



Photograph: Reuters

CRITICAL MOMENT

SNAPSHOT OF A COMMUNICATIONS TURNING POINT
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The eyes of Florencio Avalos are caught on a tiny video camera... and a mining accident in a far-off country becomes a human drama that transfixes the world. Each year, several thousand miners die underground. The 33 miners trapped in a collapse at the San José copper and gold mine in northern Chile last August seemed destined to be another statistic in a dangerous industry – until rescuers drilled down and, 17 days after the accident, heard tapping. Shortly after, they brought the first pictures to the surface, proving that all had survived. In the past year the world has been rocked by revolutions and disasters. Our ability to relate to each was

enhanced by human images: a lone woman amid a submerged Japanese landscape, or people power in Tahrir Square. The world watched Chile as engineers took 69 suspense-filled days to drill a shaft wide enough to bring the miners to the surface. On October 12, with television stations from around the world going live to the mine, they came up one by one. First was Avalos, 31, the man in the picture, chosen to lead because of his superior fitness – in case anything went wrong. Proof once again that stories with a human face are always more compelling.

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