

## WEB FORUM &lt; LETTERS &lt; VOICES

## Courts used to intimidate natives

Re Democracy suffers under barrage of strategic lawsuits  
Comment, Feb. 26

A troubling pattern is emerging in Ontario. The right of ordinary citizens in a democratic country to defend their communities and their land without fear of devastating financial liability is being eroded. In addition to SLAPP suits, the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines is backstopping uranium and platinum exploration companies by using the court system to punish aboriginal leaders and elders who peacefully oppose exploration and mining on their lands.

The Ardoch Algonquins and Shabot Obaadjiwan are being forced by the courts to accept uranium exploration. These are reasonable people trying to protect their lands. The court has sentenced them to six months in jail and slapped them

with thousands of dollars in fines, with escalating fines to come. And a decision on costs against the community is pending as well. Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug, a remote First Nation in northern Ontario, is next to be punished for defending its community and environment from mining. It is being sued by an exploration company for \$10 billion. And its members also face being thrown in jail and/or fined exorbitantly.

It's time for Premier Dalton McGuinty to rectify this situation before Ontario's reputation is further damaged. The Mining Act should not take precedence over reasonable people wanting a say in how their land is used, and companies must not be allowed to punish the public.

Anna Baggio, CPAWS Wildlands League, Toronto

## Premier's office should lighten up

Re Premier's fan accused of death threat  
Feb. 26

While Neelam Vir's choice of words in "If she didn't give it to you, I'll kill her" is obviously infelicitous, the interpretation of this utterance by the premier's office is remarkably ungenerous. The phrase, "I will kill her," has been mistakenly interpreted as a direct speech act rather than a playful turn of phrase. Was Vir not writing about something harmless like *gulab jamun*?

As the philosopher Paul Grice would say, we use indirect speech acts for various purposes. Here the

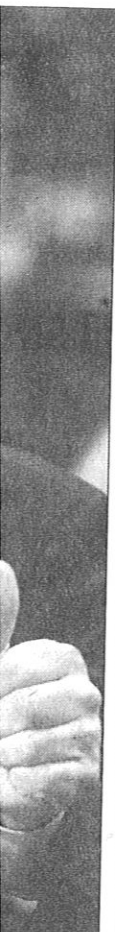
terlocutor through a tacit, collaborative understanding that Vir's utterance was not literally true.

Given that the jocular use of "or I will kill you" exists in both colloquial Hindi and colloquial English, a newcomer could easily be blind to the fact that these words might be construed as a piece of information (and thereafter "evidence") rather than an attempt at rapport.

Vir seems to have learned from her faux pas. Now it is the turn of the premier's office for some tutoring in pragmatics, intercultural communication and humour.

Professor Rena Helms, York University

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