

## Burma's referendum: A done deal

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LARRY JAGAN

ON May 10, Burma goes to the polls to vote on a new constitution. A constitution that very few people have actually seen, and certainly one which cannot be criticised publicly. But the new constitution is going to move the country into a significantly new political era, even if the military leaders remain in power. A period of massive change is inevitable.

And Burma's military rulers are taking no chances, as they carefully orchestrate a "Yes" vote.

"To approve the state constitution is a national duty of the entire people, let us all cast a 'Yes' vote in the national interest," the state-run newspapers have urged ever since the referendum was announced, exactly a month before the polls.

In fact, the government is hoping for a unanimous vote, though that is inconceivable unless the results are completely rigged, something which most diplomats in Rangoon believe is highly likely. But public sentiment is far more difficult to test. There are no opinion polls available, so it is hard to get an informed impression.

Rangoon's taxi drivers -- a good weather vane of public opinion -- are of one mind: little is going to change by having a new constitution. "What's the point of voting,

they [the military] just order everyone around and don't care what people think," said Min Thu a taxi driver in Rangoon. "If they promise to reduce the cost of petrol, then I would certainly vote."

"I'm going to vote 'yes' because I'm tired of the top brass running the country, and doing it very badly," said a Colonel who wanted to remain anonymous for safety reasons. "It's time to get them out of government and a new constitution is the only sure way of doing that," he added.

The poor farmers in Burma's once prosperous rice growing area in the centre of the country are delighted with the opportunity to tell the government what they think of them, a western aid worker told The Daily Star on condition of anonymity. "It's the first opportunity since the 1990 election that they have had to express themselves," she said. "And they see it as a referendum on the military government; so expect a resounding no from them."

But the regime is well aware of the regional variations there is likely to be, so there will be no announcement of the results at each polling station or even provincial level. The only announcement will come from the equivalent of the electoral commission in the capital Naypyitaw.

"This is very different from the

1990 elections, when the election results were made public at each local polling station," Zin Linn, a former political prisoner and now spokesman for the Burmese government in exile. "It means they will be able to manipulate the results to their own ends."

While the military government has been constantly promising the voting process will be transparent -- or they describe it held in a "systematic and fair manner." Most analysts believe it will be anything but free and fair. First of all the public or the opposition will not be allowed to scrutinise the counting. A senior general in the junta told military people and government officials in Rangoon recently that only the last ten voters before the poll closes would be allowed to stay and witness the actual count.

"These last 10 voters who can monitor the counting of the votes by the poll commission members (around 15 people) will certainly be members of the Union Solidarity and Development Association," who Than Shwe has given the job of running the referendum, and getting the result he wants," said Win Min, a Burmese academic at Chiang Mai University.

International election monitors have been banned, and it is unlikely that foreign journalists will be allowed in to report on the referendum. Both these are essen-

tial if the referendum is to have any international credibility, the former UN rapporteur for human rights in Burma, Paulo Pinheiro told The Daily Star in an exclusive interview.

Although international observers were not permitted to observe last year's constitutional referendum in Thailand, Burma's leaders need them if they are to convince the world, let alone their own people, the vote was legitimate, according to Professor Pinheiro.

"I think it would be unfair to compare the political system in Thailand with the military government in Myanmar," he said. "After decades without election at least international observers could verify the conditions of the vote. And the UN has a unit that just deals with elections, but the military government has refused their help."

In fact the Burmese military ruler Than Shwe also rebuffed the Thai government's offer to assist in running the referendum during the Thai prime minister's recent visit to the Burmese capital, according to Thai diplomatic sources.

But what is even more undemocratic is the government's insistence that there be no public debate during this referendum campaign -- only arguments for the constitution are allowed. The local media have been forbidden from reporting the "No" campaign. The new constitution cannot be criticised, and anyone who does is liable to be sentenced to more than ten years jail. Those who recommend a "No" vote have been beaten up and at least twenty young members of Aung San Suu Kyi's party have been arrested for wearing T-shirts that said "Vote No."

Undeterred the NLD has

launched its opposition to the constitution. "For the people who have the right to vote, we would like to encourage again all voters to go to the polling booths and make an 'X' (No) mark without fear," the NLD urged voters in statement released to the press last week. But they conceded the whole process was a sham.

