

Give Peace a Chance in Chechnya

The Budennovsk hostage drama has at last come to an end. But not before scores of people — many of them innocent — had died. The hostage-taking by the Chechen rebels has hardly achieved what they wanted to — complete pullout of Russian troops from Chechnya. Yet the Chechens were able to make one or two points. One negative but a very effective point for the separatist Chechens is that they can cause constant worries for the Russian government if they wish to. On the positive side the temporary truce can be indicative of the felt-need for a lasting reconciliation between the two sides.

Looking in retrospect it now appears that both Chechen and Russian leaders underestimated the seriousness of the problem. Dzhokhar Dudayev who claims to be the president of Chechnya, seemed to have gone overboard in declaring independence for the republic. Similarly, Russian leaders, Yeltsin in particular, have been rash in sending troops to Chechnya before exhausting diplomatic means for settlement of the dispute. Its fall-outs have been devastating. Perhaps the blood-letting in Chechnya could be avoided, had Yeltsin listened to men like Victor Chernomyrdin.

The hostage crisis could be solved by Chernomyrdin's personal interference and good offices. From the very beginning the Chechens have been saying that they trust the prime minister and have their full confidence in his negotiating ability. His successful mediation proves they were right. Now that the Chechens have followed in letter the agreement reached between them and the Russian prime minister, the good work has to be continued with the aim of bringing peace in the republic. The Chechen separatists, for their part, have made a few concessions — such as agreeing to Russian military presence in some towns to be given a military status. Now the Russian leadership must fully utilise the opportunity to bring the Chechen fighters to the negotiating table get their demand for the eventual withdrawal of the Russian troops sorted out.

Evidently, the Chechen campaign is in a subdued state. It is the Russians who should now generously volunteer to address the grievances of the Chechens. That the Chechen guerillas could not muster enough Western support, except for occasional expressions of moral concern over the unequal fight, is one of the main causes of their present plight. But this must not be allowed to be a cause for their humiliation. At least the West should exert as much diplomatic pressure on Russia as will ensure an honourable solution for the Chechens. After all, these people are very proud and any humiliation inflicted on them would never be forgiven.

Towards a Living Liberation War

A Muktiyuddha Jaguhar — Liberation War museum — is going to be set up in Dhaka. The Muktiyuddha Smriti Trust, the sponsors, in a press briefing on Monday, specified the location of the museum at Segun Bagicha which is no doubt an ideal site for such a project.

Ours is a state born directly out of the womb of the Liberation War of 1971. The initiative to build a museum centering on that war, by a private trust, should shame the successive governments of this state, specially the incumbent one which claims a share of glory that late Ziaur Rahman achieved by declaring the commencement of that war on behalf of the Bangabandhu. The private attempt brings into bold outline the hollowness of this and the previous governments' protestations of championing the Liberation War. At the same time, the proposed museum coming from the private sector becomes in effect a people's undertaking rather than a party's — and there can be nothing better than this until a government becomes truly pro-Liberation War and helps the state to repay its debt of gratitude to the Liberation War as a matter of foremost duty.

The above should very clearly impress upon the sponsors that they have no right to make a poor show of the museum. We know that a museum, like a library, grows, often from a very modest beginning. One should not mind if the beginning of this present project be rather unspectacular. Nevertheless, it must bear the signs and promises that it is conscious of its responsibility in presuming to be the repository of some of the best and most sacred achievements of a very old nation. It must impress with its broadness of vision and its grasp of the complexities of this nation's history and culture, economic and social challenges and even of purely the question of what constitutes this nation. And at the very outset. A very easy approach to such a formidable sounding order would be to go for a collection of all that has so far been published on the liberation war or having any bearing on it.

As Bangladesh gropes its way like someone demented, unsteady and uncertain and hardly with a clear idea of any direction, it seemingly moves away from the principles and ideals that materialised it. Harking back to those can heal our erratic ways by a large measure. The Liberation War is the eternal fountainhead of those principles and ideals.

