The Baily Star

Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali

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Delayed Realisation

A reluctant government has at last decided to call for foreign assistance to help finance its postflood economic recovery. The spirit behind the reluctance was laudable for the glimmer of self-respect it betrayed. Hopefully it may not have got too late for adequate foreign help to materialise and to come and be effective as soon as the waters recede. The Prime Minister has candidly connected the delay in the decision to a very late realisation that the flood was this big a problem tarrying for weeks beyond its welcome. This delayed realisation must have caused the nation much loss already. One big loss was that the government could not get into appropriate gears to engage the watery challenge. Now that the decision has been taken to appeal for foreign help, whatever be the response will have to be thoughtfully used to tide over the present problems - reaching food and clothes and medicine to

the marooned millions.
Government has been discreet in talking of help for post-flood recovery. But it is plain enough to see that we needed much to do during in-flood time. We perhaps have missed that bus. The government's measure of the size and duration of the waters was seriously out of step with reality. And the same idea of size continues, continues to keep alleviation measures well below what was required. The first and overriding reality of Bangladesh is now the unyielding all-devouring floods. The goings on in the government do not at all reflect that fact. The government has failed to respond appropriately to the challenge may be because it decided to underplay it much before the dimensions could be grasped.

That said, we expect the government to make a great success of the post-flood operations for which foreign assistance may now be forthcoming. The main thrusts will necessarily have to address a) food and clothes, at least for 3-plus million families; b) prevention of epidemics through medical teams and medicines; c) house-building support; d) agricultural rehabilitation, helping farmers to plant the new crop, through both cash and kind; and last but not the least e) infrastructural reconstruction, bringing the roads and bridges to shipshape condition and rebuilding lost and damaged community facilities, mainly schools and colleges.

The rest of the year and may be some of the following years would be greatly influenced by the way the recovery is made - its nature and magnitude. The post-flood, shall we say, expeditions must be very well planned to give us the desired re-

Some Cheer for BAPEX

BAPEX, the classic example of a local village sage not receiving any alms, has, at long last, been blessed with a kindly, benign stare from Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. She has asked the native oil and gas exploration unit, the very nomenclature suggestive of marginalisation and suppression of talent over time, to submit a project proposal for drilling two new gas wells at Salda. This is an instance of unscrambling a mess through a prime ministerial intervention. BAPEX's earlier request to do the same was not being entertained by the energy ministry although it was entitled to it given the fact that originally the lead gasfield near Salda had been struck by it a full two years ago hinting at more reserves in the area.

Our hope is that this will not be a one-off buckup for BAPEX; instead it would mark a solid beginning for a complete turn-around in its fate and profile sooner than later. It cannot be over-emphasised that the growth of this self-motivated keen achiever in the field of hydrocarbon explorations, with ten gas finds already to its credit, has been deliberately stunted. Sophisticated high tech and foreign investment are definitely besought but such a craving should not have been allowed to stifle the evolution of BAPEX into a full-fledged national exploration company. Especially when it has been a milching cow despite an array of odds and all that was required to be done boiled down to letting it perform to its full potential.

So, we urge upon the government to do every thing in its power to ensure that BAPEX develops into a well-equipped national exploration company. It must have a level-playing field with the foreign companies with permission to run on a commercial basis so as to generate funds for it to conduct further explorations. Its field of competence has to be widened.

All this will take some doing because over the long haul BAPEX has undergone a regressive process of attrition specially in terms of qualified staff and gears. Let's fill in those voids.

Pathetic!

Flood this year has been a source of such major and mass suffering that stray accounts of family disasters do not really scramble for our priorities. Yet reports like the one dispatched recently by our Khulna correspondent and published in The Daily Star Monday last haunt us for sheer poignance. No, it had nothing to do with the direct impact of flood. Jamir Sardar, a 40-year-old farmer from Arashnagar village of Dumuria thana poisoned his two teenaged sons with the one dying within minutes of taking it and the other reportedly struggling for life in a local health complex. Apparently the man was at the end of his tether. His sons were without food for two days and a poor father without any means that he was, there was nothing he could think up other than putting insecticides in his sons' mouths.

