

# Australian Satellite Television to Asia

by Kalinga Seneviratne

that the issue is not about immigration scams but the way Australia turned back a batch page — 'Get Out! Stay Out!' Hidden in a corner on page 21, on the other hand, was a small article headline — 'Brain drain as more skilled emigrate.'

The 'Get Out! Stay Out!' headline was given to a story on the deportation of 113 Chinese boat people a week after they had arrived in the Australian territory of the Christmas Islands, perhaps looking for greener pastures. The story on page 21 was about how Australians are leaving their country in greater numbers than ever before for employment overseas. Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia are steadily attracting more and more Australians who are also, of course, looking for greener pastures, with unemployment running at over 10 per cent.

This case came to my mind when I watched David Hill, the Managing Director of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), launching the Australian satellite television service on 17 February. Hill told viewers in Asia: 'We aim to provide a wide range of quality television programmes which reflect regional interests and sensitivities.'

ABC of course will claim that they do not come down to the sensationalist gutter level of news values as that practised by the *Telegraph*, but having lived in Australia for the last 15 years and having worked in the media field for at least seven of those years, I can honestly say that racism in the Australian media is well entrenched and ABC is not immune to it.

It is interesting to note that while the ABC service to Asia is promoted as a regional TV service, as opposed to the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and Cable News Network (CNN), the ABC staff both in Australia and in Asia are almost exclusively Anglo-Celtic. They have not hired a single Asian journalist. The Executive Producer of the news service however is of Indian descent, but even some of his colleagues at ABC described him as the best ex-BBC Englishman they have at ABC.

Whatever regional face ABC tries to project, Australian news values are well and truly Anglo or Euro-centric.

Let us take the issue of Australia's relationship with Asia. The media very often talks and writes about how trade barriers in Asia are blocking Australian inroads into Asian markets or investments there. While it is normal for cash-strapped Australian companies to look for an economic lifeline in Asia, in the process exploiting low-paid Asian labour in some of those countries, at the same time it is not on for these same Asian workers to come to Australia to take advantage of the higher wages here.

The 'Get Out! Stay Out!' xenophobia of the *Telegraph* is a typical example of this thought process — where the issue is seen as an Asian immigration scam. Margaret Piper, Executive Director of the Refugee Council of Australia, said at a press conference on the same day

It was an extremely one-sided story done by ABC's Neil Merzer which was aimed at giving the viewer the impression that it is Thai men who are spreading the disease, not Western tourists. *Four Corners* introduced it thus: 'Up to a quarter of a million Australians visit Thailand each year. Many are men eager to sample Bangkok's bars and brothels. These pleasure seekers now risk a death sentence. At least a dozen Australian men have returned from sex tours carrying the deadly HIV virus, some to infect partners at home.'

Another example of how the Australian media project themselves as the conscience of Asia is in the reporting of human rights violations. Australians know all about the 'repressive regimes' of China, Burma, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Pakistan, Korea, Vietnam and sometimes, Thailand, India and Malaysia as well. That is almost the whole of Asia, by the way.

While Australians learn all about the poverty, the repression and the dictators of Asia, the other Asia of highly educated people, middle-class comfortable lifestyles, technologically advanced industries, independent newspapers and well organised health care systems are hardly reported on.

Since most Australians hear and see only the negative side of Asia and very rarely, the positive side, most Australians do not want to be Asian, but do not mind making money out of them. They see their integration with Asia purely on business terms. Even Asian languages are called business languages — even though most of these languages and their literature are among the oldest and the richest in the world.

Many Australians are also unaware of the fact that Asian societies have been rich and vibrant cultures for centuries and that many of the so-called 'new age' philosophies and therapies Australians are increasingly

being attracted to, are age-old traditions of Asia.

One typical example is Yoga, which is at the root of the Hindu culture and which is today an integral part of contemporary Australian society. As we do hear of these contributions being made by Asian societies to modern Western lifestyles, I believe most young Australians taking up Yoga in gymnastics around the country think Yoga is an American import.

Fed with these values, Australian journalists go to Asia and see McDonalds opening up a restaurant in Kuala Lumpur or an Indian woman in jeans smoking a cigarette in Bombay and gleefully report these as signs of Westernisation or modernisation of the East. This view is also often used to argue that the East is adopting Western tastes, thus Australian businesses — especially the food industry — could exploit that to make profits.