Bravo Girls

Bravo girls. Keep it up. A survey of primary schools in ten northern districts has thrown up interesting and unsuspected facts. Enrollment of boys is somewhat higher in seven of them than that of girls. But in all of these districts attendance is higher for girls than for boys. Dropping out is as such more a male feature in these areas and girls are more expected here to complete the primary level than the boys. In three of the surveyed districts, Dinajpur, Chapainawabganj and Gaibandha, however, both enrollment and attendance are higher for girls.

These are certainly very heart-warming data and the fact that at the secondary school admission stage girls fall behind the boys by a big margin can hardly take the shine off the girls' achievements. For up to the matriculation level it is literacy that results and scarcely anything more. And a primary completing girl is not less literate than a matriculate boy. And in terms of social return the girl may be far more fetching than the higher educated boy.

The news of the survey conducted by an international NGO came from Natore. Which unfailingly gives a romantic turn to a prosaic piece of information. The reader must be congratulated for guessing right. The best retained piece of poetry for the last half of a century contains lines written about a Bonolata Sen of Natore. That Jibanananda's celebration of Natorer Bonolata Sen was not quite fortuitous is borne out by the northern region's progress in female education and comparatively less gender-related persecution over there.

If leadership were assessed on a scale of one to ten with respect to the gift of speech as its primary indicative quality, PM Ms Benazir Bhutto would easily go past that measure of assessment. An extremely confident and articulate Ms Benazir fielded searching questions from a select group of senior journalists the day before the announcement of the 1995 Federal Budget for an off-the-record briefing, ostensibly on the Federal Budget. That document got very cursory attention, not even the fact that Rs 25 billion additional taxation was envisaged excited many ripples as the focus shifted to the unspoken agenda of the day, the situation in Karachi. While there was certainly a sense of urgency among those seated in the PM's Conference Room, as the only person in that gathering actually living presently in that city on a full-time basis, one came away with a deep sense of frustration and anxiety, endless frustration that even a perceptive leader like Ms Benazir who should be sensitive to democratic solutions for such problems was adamant about not "negotiating" with terrorists and deep anxiety at the helplessness of millions of innocent Karachi-ites who fear death, destruction and injury every day at the hands of rapacious and ruthless gunmen without any qualms about targeting innocents, age (and sex) making no difference as to opportunity targets.

Having failed to get the attention of the PM in this small but august assemblage one can only hope that unlike other leaders who read but do not understand and others who understand but cannot read, Ms Benazir will have the time to scan this fervent appeal to the senses and intelli-

Rockets over Clifton! The PM spoke about a particular "signature" on the rockets and bullets. They may well be forged! One must go over the compulsions of these militant factions in order of priority as to the possibility of their involvement or otherwise in the symbolic rain of rockets over Clifton.

gence of an educated PM who is herself part time resident of Karachi and the mother of three small children.

Karachi is aflame, make no doubt about it. The fire may not be visible to the naked eye but it is burning, none so fiercely as within the hearts and minds of its populace, a mass that is gradually losing hope of any succour between the many devils that strut gun in hand through the streets of this city and the deep sea. Islamabad is a world removed from Karachi, a city for golf and tennis, occasionally polo, an 8:30 to 2:00 pm town that is laid-back and seems insensitive to the chaos and confusion that is threatening to engulf this nation's only port city and major commercial centre. In a city where everyone has a theory (and solution) to offer, in fact about the only person who would understand the situation (and be affected by it) politically and as a person is the PM. So why this insensitivity to the apocalypse that this city is headed for?