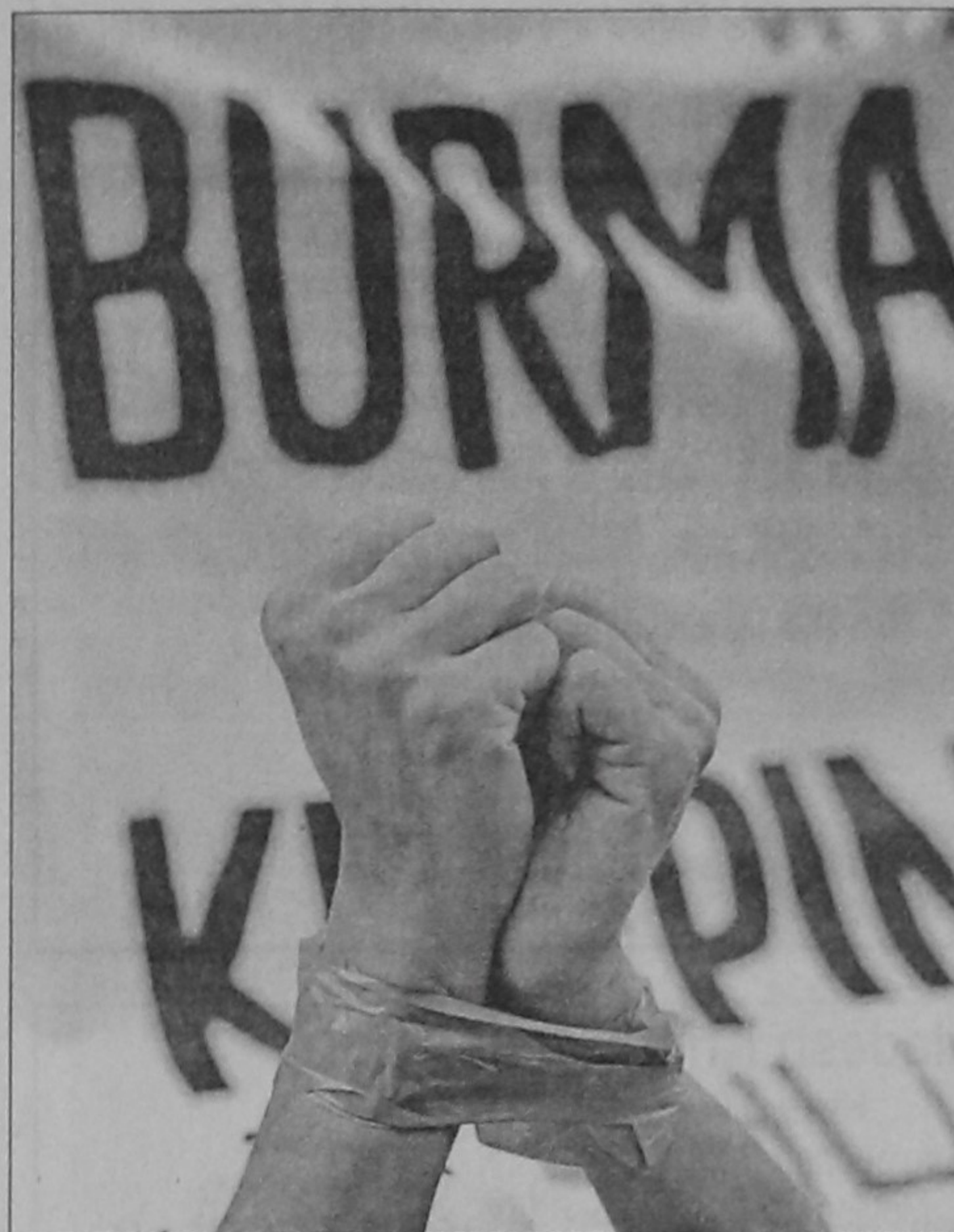
"An intimidating atmosphere for the people is created by physically assaulting some of the members of (the) NLD," its statement said.

"The whole process is surreal to have a referendum where only those who are in favour of the constitution can campaign," Professor Pinheiro told the Daily Star.

