

Hands, Not Eyes, Reveal Character



Hands allude to a person's age.

Fidgety, ink-stained and with nails bitten to the quick, Gordon Brown's hands are fast becoming a visible symbol of the pressures he is under.

"Since he became prime minister, Gordon Brown looks cared for above the eyebrows --he has had a decent haircut". That's the pithy verdict of Veronique Henderson, co-author of *Style Matters for Men*, BBC reported.

"But nobody has told him about his hands. His stained fingers say: here is a man that does not look after himself, and who does not care about his image. And he is chewing on his nails--a sign of a nervous and worried disposition."

It's not only stylists who see significance in hands. Experts from fields as diverse as palmistry and biology say it's the hands--not the eyes--that provide the most revealing insights into a person's character.

As far as occupations go, common sense tells us that a writer or an office worker is likely to have soft hands, while the expression "horny-handed son of toil" aptly reflects the damage done by manual labor.

To the great detective, Sherlock Holmes, such a theory was elementary. "By a persons' fingernails... by the callouses of his forefinger and thumb... by each of these things an individual's calling is revealed."

It was a lesson learned well by the Khmer Rouge, which ruled Cambodia during the 1970s. In a bid to root out individual thinkers, Pol Pot's soldiers would routinely examine people's hands. Those with soft palms were deemed "intellectuals" and dispatched to the Killing Fields.

Yet hands also allude to a person's age. A study by the Ameri-

can Society of Plastic Surgeons found that most people who were shown photographs of a female hand were able to accurately estimate the subject's age.

> Revealing Insights

while a person's hands may indicate their age or occupation, practitioners of chiromancy--or palmistry--believe the appearance of a person's hands can offer more revealing insights.

Palmist Paul Hughes Barlow, who practices beneath Brighton pier under the name Punditt Maharaj, says the shape of the hand, the lines that run across it and the way the fingers are held all indicate a specific personality; even a person's future.

"The hand is something you use to express yourself--the inside of the hand is secret and reveals a lot of what you think and feel," he says.

> Hormone levels

Whilst many scientists are dismissive of palmistry, they do believe that the shape of the hand, or more specifically the relative size of the index and ring fingers, can provide accurate information about an individual.

Research by Professor John Manning, author of *The Finger Book*, suggests those with a long ring finger compared to their index finger are more likely to excel at sporting activities. Those with larger index fingers are more likely to be sociable.

"It is all to do with the amount of the hormones testosterone and estrogen produced by the fetus while it is in the womb," he says. "More testosterone is indicated by a relatively large ring finger. More estrogen shows up as a longer index finger."

Attend to Survivors After Disasters

Getting clean water to survivors of a disaster is far more important than disposing of the dead, but myths persist that corpses somehow spread disease, the World Health Organization said.

The UN health agency issued a statement after learning that Chinese rescue teams were distributing disinfectant to spray on the bodies of those who died in Monday's earthquake in southern China, which has killed 15,000 people, Reuters reported.

Similar concerns were expressed in Myanmar, where more than 130,000 people are dead or missing after Cyclone Nargis hit on May 2.

WHO advised rescuers to focus on the living, not the dead, and to pay special attention to the old, the very young and the sick.

"There is a widespread and erroneous belief that dead bodies are a source of dis-

ease and therefore a threat to public health. This is untrue," WHO said in a statement.

"There is no public health threat from dead bodies and this misapprehension causes unnecessary diversion of staff and resources at a critical time. Pressure from misinformed journalists and media organizations can cause governments to behave inappropriately, for example spraying the area around dead bodies with disinfectant or covering dead bodies with lime," WHO added in the advisory.

"There has never been a documented case of a post-natural-disaster epidemic that could be traced to dead bodies. Those killed by natural disasters are generally healthy at the time of their death, and therefore very unlikely to be a source of infection to others."

WHO said epidemics are more likely to come from unsafe food and dirty water.



News in Brief

Fake Smiling Bad for You



Pretending to smile can be bad for your health, a leading psychologist has warned.

Office workers wanting to get on, shop assistants trying to sell and call center workers ordered to be friendly all suffer higher stress levels if they regularly have to put on a grin, German scientist Professor Dieter Zapf said.

Trying to button-up our true feelings does more harm than good, Prof Zapf of the Johann Wolfgang Goethe University of Frankfurt warned, Telegraph reported.

He told healthcare magazine *Apotheken Umschau* that "professional smilers" should take regular smile breaks when they could be as glum as they liked.

"Smiling against one's own will can lead to depression, affect the immune system, cause higher blood pressure and other problems," he said.

The findings were based on a two-year project in which 4,000 volunteers were subjected to daily abuse in a fake call center.

Prof Zapf later said: "Every time a person is forced to repress his true feelings, there are negative consequences."

UN: \$7m for China Quake



The United Nations has released \$7 million in aid for China following the devastating earthquake in the Sichuan region, UN spokeswoman Michele Montas said.

The money, which will be taken from the organization's Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), will be used by different UN agencies and programs to help China meet the most urgent humanitarian needs, AFP reported.

"The United Nations stands ready to provide further support, as required, to the government of China in its efforts to respond to the humanitarian needs caused by the disaster," Montas said.

The official Chinese death toll from Monday's earthquake stands at 22,069, but state television said the government estimates more than 50,000 may have been killed. Another 4.8 million people have lost their homes, officials said.

Blue Diamond Sets Record



A pear-shaped blue diamond has sold for 5.2 million Swiss francs (\$4.93 million), setting a new world record price per carat for any gemstone, Sotheby's said.

The buyer of the 3.73 carat blue stone was British jeweler Laurence Graff, who also picked up a light pink diamond weighing 6.26 carats for 1.67 million francs, the auction house said, reported Reuters.

In all, 423 of 508 lots on offer found new owners at Sotheby's three jewelry sales held in Geneva, netting a total of 60 million francs, a statement said.

"We've had great success with important stones, with period pieces and particularly with jewels of noble provenance," said David Bennett, chairman of Sotheby's international jewelry department for Europe and the Middle East.

S. African Military Criticized Over AIDS Policy



The South African military's blanket exclusions of HIV positive members is not medically justified and ignores government policy, lawyers for service personnel union told a court.

A lawyer for the South African Security Forces Union, which is attempting to force the military to review its HIV-AIDS policy, said the army had failed to implement its own and the government's policies, AFP reported.

"The HIV policy adopted by the cabinet in relation to the military and the department of defense is not consistent with the policy implemented by the SANDF (South African National Defense Forces)," lawyer Gilbert Marcus told a hearing at the high court in Pretoria.

"The cabinet has adopted a policy that HIV status should not exclude candidates from appointments to the SANDF, although it may preclude their appointment to positions that require extreme physical fitness."

Marcus said the SANDF's AIDS policy prohibits HIV positive people from being recruited, employed abroad or promoted if they are found to be positive during mandatory HIV testing.

This despite the fact that aviation policy allows HIV positive pilots to fly and infected soldiers are deployed within the country despite being considered "not combat ready".

According to Marcus, the SANDF has admitted that some 23 percent of its members are HIV positive.

"It is simply impossible at this stage to have an HIV-free defense force. The question is how do we accommodate this," he said.