The immediate cause for attention is the killing spree that gunmen staged only a few days back in Clifton, symbolically crossing that fall-safe line that divides Karachi into areas of violence and islands of peace. One bright Govt functionary, faced with daily reports in the media about violence in Karachi had even suggested that a government edict be promulgated that only the peaceful South-east region of the city be called Karachi so that when

violence took place in Li-aqatabad, Mangophr, Malir, Korangi, the government information machine could say tongue-in-cheek that "Karachi" was peaceful. So much for that idea! While the PM readily blamed the MQM (A) for the dastardly attack that claimed the innocent life of a three year old child, this could be laid at the doorstep of a number of terrorist factions operating in the city, including those from the MQM (A), who could be responsible for the attack. The

has no business roaming about freely. But then he is Nusrat Bhutto's son and the PM's hands are tied. Which organization has threatened Navy personnel with retaliation and dire retribution for the Shah Bunder incident? Why was a Navy installation a target for one of the rocket attacks? Earlier a car bomb exploded near the Navy flats and on June 13 a Navy lieutenant was gunned down crossing a bridge in a car. Murtaza's people have reportedly been trained by

be safe from retaliation if Gen Babar's "grand operation" is launched.

A combination of their frustration and cause for revenge could have driven extremists within MQM (A) to go on this killing spree, with rockets directed without aim to cause fear and panic. Very rapidly it seems that MQM's "field" commanders may be losing control over their units, in the face of Altaf Hussain's call for restraint this may well have been a defiant act by disgruntled elements. By itself this loss of control may be viewed with alarm.

The PM very rightly called MQM (H) a Javed Nasir creation. Acknowledgement at the highest level of government that an organization of the State sponsored terrorist faction with money and material besides government protection is a pathetic commentary of the level to which we have descended. This happened during Mian Nawaz Sharif's time as PM and since Lt Gen Javed Nasir was his appointee as DG ISI, it must have been cleared by him. In a subsequent election during Mian Sahib's tenure as PM, the MQM (H) got a "massive" 20000 votes (2% of the voting populace) despite Syed Muzzafar "George Bernard" Shah's Herculean efforts at rigging as Jam Sadiq Ali's handpicked successor as CM Sindh. How can people act civilized even they support the uncivilized? That is the paradox of Johnny-come-latelies in politics, they can-

not digest power and/or absorb its realities. Their only stake is in their own survival at all costs and damn all principles! It is no secret that MQM (H) was passed on by the ISI temporarily to the MI before being set free and taken over by the IB. How else can Afaq and his men get such protection as they now enjoy! It would be in the fitness of things for them to spread mayhem in order to (1) blame it on MQM (A) as the obvious suspects and (2) thus also enhance their own longevity as a useful instrument to be used whenever the situation demanded. Remember the border incident that was staged by Germany as a pretext for invading Poland? The PM's evading of the Haqueqis to the MQM (A) sounds ludicrous but gives credence to this fact. There are a number of other terrorist factions that can also be considered for accusation, among them militant factions of Jeay Sindh, SSP and SPM, etc. How does one know how the convoluted mind of a terrorist works? How are we to discern the psyche of various deprived militant minds that operate in the city and think nothing of targeting women and children?

There is a dangerous vacuum of leadership here at the grassroots level. Before this void is completely filled with gun-toting killers, the Federal Govt must take the bit in its teeth and initiate a series of steps to defuse the situation. There is no alternative to gaining time immediately by announcing a schedule for Local Bodies elections. Unless an alternate democratic leadership comes up post-haste to replace the rule of the gun, we shall be forced to watch this city go down under a rain of rockets.

AS I SEE IT

Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

PM spoke about a particular "signature" on the rockets and bullets. They may well be forged! One must go over the compulsions of these militant factions in order of priority as to the possibility of their involvement or otherwise in the symbolic rain of rockets over Clifton.

Prime suspect should be brother Murtaza's Al-Zulfikar. This is a self-confessed Indian-supported and trained terrorist organization. There are reams (and videos) of evidence about Murtaza Bhutto's involvement in training terrorists and abetting their activities in Pakistan. Given the sliding scale on which people are being kept in jail for one reason or the other, Murtaza

RAW, conceivably they may not be under his control anymore but the targeting of Navy personnel has only one obvious smoking gun to point at. The fiction that there is friction between brother and sister is now wearing thin.

