort of messed up with this."

Randolph expresses disgust at Brown's practices: "Until the economic recession and collapse I stood behind Labour nearly one hundred percent of the time, now though, I can't really say. Brown has made mistakes, there's some scandals

and stuff like that. I might vote for Cameron."

Despite Golding's hopes for a Labour victory, he states what he thinks is the likely outcome: "I'd have to say that Brown will lose, Conservatives will have power, and we'll all be really sad."

Randolph, who is not particularly political, also believes that change is coming. For his prediction on the election results, he says, "I guess I just want to say that whoever wins I want them to be more of a representation of the people who vote, me. I'm a voter and I hope my vote matters and I hope what I say matters, beyond that though, I can't really say anything for certain." With a laugh, he concludes: "if only I could predict the future we wouldn't be in this trouble then." \*

*The following people were interviewed for this article: Thomas Randolph-Citizen, London UK; Heather Golding-Intern, Labour Party Offices, London; Mark Rector-Project Manager, Lloyds of London; Raymond Clear-Citizen, UK*



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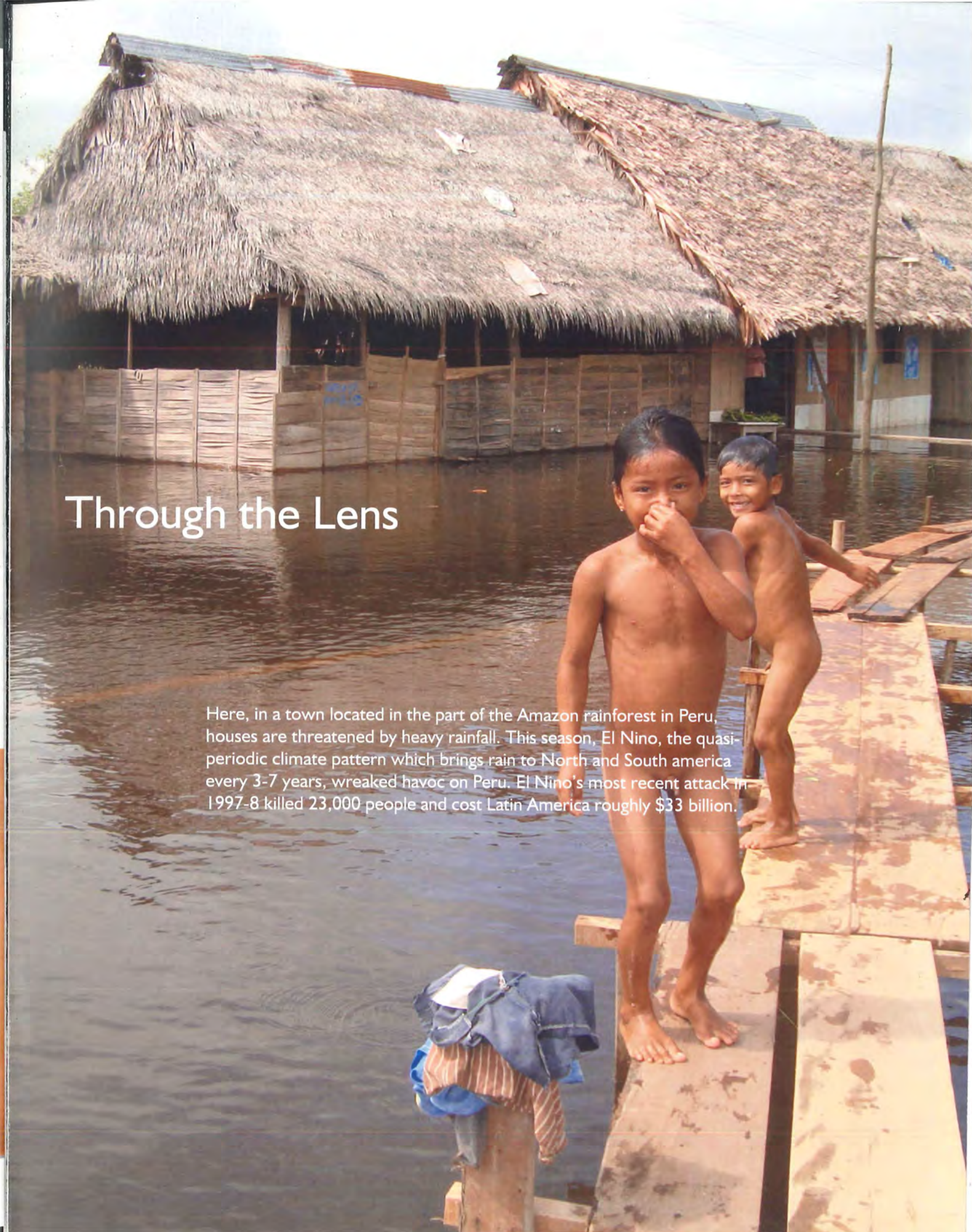
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## Through the Lens

Here, in a town located in the part of the Amazon rainforest in Peru, houses are threatened by heavy rainfall. This season, El Nino, the quasi-periodic climate pattern which brings rain to North and South America every 3-7 years, wreaked havoc on Peru. El Nino's most recent attack in 1997-8 killed 23,000 people and cost Latin America roughly \$33 billion.



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