But, although Jamir could put up with the painful memories of his murderous act, his wife could not. She committed suicide. Jamir's is not the only doomed family in this country. Even when there is no official famine in any part of the country, extreme poverty does stalk rural Bangladesh as a very potent anti-life agent. This particular case goes to substantiate that. It also goes to show how little we have achieved in our struggle for economic emancipation in practical and general terms despite the sound and fury of our politicians.

An eye opener as it is to rural pauperisation, this probably underlines the greater intensity of female emotions in filial relationship, too. Annoyed and frustrated though he was to the limit Jamir nevertheless found life worth living even after helping his two innocent children to their fatal ends. His wife though having no part in this drama of betrayal found the loss of their son far too much to bear. In this loveless world it is people like Jamir's wife that we are badly in need of.

The Russian Drama!

The patience shown by the Russian population up to this point has been surprising ... It is difficult to say how long their patience will last.

Although the appointment of Chernomyrdin whom Yeltsin blamed for the current financial crisis may surprise many, it shows how desperate Yeltsin is at this moment. He is simply playing for time.

newly appointed prime minister, Sergei Kiriyenko. He has reinstated Viktor political parties in the parlia-Chernomyrdin, a man he fired ment. It seems that he has been five months ago, as the interim able to gain their support and prime minister. The decision his appointment is expected to follows an unprecedented be easily confirmed by the opeconomic crisis which reached position-controlled parliaits peak last week when the rouble was effectively devalued The devaluation of rouble

and the government was forced followed calls from George to default on its domestic debts. Soros, the controversial US fi-Yeltsin has a long history of nancier, for a devaluation and firing top aides when things are the setting up of a currency board. Initially, the central not going his way. Being aware of the political opposition and bank lashed out at Soros for the need to take stern action in suggesting a switch from a order to restore confidence in slowly depreciating peg of the the financial market, he made rouble against the dollar to a Kiriyenko his latest scape goat. fixed rouble at a rate of about 25 But the question is, will this act per cent lower than its current of desperation help Yeltsin to level. However, continuing dehold on to his power, or is this a terioration of the financial prelude to his eventual deparmarket reduced the options ture from the political scene?

ORIS Yeltsin has struck

Bagain! In a desperate attempt to show he is in

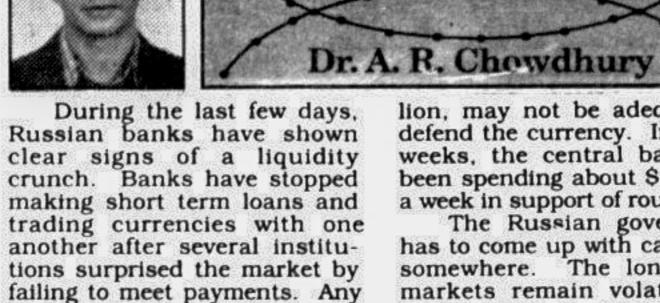
control. Yeltsin has dismissed

his entire cabinet including the

available to the bank. It is too early to say what ef-About 40 per cent of Russia's fect this act will have on the fiexports are oil-related. The renancial crisis. Foreign incent collapse in oil-price had vestors trusted and respected undermined the rouble leading Kiriyenko. They may now be to a \$23 billion rescue package forced to cut losses and leave. from the IMF. The rating Their fate, like Russia's, is in agency Moody's downgraded its new hands. But it has become deposit and debt ratings for increasingly clear in the last about a dozen Russian banks few days that Kremlin is witwhile Fitch IBCA cut Russia's nessing a change in the balance foreign long-term debt rating. of political power. Cher-The funding crisis of the govnomyrdin has gained political ernment became critical as it leverage at the expense of both failed to raise adequate taxes Yeltsin and Kiriyenko. Aland instead had to rely on though Kiriyenko dismissed short-term debt. The governcalls for his resignation as late ment rolled over \$1 billion of as Friday, Chernomyrdin short-term debt maturing every sprang into action last week to gather the support of various