MQM (A) is the next obvious suspect. Their areas of inhabitation have been battle-grounds for the most part of three years, the sound of automatic fire is a living nightmare on a daily basis. The population in the Central District do resent an island of peace in Karachi's South as they face encirclement operations, raids and various other humiliations on a daily basis. This could well have been a warning that no areas would

Oklahoma City Bombing : Scapegoating the Muslim Community

Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed writes from Princeton, USA

Although Muslims had nothing to do with the Oklahoma City bombing, they will pay a high price, regardless. The Administration's Omnibus Terrorism Act, now before the Congress aims to curb Muslim immigration and fund raising capabilities in the US. It will allow people to be deported based on secret reports.

I hope you are not an Arab or a Muslim. All the "sand niggers" should be kicked out, their bodies buried in the sand with only the heads showing, and left for the vultures to feast on! On Thursday, April 20, the day after the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, many Arab Americans and Muslims were greeted with such words as they entered the work place.

Such wanton disregard for human life, killing of babies, these could not be the work of Americans, the rationale went. It had to be sinister and foreign, it had to be Islamic. These Muslim "animals" must be a lesser breed who secretly enjoy killing children!

In spite of the protestations from the law enforcement agencies that they did not know immediately who the perpetrators were, the media had decided otherwise. "Three Middle Eastern looking men were seen fleeing the area," was the first part of a massive misinformation campaign. Every possible Muslim angle was played up to the hilt by the media.

The "first break" came when an Arab American was found to be travelling from Oklahoma City to Jordan. Any Muslim leaving Oklahoma City must be a criminal. Then America's allies got into the act. John Major's British Government, which has lost no opportunity to help the Muslims in Bosnia, hounds the "suspect" as his plane lands in London, and dispatches him back to the United States. "In the name of Islam", screams a front page headline on London's daily "Independent." The Italians find "bomb making equipment" in the suspect's luggage. On his return to the US, the FBI calls him neither a suspect nor a witness, and releases him. The Italian report turns out to be bogus.

Terrorism "experts" crop up everywhere, especially omnipresent on television. They paint a dire picture of future Islamic terrorism on US

mainland. Especially in demand is Steve Emerson, who made a name for himself by airing a documentary, "Jihad in America", last November. Mr Emerson characterizes Oklahoma City as a hotbed of Islamic fundamentalism. On CNN's Crossfire, a lawyer asks Mr Emerson how he is so sure this is the work of Muslim terrorists, when two hours after the World Trade Centre bombing he had blamed it on the Serbs!

On Thursday afternoon, April 20, the FBI releases composite sketches of "two white males" as the suspects. Public outrage diminishes dramatically. The American Muslims heave a sigh of relief! But the media does not give up the Muslim angle that easily. "A Pakistani cab driver from Queens" is made into the next suspect. He went to Oklahoma City an hour before the bombing. If a Muslim leaving Oklahoma City can be a suspect, so can one entering it!

But the FBI keeps on soliciting information only on the two "white male suspects." William M Carley of the Wall Street Journal, tries to rid the FBI towards the right track. He writes on Friday, April 21: "Investigators initially seemed to be focusing on a possible Mideastern connection to the Oklahoma City bombing. But in a news conference yesterday, US Attorney General Janet Reno said arrest warrants had been issued for two white men, apparently spotted at the scene. There was speculation the men had a grudge against some federal agency."

Still, the car-bomb technique, the size of the bomb and the chemicals used for the explosive are so similar to those used in the World Trade Centre attack that many analysts believe the same loosely knit bands of Muslim extremists are behind both the

blasts," Carley concludes.

Relentlessly, the FBI pursues only these two men, and no Muslim. This alarms well-known Muslim haters in the media. A golden opportunity to destroy the Muslim community is slipping away! A M Rosenthal of the New York Times writes on Friday: "Police do not know for certain whether the bombing is foreign terrorism or domestic. Either way, the fact remains that whatever we are doing to destroy Mideast terrorism, the chief terrorist threat against America, has not been working." By what journalistic gymnastics he jumps from the first sentence to the second, only he knows.