"A referendum without some basic freedoms -- of assembly, political parties and free speech -- is a farce. What the Myanmar government calls a process of democratisation is in fact a process of consolidation of an authoritarian regime," he said.

The new constitution took the army more than fourteen years to draft. The actual constitution was only revealed to the public few weeks ago. It is on sale at 1,000 kyat a copy -- the equivalent of a dollar in a country where more than 8 out of ten families live on less than \$2 a day. But even then it is almost impossible to find copies, according to western diplomats who have been scouring Rangoon for them.

"You don't need to read the constitution to know its simply conferring power on the military for eternity," said an elderly Burmese academic who wanted to remain anonymous. "The choice is simple a vote in favour of adopting the constitution means we want the military to play the leading role in politics and run the



country," he said.

Under the new constitution the president must be a military man, a quarter of the parliamentary seats will be nominated by the army chief, key ministries including defence and interior remain under military control, and the army reserves the right to oust any civilian administration it deems to have jeopardised national security.

The detained opposition leader, Aung San Suu Kyi is effectively barred from political life because she was married to a foreigner, the eminent British academic and scholar of Tibet and Buddhism, Michael Aris, who died

of prostate cancer in 1999.

This all makes a mockery of the government's stated aim of moving towards a multi-party democracy along its seven-stage road map. Burma's second in command, General Maung Aye recently told recent passing-out parade of new recruits that the constitution would pave the way for democracy.

"Comrades, it is the Tatamadaw [military] that is constantly striving for the emergence of a constitution capable shaping the multi-party democratic system," he told the army recruits last week.

But legal experts and human rights activists insist the Burmese military have got it topsy-turvy. Real democracy needs to be nurtured, including political prisoners released from jail, political parties allowed to operate unhindered, freedom of the press, and an independent judiciary. This is certainly not the case in Burma.

Professor Pinheiro, who has visited Burma several times since he was first appointed the UN human rights rapporteur, is dismayed. "I've been following political transitions throughout the world, including Asia for more than thirty years, and I am yet to see a successful transition to democracy without a previous phase of liberalism," he said. "There isn't the faintest sign of that yet in the case of Myanmar."

But the regime will be faced with a major dilemma after the referendum. A transition government will have to be formed and political parties given a measure of freedom to function properly, especially if there are to be elections in 2010, as has already been announced. This will almost certainly mean the wholesale sacking of the current cabinet and the involvement of many more civilians in government.

These steps will all be delayed substantially if there is a significant "No" vote in next week's referendum. For although he real count may not be made public, the top leaders will know they do not have the support of the majority of the Burmese people. This could lead to the top general going back to the drawing board even if the referendum is already a done deal.

Larry Jagan, a Burma specialist, writes for The Daily Star from Bangkok.

## Time to bury a dangerous legacy

**The good news is that nuclear terrorism is preventable by a feasible, affordable agenda of actions that, if taken, would shrink the risk of nuclear terrorism to nearly zero. A global strategy to prevent this ultimate catastrophe can be organised under a Doctrine of Three No's: No loose nukes, no new nascent nukes, no new nuclear weapons.**

GRAHAM ALLISON

ONE month after the terrorist assault on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, on October 11, 2001, President George W. Bush faced a more terrifying prospect. At that morning's presidential daily intelligence briefing, George Tenet, the director of central intelligence, informed the president that a CIA agent codenamed "Dragonfire" had reported that Al Qaeda terrorists possessed a 10-kiloton nuclear bomb, evidently stolen from the Russian arsenal. According to Dragonfire, this nuclear weapon was in New York City.

The government dispatched a top-secret nuclear emergency support team to the city. Under a cloak of secrecy that excluded even Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, these nuclear ninjas searched for the bomb. On a normal workday, half a million people crowd the area within a half-mile radius of Times Square.

A noon detonation in midtown Manhattan would kill them all instantly. Hundreds of thousands of others would die from collapsing buildings, fire and fallout in the

hours thereafter. The electromagnetic pulse generated by the blast would fry cell phones and other electronic communication. The wounded would overwhelm hospitals and emergency services. Firemen would fight an uncontrolled ring of fires for days afterward.