The loss of confidence in the Russian market severely limits Yeltsin's affordable options for raising new financing. The banking system has been persuaded to cover about half of the country's \$20 billion worth of domestic bonds that it must redeem by the end of this year. The government hopes to cover the rest by convincing the commercial banks to repurchase bonds, issuing Eurobonds and raising tax and privatisa-

tion revenue.



large-scale failure of the bank-

ing system would affect many

Russians for the first time be-

cause some of these institutions

hold their savings. It would

also damage Russia's credibility

among investors at a time when

confidence is extremely low.

lion, may not be adequate to defend the currency. In recent weeks, the central bank has been spending about \$1 billion

The immediate concern is

to help Russia stave off further

devaluation of the rouble. If the

Russian parliament passes tax-

reform laws in the next few

weeks, additional funding by ei-

ther the IMF or G-7 countries is

possible. Otherwise, the gov-

ernment would be forced to use

the existing IMF funding to en-

able investors to bail out of the

Russian market. Further de-

valuation then would become

inevitable. Foreign exchange

reserve, currently at \$17 bil-

Connecting the Dots,

a week in support of rouble. The Russian government has to come up with cash from somewhere. The longer the markets remain volatile and banks have to struggle, the greater the risk of insolvency. The large banks are feeling the squeeze now as foreign banks are calling on them to replenish the collateral that Russians have put up for short-term dollar credits. Russian banks usually offer long-term dollar denominated Eurobonds as collaterals, but as the bonds' value has dropped, foreign creditors demanded that the Russians make up the difference in cash. Consequently, debt prices have fallen due to the self-off of rouble-denominated treasuries by Russian banks in their effort to generate cash.

The Russian stock market has also collapsed as the leading Russian Trading System index crashed through the benchmark 100-point level at which it was launched in 1995. The collapse can be blamed on a continuing slump in the government bond market - prime indicator of confidence in its fiscal policies. This has raised serious questions about the government's ability to redeem about \$20 billion worth of bonds before the end of the year.

The dilemma facing the new Russian government is that the steps necessary to deal with the banking and financial crisis is different from the actions that have been proposed in the IMF bailout package. The IMF package has proposed restrictive monetary and fiscal policies; while the banking sector faces a liquidity crunch and hence needs stimulating policies. The government has to walk a tight rope in trying to reconcile these opposing concerns. The fate of the economy depends on the success of this balancing act.

The single most important issue facing the new government is debt-restructuring. Both domestic and international markets are closely following the scheduled announcement about how the government intends to restructure the \$50 billion short-term debt repayment. This will have an impact on the South-east Asian markets. The situation in Russia is putting more pressure on China and Hong Kong to adhere to their exchange rate regime in order to prevent a full-scale

Russian contagion. Yeltsin is definitely aware of the grave situation facing the country. The patience shown by the Russian population up to this point has been surprising. Workers have not been paid for months. The inflationary trend in the economy due to the latest devaluation would raise prices of essential commodities. It is difficult to say how long their patience will last.

Although the appointment of Chernomyrdin whom Yeltsin blamed for the current financial crisis may surprise many, it shows how desperate Yeltsin is at this moment. He is simply playing for time. No one in the government seems to have a clue as to how to solve the current crisis expeditiously. The latest cabinet reshuffle is simply to give Yeltsin some breathing space and time to make a new political move.

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Will Clinton's Presidency be Salvaged?

by A R Shamsul Islam

Practically the "against" are much heavier than the "fors". Still there is an outside chance of rescuing the president. The Americans are a nation "to get to work and build the country". Clinton is doing well internationally and domestically and he has a further two years only to fulfil his term.

before the grand jury on 17 August of sexual relationship with white House intern Monica Lewinsky in 1995. The President immediately adciary Committee, McCollum, dressed the nation from the Barr, Lewis, Frank, McHale and same room and from the same Sens. Hatch, Specter, Harkin chair he testified to the jury. etc. were more or less of the This is for the first time in opinion that an immoral and long tension-loaded seven liar president is not approprimonths since the advent of ate for the US. The submission Clinton-Lewinsky episode that of probe report by Independent the President reversed his per-Counsel Ken Starr was advised sistent denial of having any unto be waited upon for decision if seemly affair with that White impeachment proceedings are

House intern. Interestingly enough, the opinion polls conducted following President's admission by the ABC News/CBS/New York Times/USA Today/CNN/Gallup told practically no fall of Clinton's popularity in so far his retaining the Presidentship was concerned. About 72 per cent of the Americans opined the country will be better off if Clinton stays in power.