In a Jumma prayers meeting in the local mosque, the Imam prays for, and asks for donation for the victims of Oklahoma City bombing. The faithful opens their wallets generously. Timothy James McVeigh, one of the suspects, is apprehended in the afternoon. Thank God! "Experts" on Islamic terrorism vanish from the television screens!

Although Muslims had nothing to do with the Oklahoma City bombing, they will pay a high price, regardless. The Administration's Omnibus Terrorism Act, now before the Congress aims to curb Muslim immigration and fund raising capabilities in the US. It will allow people to be deported based on secret reports. Such potential violation of civil liberties flies in the face of the United States justice system, where a person is presumed innocent until proven guilty. But after such a tremendous outburst of xenophobia in the media in the aftermath of a bombing the Muslims did not commit, who will espouse the Muslim cause? Although the terrorism is domestic, The American Jewish Congress takes out a full page ad in The New York Times on Sunday, April

23 urging citizens to support legislation against "foreign (read Muslim) terrorism." When will we learn that Israel's enemies are not necessarily America's enemies? Nevertheless, the terrorism bill is guaranteed to become law by bipartisan support.

The Muslims of America have just had a brush with catastrophe. It has been made clear to them that they are responsible, by extension, for the acts of any criminal with a Muslim sounding name. An attempt has been made to intimidate the peaceful Muslim citizens of the United States. This is trial and conviction by the media without evidence, this is guilt by innuendo, and this is totally contrary to the time-honoured traditions of the fairness of American jurisprudence.

Some in the media have taken advantage of the tragic bombing of the World Trade Centre and the PBS's airing of the one-sided documentary "Jihad in America", to declare open season on the American Muslims. This is reminiscent of the worst days of the communist witch-hunt under Senator McCarthy in the 1950s. People's lives and careers were destroyed by lies, and innocent men were declared guilty by association. Decent people, and press then, as now, waited too long to speak out in favour of the innocents.

The overwhelming majority of the Muslims in America abhor violence and would go out of their way to aid the law enforcement agencies in apprehending the perpetrators of violence of any religious hue. The word "Islam" itself means "peace". Since Islam is a fairly new religion in America, and ordinary Americans do not know much about it, some unscrupulous press, media and legal agents are attempting to instill unwarranted fear of Muslims into

the hearts of ordinary Americans.

In reality, it is the fledgling Muslim community in America that is truly afraid. In the face of a concerted effort by some quarters to paint the whole community as suspect, they are afraid of losing their

livelihood. They are afraid for the safety of their children. In a society that justly prides itself in the fairness of their justice system, Muslims are dismayed that the virulent attack on their civil liberties and civil rights have drawn scant attention from the press.

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OPINION Roundtable—'Save Dhaka'

Helal Kabir Chowdhury

The roundtable on "Save Dhaka" organised jointly by Post-Graduate Centre of the Department of Architecture, BUET and The Daily Star appeared to be commendable and thought-provoking. Its deliberations and recommendations have generated interest in our mind for their timely and appropriate implementation. The recommendations sound acceptable and pragmatic but are unlikely to find a place in the new comprehensive urban development master plan to be ready in December. But let us not be pessimistic.

Discussions rightly urged the formation of an independent city authority to coordinate the overall planning, development and administrative activities of the capital city. This demand is easily justifiable in the context of what is happening in city administration and that for putting WASA, DESA, T&T, Titas, RAJUK etc. under the aegis of a single authority deserves merit.

Works and Housing Minister Barrister Rafiq's acceptance of the fact that there is lack of coordination among various regulatory bodies and authorities working separately, preventing concerted action for capital city's development and planning, is heartening to observe. I would like to give an example of what I have witnessed in this regard. Acute paucity of drinking water had been causing great suffering for a vast section of city dwellers. Individual and collective approaches, appeals in the press for its solution have been undertaken by majority of the sufferers.