The launch of ABC satellite TV to Asia has been greeted here as if ABC is about to catch a captive market in Asia and though not publicly expressed, I honestly believe many within the ABC see this venture as a move towards Australian cultural imperialism in Asia.

ABC practices a concept of 'style and standard' which basically shuts out from their airways any broadcast journalist who do not have an upper-class Anglo-Celtic Australian accent. I have had this experience with ABC for many years.

Last year I produced an eight-part series on non-Christian religious practices in Australia which Radio Australia broadcast in their English language Asian service, but ABC Radio's national network refused to broadcast it saying it was not up to their 'style and standard'.

They said they would consider broadcasting it if I allowed one of their Anglo-Celtic producers to present the series. I had interviewed people from various Asian backgrounds and with different accents for the series, as it was about the practice of Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Sikhism in Australia. ABC had no problem broadcasting those interviews, but the presenter according to their 'style and standard' had to have an Anglo-Australian accent.

Their line of thinking is that Australian listeners will find it difficult to pick up foreign accents. But then they do interview foreigners on air and that does not stop them employing Anglo-Celtic Australians to broadcast to Asia on Radio Australia.

Even after 50 years of broadcasting to Asia, Radio Australia's English service today has only one Asian broadcast journalist and his voice appears very irregularly in the service. While ABC boasts that it is an Asia-Pacific regional broadcaster, Asian journalists find it every difficult to get through the ABC employment structure where racism is institutionalised.

(Third World Network Features)



## HOLE IN THE WOOD

A shaft of sunlight penetrates the forest as a revolutionary drill is put to the test in Surrey, southern England.

Methods used in the assessment, conservation, and repair of timber in historic buildings have greatly advanced in recent years. Systems such as X-ray and infra-red photography, pulse radar and ultrasonics, have been applied successfully to the assessment of decay in timber. Such non-destructive techniques play an increasingly important role, as awareness grows of the need to retain as much as possible of the original material.

The new micro-drilling technique using this specially designed instrument has been developed by a British company to take the testing of wood a step further. In appearance it has the look of a high-tech harpoon gun, but in fact

The Decay Detecting Drill consists of a long thin probe that is pushed into the timber, giving information on the presence of decay or other changes in the wood. The data produced can be assessed on site or at a later time, and provides a permanent record of the state of timber.

More importantly, the precision with which decay can be quantified, the ratio of sound wood to decay established, and its position in the overall cross-section of the place should reduce the amount of repair and strengthening deemed necessary — allowing significantly more accurate costings and repair schedules to be drawn up. In large buildings such as cathedrals and major houses, where a continuing and rolling programme of repair and maintenance is carried out, a thorough survey of all relevant timbers could prove extremely valuable.

The instrument is the result of research over a ten year period by David Seadby of the Plant Pathology Research Division at the UK's Agriculture Department in Northern Ireland, and has been developed jointly with the company.

Low voltage and a nil pressure cut-out system ensure the instrument's safety, and with minimum training required in its operation, the user will rapidly become familiar with the drill and how to interpret the information it can obtain.

With a number of applications including construction and forestry surveying, the instrument eliminates the need for destructive testing to trees or wooden structures, and its simple and innovative design looks certain to provide an easy and environmentally friendly solution to the problems of timber assessment, around the world. — LPS

# Skyway tohovels?

by Peter Costantini

An ambitious proposal to build a global satellite network sparks a debate over who will profit — and who will pay — for the technological innovation.

reach unserved areas at lower costs. Small satellite dishes could be easily installed in remote areas feeding into local phone systems, they say.

Satellite transmission also avoids the vulnerability of ground wires to natural disasters as well as dependency on local electrical power. For areas in which electrical service is unreliable, this capacity could provide more reliable communications and ease rescue and recovery operations.

But whether enough telecommunications traffic will be generated by remote and

rural areas to make such an ambitious system competitive remains an open question. Most traffic is currently produced by businesses in industrialised urban areas.

Says Bereano: 'The reality is that access will be highly skewed for different sectors of society.'

The scope of the project might have caused scepticism if it had been proposed by lesser investors. But Gates happens to head the largest computer software company in the world while McCaw is boss of the biggest cellular tele-

phone firm around the globe.