HE whole world is

L every development

following Clinton's confession

watching suspensefully

Whereas most of the congressmen expressed their dissatisfaction at President's speech. Though Vice-President Al Gore appreciated President's courage to confess a mistake and urged all to move forward and House Democratic Leader Dick Gephardt inspired the congressmen to use energies to meaningful activities of the country, most of the other congressmen like Reps, Hyde, chairman of the House JudiClinton. Third, people do not want a President being impeached for offences that do not hit them directly.

control both the houses of congress. They do not acknowledge America's world leadership will suffer if Clinton goes. Further, they condemn Clin-

Whereas the Republicans

ton had done very bad to attack Starr in his speech. They resent the President had not answered all the asked questions. They charge Clinton had perjured. The air is getting thicker

total focus is on : will Clinton The following factors are crucial in approaching an an-

with speculations. However, the

First, the upcoming investigation report of Starr to be submitted to the House Judiciary Committee is very vital. It will determine if there are

enough evidences to require the

congressmen to begin impeachment hearings. It will not be out of place to mention here that however

shrewdly crafted, the Presiden t's televised speech contained some aspersions upon Starr." The independent counsel investigation moved on to my staff and friends, then into my

private life. And now the investigation itself is under investigation". Such expressions are far from good and wise. The Republicans took serious offence with them. Clinton must thank his stars if Starr's report, even if prepared fairly, does not imperil him.

Second, hasn't Clinton lied under oath? During his deposition under oath in Paula Jones case in January last Clinton denied having any sexual encounter with Lewinsky. Doesn't it constitute perjury? "While my answers were legally accurate... how could he say so?

Third, was his confession "he had some inappropriate relations with Monica" spontaneous or forced upon him by ground realities? If spontaneous, why it was not delivered

Fourth, if condoned will Clinton rectify himself so as not to establish any morally repugnant relations with a lady in future. The affirmative expectation is afar come to mind. At present there are some to feel the need to review the case of Paula Jones.

Fifth, the Americans cannot possibly let down the Rule of Law on the plea of sparing the country lots of pain that Clinton's elimination is associated

Clinton argued, "Even Presidents have private lives". There is none to dispute this. What people objected is with what a moral laxity Clinton exercised his so-called private life (with Lewinsky).

That is why Clinton is ridiculed as an "incurable teenager". Many greeted his televised speech with laughter, jeer, boos. One person screamed, "Bill, you are a phony".

Clinton was vacationing, on occasion of his 52nd birthday celebration, with Hillary and Chelsea whom the President has subjected to a sense of utter dishonour and disgrace by his base infidelity. He is alleged to be a master of giving stunts. He has worn a tie presented by Monica obviously to pose that he has not forgotten her who was hurt when he told, in his testimony to the grand jury. that he had no emotional ties with Monica. Again, while testifying to that jury, he declared that he was very concerned about protecting his family which sometimes led him to act misleadingly.

In his speech, he assured "at no time did I ask anyone to lie, to hide or destroy evidence". Monica also corroborated this. It is his plus point.

On the other hand, Lewinsky has given her second testimony to the grand jury. Again, Clinton may be asked by Starr to answer some specifics of dangerously intrusive questions that he refused to give to the grand jury. Things are darkening a lot for Clinton who sticks to the point not to resign.

It is early to comment on what will finally happen to Clinton. Will his presidency be salvaged?

Practically the "against" are much heavier than the "fors". Still there is an outside chance of rescuing the president. The Americans are a nation "to get to work and build the country". Clinton is doing well internationally and domestically and he has a further two years only to fulfil his term. Let the country spare a good deal of pain by avoiding the rigour and unpleasantries of Clinton's elimination is what may flare up as a winning sentiment of the matter-of-fact Americans.

