

Canadians have focused on homegrown scandals recently

But is our navel-grazing misguided

By **ALEX BUSTOS**

OTTAWA (CUP) -- Canadians are so boring they're the designated drivers of the Americas, my uncle from New Jersey once told me.

"That may be true," I responded, "but at least we're not from New Jersey."

My uncle's jab at Canucks aside, his statement was based on an interesting premise: Canadians shouldn't navel gaze because our navel is, well, not very interesting.

A quick glance at headlines from around the planet suggests my American relative isn't the only one who thinks so.

Yet anyone reading Canadian newspapers these days would think otherwise. From the APEC scandal -- also known as Spray-PEC -- to Quebec secession to fiery protests against Ontario Premier Mike Harris, our national news pages are full of stories we think are really important.

Outside of Canada, however, there's barely a whisper of what goes on north of the 49th parallel.

For example, the Belgium daily *Le Soir Le Ligne* hasn't mentioned Canada all year, according to a search on the paper's Web site.

Ditto for the South Korean newspaper *Korea Herald News* and Papua New Guinea's *The National*.

And England's *Daily Telegraph* -- owned by Canadian media magnate Conrad Black -- has had no coverage on the APEC fiasco in months. No mention of student Craig Jones, Solicitor General Andy Scott or Prime Minister Jean Chretien to be found.

In fact, a search on the *Daily Telegraph's* Web site reveals that in the past year the paper has had only two APEC stories and four brief mentions of our prime minister.

The only Canadian content to be found in the *Irish News* is limited to our rugby team.

The few international pa-

pers that cover Canadian politics or politicians do so in a questionable manner.

A recent article about Chretien in the Spanish daily *El Pais* is a case in point. The article refers to the minor facial paralysis the prime minister suffered as a child, noting it "forces him to speak in a torturous diction."

Few Canadian scribes would be bold or foolish enough to write these words.

Then there's the *Press*, one of New Zealand's largest newspapers, writing about the scandal resulting from last November's Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation meeting in Vancouver.

"Long after memories of the 1997 APEC in Vancouver faded, actions by Canadian police against non-violent protesters -- mostly students -- continue to grip media headlines and rock Jean Chretien's government," a recent article states.

The article then states the RCMP "targeted" protest organizers for "pre-arrest" before the meeting.

"The operation was not driven by legitimate security concerns but rather aimed to spare visiting leaders, notably Suharto, from political embarrassment," it says.

The *Press* article which got away with reporting more or less what landed CBC reporter Terry Milewsky into hot water -- was one of only a handful of international articles (out of an informal sample of about a dozen daily papers) that focused on Canada.

What does this little global media search tell us?

Perhaps in the grand scheme of things our problems really aren't that big.

Which doesn't mean we shouldn't worry about political interference in the APEC inquiry and other important issues of the day.

On the other hand, this little exercise serves as a healthy reality check on how our problems register with the rest of the world.



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