Gates, chairman of the Microsoft Corp., has dominated the software industry for the last decade. McCaw is currently negotiating the sale of his firm, McCaw Cellular, to American Telephone and Telegraph (ATT) for US\$12.6 billion.

Critics of concentration in information industries have called for a strict separation of control over 'conduit' (the hardware which carries the signals) and content. Some fear the builders of the communications projects may also wish to dominate the vast network of information that results.

'Bill Gates doesn't strike me as someone who wants to rule the world,' says James Love of the Taxpayer Assets Project, a non-governmental organisation in Washington.

'But he does seem to want to bring a little order to the world of software,' he adds. 'And what he has probably observed in negotiating with the cable television industry is that the people who run the cable companies control the content on the cable.'

Love says cable television in the 1960s was sold as a cornucopia of library resources, health care and democracy. It remains far from

fulfilling these promises in the United States.

For any new technology, he asserts, 'The degree to which it is actually used for those kinds of things depends upon a regulatory system, a pricing system and a financing system that actually makes those things happen.'

Bereano also sees a need for public investment and involvement through 'open, democratic political processes' in developing such a system.

He remains wary of the proposed satellite networks emphasis on telephone communications. Even in the United States, he points out, the proportion of households with phones dropped during the 1980s.

'If only 90 per cent of families in the US can afford a phone,' he asks, 'how many families in Upper Volta can afford the equipment and service?'

Bereano questions whether the satellite system will be more useful than existing radio links: 'Do small clinics in the boondocks of Africa wind up calling the Pasteur Institute very often? The technocrats very often have very little appreciation for social and cultural realities.'

Assuming that a lot of data can be piped out to remote areas, Todd Newman of the California-based Computer Professionals for Social Responsibility also notes, 'You can't drink from a fire hose.'

Even in the developed countries, he says, 'the local communications channels are very often narrow funnels for torrents of data. They may cause bottlenecks.'

— IPS

# Sex is often a dangerous sport

Abortion could be legal but cultural and social taboos might still make it unacceptable

SEX — or sexual intercourse, to be exact — is not always loads of fun and may even be a dangerous sport a lot of times.

At the recent Developing Country Journalists Seminar here, Dr Pramilla Senanayake, assistant secretary general of the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), reported that of the estimated 114 million acts of sexual intercourse which take place each day, some 910,000 result in conceptions (many of them unwanted), 356,000 in sexually transmitted bacterial and viral infections, and the rest presumably just in pleasure.

Of the 910,000 daily conceptions, only 390,000 result in live births. Zygote (fertilized egg) wastage is estimated at 290,000 and spontaneous abortions at 130,000. Induced abortions number about 90,000 while still-births total 10,000.

The toll on women of the 'fun' activity, particularly of the resulting pregnancy, is very high. Conservative estimates place pregnancy-related or maternal deaths at 500,000 annually although the figure could be much higher as many cases are not reported as such nor attended by health professionals.

South Asia accounts for more than half of these deaths — 296,000 — while Africa has about 150,000. Estimates for Latin America and East Asia are 34,000 and 12,000, respectively, while all developed countries account for only 6,000 deaths.

Dr Senanayake told participants in the seminar, organized jointly by IPPF and the Washington DC-based Population Reference Bureau to familiarize journalists with issues to be discussed in the International Conference on Population and Development to be held in September in Egypt under the auspices of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), that about 50 million abortions are carried out worldwide every year. In Latin America alone, it is estimated that there are four million clandestine abortions every year.

The IPPF official said some 200,000 of the 50 million abortions annually end in the woman's death.

As for sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), including the

deadly AIDS, Dr Senanayake pointed out that women are often more adversely affected than men. In the first place, the transmission risk is higher from man to woman and female barrier methods currently available — which could have given women the opportunity to better protect themselves from infections — are less effective.

Women also suffer more from complications arising out of STDs such as pelvic inflammatory disease, infertility, ectopic pregnancy (one taking place in the fallopian tube rather than in uterine cavity) and cancer of the cervix.

Dr Senanayake said medical people are getting more evidence suggesting that cancer of the cervix could be a sex-related problem. Findings so far show that women who have had sex early and have had more partners seem more likely to contract the disease.

The IPPF official added that for pregnant women with STD, there is a greater likelihood of their passing on the infection to their unborn child.

Dr Senanayake said making abortion legal does not always solve the problem of deaths from illegal pregnancy termination. The procedure could be legal but cultural and social taboos might still make it unacceptable prompting women to go to illegal abortions.