In one area of the city, concerted campaigns led by the local MP who is also a state minister, managed to impress the WASA to do the needful. But a plot of land for the construction of a reservoir was not available. When a government plot was identified it became a monumental task to have that sanctioned from the relevant government department. Interventions were made from high level but till today the water crisis in that area remains to be resolved. The local people in collaboration with WASA have failed to procure that land belonging to the Railway authority. Others can cite myriads of such instances.

Now I would like to focus on Barrister Rafiq's declaration that a new comprehensive urban development master plan would be ready by

December this year. But this gives rise to a question whether that plan would include cities like Chittagong, Rajshahi, Khulna and other district towns. A plan for the capital city is not enough and does not sound plausible. If it is meant for Dhaka only, immediate attention should be given to include other cities and towns.

Mayor Hanif's comment on withholding the Japanese grant for mosquito eradication in the city does not sound healthy. If utilised for unwanted laxity on the part of the government, the grant may have its natural death depriving the Mayor to implement an important programme which was one of his election pledges. Just because the Mayor is an Awami League leader should not be a hindrance (as often alleged) to solve city's problems as he is the elected representative of the Dhakaites to look after their well-being. Continuation of such instances are wholly unacceptable.

Speaker's deliberations on the urban poor also drew our attention. Will their fate be considered by the implementing agencies of the new master plan of urban development? It is astonishing to find out that only three to four per cent of foreign assistance since 1972 has been used in the urban areas. I strongly feel separate residential quarters be constructed for the slum dwellers, thereby rehabilitating them in phases. This will be done at government's behest and the fund may come from the World Bank.

To the Editor...

'Poison-free Foodstuffs'

Sir, I am pleased to read your very interesting and thought-provoking editorial "Poison-free Foodstuffs" (June 1, 1995). The subject matter of this editorial involves everyone of us. According to WHO nutritious food is synonymous to health. Studies carried out at the Institute of Food and Radiation Biology of the Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission (BAEC) have demonstrated, although apparently healthy, how safe the food we are eating. In absence of the proper application of food standard as per recommendations of the FAO/WHO and organized consumers movement, the consumers have been left to the mercy of the unscrupulous food producers and traders. I hope your editorial will draw not only the attention of the authorities but

also the consumers at large.

Decades ago DDT, a chlorinated hydrocarbon, was banned in this country to control pests in foodstuffs. However, it is permitted for public health purposes (e.g. control of mosquitoes). This and other dried fish. The use of these toxic chemicals will continue unless the users are properly informed on their deleterious effects on consumers and the environment. Now that a laboratory is available to provide the services to the relevant government department to determine the residual toxicity in foods, the existing food laws should be enforced and steps should be taken to achieve the objective of providing safe and nutritious food to our people. Attaining the self-sufficiency of food should not be the only goal of our policy makers, nutrition education and providing safe food to the consumers should also be

equally important for the development of a healthy nation, and should properly be addressed to. Past focus of FAO was on increased productivity, currently it has placed emphasis on sustainable development, considering the large-scale degradation of environment. Bangladesh is a small country compared to its population. Therefore, any activity which effects the nutritional status of its people and the environment should be seriously looked into.

I again appreciate your writing such an important editorial. I hope the media will take more interest on this subject in order to create awareness on the level of toxic residues in food for the benefit of the consumers.

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'Electric connections galore'

Sir, A photograph with the caption "Electric connections galore" printed in your esteemed daily on 8.6.95 on page 12 says that a number of electric connections have reportedly been taken illegally from a single electric pole in Dhanmondi.

Now Dhanmondi is a place where aristocrats and affluent class of people reside. Many of them are involved in various socio-cultural and political organisations and they participate in seminars, workshops, meeting, etc for the welfare of the country. We could not understand how come illegal electric connections be taken in an area like Dhanmondi!

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