In the hours that followed, Condoleezza Rice, then national security adviser, analysed what strategists call the "problem from hell." Unlike the Cold War, when the US and the Soviet Union knew that an attack against the other would elicit a retaliatory strike or greater measure, Al Qaeda -- with no return address -- had no such fear of reprisal. Even if the president were prepared to negotiate, Al Qaeda has no phone number to call.

Concerned that Al Qaeda could have smuggled a nuclear weapon into Washington as well, the president ordered Vice-President Dick Cheney to leave the capital for an "undisclosed location," where he would remain for weeks to follow -- standard procedure to ensure "continuity of government" in case of a decapitation strike against US political leadership.

Several hundred federal employees from more than a dozen government agencies joined the

vice-president at this secret site, the core of an alternative government that would seek to cope in the aftermath of a nuclear explosion that destroyed Washington.

Six months earlier, the CIA's Counterterrorism Center had picked up chatter in Al Qaeda channels about an "American Hiroshima." The CIA knew that Osama bin Laden's fascination with nuclear weapons went back at least to 1992, when he attempted to buy highly enriched uranium from South Africa. Al Qaeda operatives were alleged to have negotiated with Chechen separatists in Russia to buy a nuclear warhead, which the Chechen warlord Shamil Basayev claimed to have acquired from Russian arsenals.

The CIA's special task force on Al Qaeda had noted the terrorist group's emphasis on thorough planning, intensive training and reputation of successful tactics. The task force highlighted Al Qaeda's preference for symbolic targets and spectacular attacks.

As CIA analysts examined Dragonfire's report and compared it with other bits of information, they noted that the September attack on the World Trade Center had set the bar higher for future terrorist attacks. Psychologically, a nuclear

attack would stagger the world's imagination. New York was, in the jargon of national-security experts, "target-rich."

As it turned out, Dragonfire's report proved to be a false alarm. But the central takeaway from the case is this: The US government had no grounds in science or logic to dismiss this possibility, nor could it do so today.

There's no established methodology for assessing the probability of an unprecedented event that could have such catastrophic consequences. Nonetheless, in "Nuclear Terrorism," I state my considered judgment that if the US and other governments just keep doing what they are doing today, a nuclear terrorist attack in a major city is more likely than not by 2014.

Richard Garwin, a designer of the hydrogen bomb, whom Enrico Fermi once called "the only true genius I had ever met," told Congress in March 2007 that he estimated a "20 percent per year probability of a nuclear explosion with American cities and European cities included."

My Harvard colleague Matthew Bunn has created a model that estimates the probability of a nuclear terrorist attack over a 10-year period to be 29% -- identical to the average estimate from a poll of security experts commissioned by Senator Richard Lugar in 2005.

Former secretary of defense William Perry has expressed his own view that my work may underestimate the risk. Warren Buffet, the world's most successful investor and legendary odds-maker in pricing insurance policies for unlikely but catastrophic events, concluded that nuclear terrorism is "inevitable." As he has stated: "I don't see anyway that it won't happen."

The good news is that nuclear terrorism is preventable by a feasible, affordable agenda of actions that, if taken, would shrink the risk of nuclear terrorism to nearly zero. A global strategy to prevent this ultimate catastrophe can be organised under a Doctrine of Three No's: No loose nukes, no new nascent nukes, no new nuclear weapons. The first requires securing all nuclear weapons and weapons-usable material, on the fastest possible timetable, to a new "gold standard." The second does not allow for any new national capabilities to enrich uranium or reprocess plutonium. The third draws a line under the current eight and a half nuclear powers -- the five members of the Security Council and India, Israel, Pakistan and North Korea -- and says unambiguously: "Stop. No More."

The US cannot unilaterally sustain a successful strategy to

prevent nuclear terrorism. Nor can the necessary actions simply be commanded, compelled or coerced. Instead, they require deep and steady international cooperation rooted in the recognition that nations share a common threat that requires a common strategy.

A Global Alliance Against Nuclear Terrorism is, therefore, in order. The mission of this alliance should be to minimise the risk of nuclear terrorism by taking every action physically, technically and diplomatically possible to prevent nuclear weapons or materials from falling into the hands of terrorists.