In one African country, according to Kalimi Mworio, project director for Partnership Challenges Fund, signatures of two obstetrician-gynaecologists are needed for a legal abortion. Given the very limited number of such health professionals, legal abortion is almost non-existent.

Dr Senanayake added that safety of the abortion procedure is also a problem. In some countries, there may not be enough physicians to perform the procedure if these medical people are the only ones authorized to do it.

Dr Senanayake and Dr Indira Kapoor, IPPF regional director for South Asia, reported on the success of a procedure being employed in Bangladesh to induce the return of menstruation. The procedure, menstruation regulation (MR), is legal. It allows the resumption of a woman's menstrual cycle a few days after it was supposed to occur without first establishing the

existence of pregnancy.

Dr Kapoor said the procedure is done much earlier than abortion and so is much safer.

Dr Senanayake said MR can be employed in other countries and kits have, in fact, been prepared to introduce it in other places. One major advantage of the procedure is its simplicity so that no hospital stay is required and health workers can be trained to perform it.

Dr Senanayake stressed the need to provide people access to fertility regulation means. She said some 500 million couples throughout the world have no access to fertility regulation.

Discussing the very serious problem of unmet needs in human reproduction and reproductive health, the IPPF official said that in addition to the 500 million couples in need of fertility regulation methods, the following also require urgent attention:

In her presentation, Dr Senanayake listed the attributes of an ideal contraceptive. The ideal contraceptive, according to her, should be safe, effective, simple to use, cheap, un-related to coitus or the sexual act, culturally acceptable, acceptable to all religions, reversible and free of unwanted side effects. It should not require medical supervision.

But Dr Senanayake stressed that, until the ideal is developed, the current means are not without their merits. She pointed out, for instance, that pregnancy is 'far, far more dangerous' to women than the pill or oral contraceptive. Moreover, certain health benefits are actually derived from the pill such as protection against menstrual problems, iron deficiency anaemia, rheumatoid arthritis, benign breast disease, pelvic inflammatory disease, ectopic pregnancy, functional ovarian cysts, ovarian cancer and endometrial cancer (cancer of the lining of the uterine cavity).

However, she also stressed that women's complaints about side effects and inconveniences associated with a certain method should not be ignored and should be attended to. She said such effects, which may seem minor or trivial to health people, could be very important to women. — Depthnews Asia

## Water Supply from Melted Snow

### TAPPING THE SUN'S ENERGY TO SERVICE ALPINE HUTS

by Susanne Lehringer

With an annual 40 million visitors — almost five times the local population — tourism in the Alps has now reached a critical level. In order to preserve the mountain regions as refuge and habitat for plants, animals and ultimately human beings it is becoming necessary, for example, to devise a concept for serving mountain huts using renewable energy sources and in so doing make a vital contribution to protecting the environment.