Constructing such an alliance will require the US and other nuclear-weapons states to confront the question of a "fourth no" -- no nuclear weapons. While US or Russian possession of nuclear arsenals is not a major driver of Iran's nuclear ambitions, and while Osama bin Laden would not be less interested in acquiring a nuclear weapon if the US eliminated its current arsenal, the proposition that nuclear weapons are necessary for the security of US and Russia but intolerably dangerous if acquired by Iran or South Africa is difficult to sell to nuclear-have-nots.

The question of a categorical "fourth no" has come to the fore with the January 2007 opinion piece in the Wall Street Journal by George F. Shultz, William J. Perry, Henry A. Kissinger and Sam Nunn, calling upon the US and other states to act to realise their Non-Proliferation Treaty commitment and President Reagan's vision of "a world free of nuclear weapons." Towards that goal, the immediate agenda should be to devalue nuclear weapons and minimise their role in international affairs.

This should begin with nuclear-weapons states pledging to the following principles: no new national enrichment, no nuclear tests, no first use of a nuclear bomb and no new nuclear weapons.

Faced with the possibility of an American Hiroshima, many are paralysed by a combination of denial and fatalism. This is unwarranted. Through a combination of imagination, a clear agenda for action and fierce determination to pursue it, the countdown to a nuclear 9/11 can be stopped.

## Youth role models set astonishing new records for egotism

THIS is a key week in the history of youth culture for three reasons. Three of the world's top role models for young people are poised to take the limelight.

First, we have singer R. Kelly, one of the top blues and rap singers of recent years. Mr. Kelly has been charged with various unsavoury crimes involving children and is due to appear this week, (May 9) not on stage, but in court.

He recently expressed his deep contrition by saying in an interview (I am not making this up): "I'm the Ali of today. I'm the Marvin Gaye of today. I'm the Bob Marley of today. I'm the Martin Luther King, or all the other greats that have come before us. And a lot of people are starting to realize that now."

A lot of people are also starting to realize that Mr. Kelly may soon have problems squeezing his ego into smaller quarters than those he is used to.

Then there is the top selling female pop singer of the past decade, Britney Spears, who has a special gig today (May 6) in a court room. At the earlier hearing, judges decreed that wealthy mother-of-two Ms. Spears does not have the ability to cope with (a) being wealthy or (b) being a mother of two or (c) being Ms. Spears expressed her humility by telling the media: "I don't like defining myself. I just am."

Many of us could probably think of good alternative ways of finishing that sentence. The third major role model

for young people is Dan Houser, author of some of the world's bestselling video games. Hitting shops this week is his latest effort, Grand Theft Auto IV. It teaches youngsters the following lessons about life.

All women are prostitutes or strippers. Why save up to buy a car when you can just steal one? A good career choice these days is "transporter of illegal drugs." No one but a fool goes out of the house without loaded weapons. Guns should be used at the



Role model for 21st century?

slightest provocation. Driving is much more fun if you do it drunk or stoned. Add drama to your leisure time by running over innocent pedestrians. Drive-by shootings are also a good laugh.

You get extra points if you shoot a police officer. Hire a prostitute and instead of paying, beat her with a baseball bat.

A few people dared to suggest that Grand Theft Auto IV might not be an ideal role model for children. Perhaps we

shouldn't market "murder simulators" to impressionable youngsters, said a lawyer named Jack Thompson.

Did Mr. Houser respond by changing the game from age 15 to "adults only?" No. He replied by introducing a new character. A lawyer who looks suspiciously like Jack Thompson gets threatened by a gunman and replies: "Guns don't murder people. Video games do."

What do we do about people like the three role models

above? The bad news is I don't think there's anything we can do. The good news is that being hugely egotistical is a surefire way of cultivating bad karma. In the words of John Lennon: "Karma's going to get you." Mr. Lennon wrote some great songs, but had a massive ego and a drug-addled private life. And events sadly seemed to prove him right.

Visit the world's only website with no pix of Britney Spears: www.vittachi.com.



Rich target: A known terrorist goal is to secure a nuclear weapon and hit a major city; above Times Square in New York City.