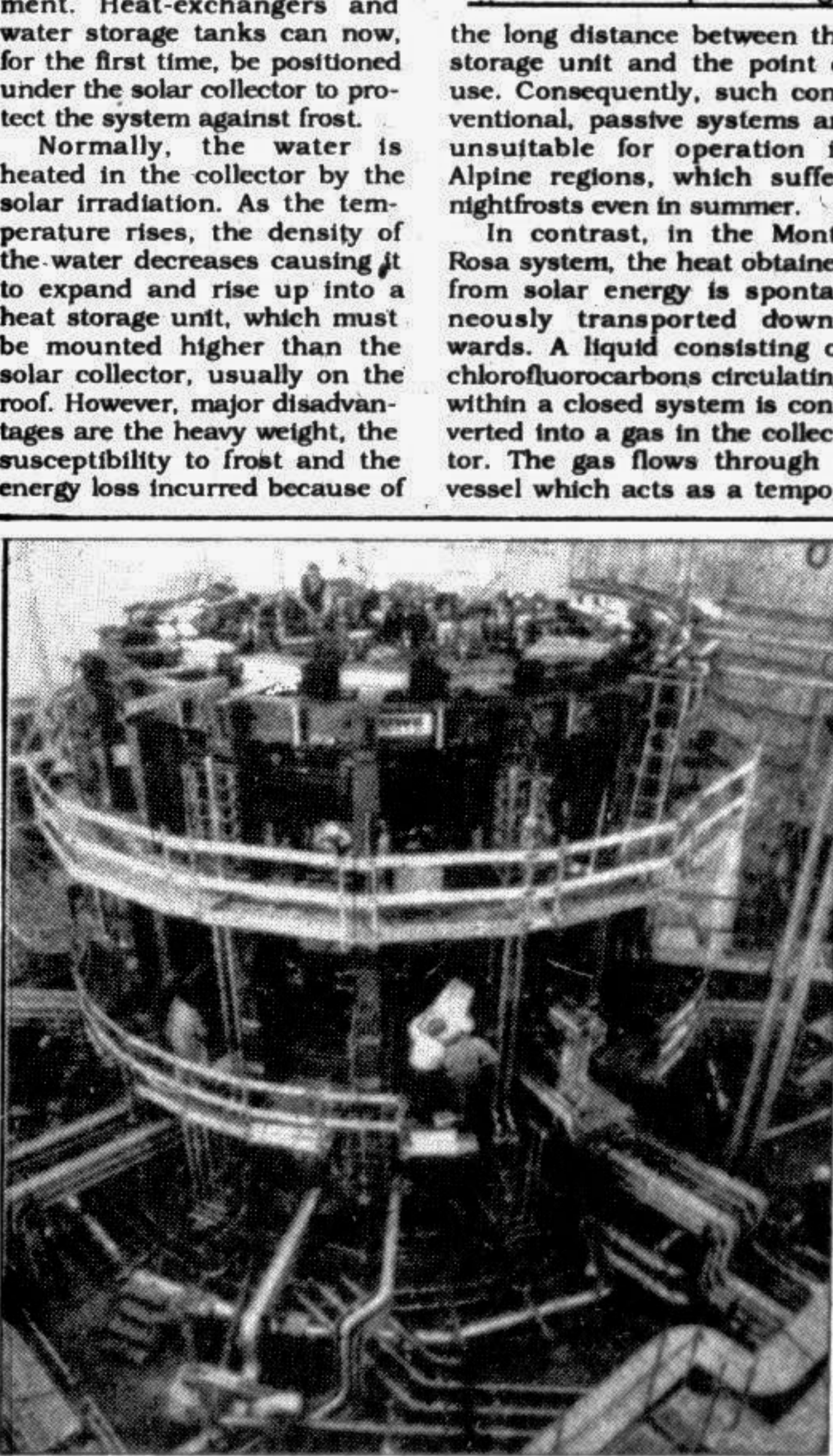
The long distance between the storage unit and the point of use. Consequently, such conventional, passive systems are unsuitable for operation in Alpine regions, which suffer nightfrosts even in summer.

In contrast, in the Monte Rosa system, the heat obtained from solar energy is spontaneously transported downwards. A liquid consisting of chlorofluorocarbons circulating within a closed system is converted into a gas in the collector. The gas flows through a vessel which acts as a tempo-

rary storage and in which any remaining liquid is separated from the gas. It then passes into a heat storage unit located underneath, where its heat is transferred to cold water or snow, and condenses to a liquid once more. The condensate is then subsequently forced up into an equalising vessel due to the pressure generated by the temperature differentials within the system. This even functions smoothly when the solar collectors are mounted 8.5 meters above the heat storage unit. Both the thermodynamic properties of the liquid had the fact that heat-exchangers and the pipelines can be laid in the building independently of the solar collectors ensure that the system is largely frost-proof.

The system was first tested in a mountain hut located at an altitude of 1570 meters in the northern Italian Alpine region of Piedmont, and according to its developers Gianfranco De Beni and Rudolf Friesen, proved both reliable and maintenance free. Equipped with 5.7 square meters of solar paneling, the plant can heat 450 litres of water by approx. 30°C or extract 250 litres of melt-water on a clear sunny day. Even with a heavy frost, when the huts are closed in winter, the system operates reliably and provides a continuous store of warm water.

Research into the technical application of solar energy is also being conducted by the Freiburg-based Fraunhofer Institute for Solar Energy Systems, ISE, and various systems have been devised. Particular attention is being given to the development of decentralised systems which are economically viable under the insolation conditions of central Europe.



Basic research forms the humus on which industrial research can flourish. Large installation for fusion research near Munich.



A close-up view of a fresh fuel element stored in a bunker at the Tuwaitha Nuclear Research Centre.