The writer is retired Principal, Govt. Mohila College,

Dhaka-Narayanganj train service

Sir, The government has handed over the charge of Dhaka-Narayangani train service to the private sector in order to mitigate the sufferings of the passengers.

But the leasing company has suspended the Dhaka-bound train of 7 am and it causes untold misery to both male and female students who find it hard to be present in their respective schools and colleges. Not only that so many passengers fail to avail the express trains. It can be mentioned here that bus service (N'ganj-Dhaka) is a very hazardous one, especially for the women, children and the aged.

In this regard I draw the kind attention of the relevant authority to take immediate action.

Md Main Uddin Fatulla, N'ganj

The compassion of a cultivated mind

Sir. When a celebrity passes away rather suddenly, a languorous benumbedness grips the nation, missing the absence of the head, and the presence of the heart. It is all the more poignant if such a cultivated mind had been ailing with lingering diseases which had no cure even abroad. The genuine acting of life was camouflaged in bonhomie. How merciful could be a creature of the Maker!

Such deaths are not sudden, in reality. The compassion of the lofty mind concealed the inner private suffering, and he left the world smiling and laughing, a gentle pose he had carefully cultivated for his audience, preparing them for the quiet withdrawal

Why a successful and popular person should suffer from cancer, philosophically speaking, as the suffering is long and lingering? There are medical and spiritual causes for all diseases and ailments of the head and heart, the body merely providing the visual monitoring. To hide one's sorrows is an act of discretion — not to impose upon the society any remnant of the personal affliction.

No human being can know

another completely, whether it be a husband and wife relationship, or a close associate for almost a lifetime. How much an entity reveals by his talk, writing, attitude, commentaries and other skills is known only to one's own self. A person is lonely in the confines of inner space. Some say the inner space is bigger and lonelier than the vast outer space. The former is the place where microcosm and

to be initiated. Former Vice

President Dan Quayle went a

step further calling Clinton to

the majority opinion of the

people and that of the con-

gressmen on the issue of Clin-

ton's staying in power are at

contradiction. How could it be

so? Isn't the congress a house

committed to truly reflect the

apparent variance. First, the

Americans are a nation (typical

nation) mortally interested in

world hegemony. They believe

is capable and intelligent

enough to lead America inter-

nationally. They don't like to

risk his exit to worry their ex-

isting global preponderance.

Second, they do no possibly

find under sight a substitute for

Clinton, despite moral lapses,

There are reasons for this

sentiments of the people?

One striking feature is that

macrocosm merge. It is difficult to be jolly. hearty and charming in old age in heterogeneous company. It is more difficult to carry one's erudition lightly and hide it from critical scrutiny or in the company of artless minds. Such personalities leave their marks on others without scars. The impersonal scores are noted by the society and stored in minds and literature.

Dust thou art, and to dust thou returnest. May the soul of one recently departed rest in peace. Amin!

A Reader Who Feels Dhaka

Don't tread on the US

Sir, What really matters to the USA is that somebody dared to challenge the US policy of "Don't tread on me." After all, every American, from Bart Simpson to Bill Clinton, repeats it defiantly and regularly enough for the world to pay heed! In spite of that, when some lunatic people decide not to pay heed, the outcome is much more severe. America unleashes itself as terrorists backed by a nation, ignoring all international laws, totally lacking respect for other countries, religions or races.

I seriously doubt whether the Clinton Administration really cares that much for the loss of further American lives. Because, if they do, they would've proceeded in a more rationale manner consulting at least the UN and the governments of the countries which they 'attacked'. But the US action such as the recent air strikes, was totally irresponsible. It only provokes more angry terrorist groups to try to take vengeance, which only endangers more American lives around the world.

From happenings around the globe and in the history books, we learnt that America

cares for nothing except US interests. I know that singing the song of peace and harmony throughout the world, regardless of country, religion, race etc will not make the US to become the 'responsible superpower' working for a stable global order in this unipolar world. But in cases like this, maybe they could show some restraint for the sake of their precious US interests, in this case, US citizens. And in that way, maybe, we won't get attacked by airstrikes, just because they thought (without any evidence) in our homes might be hiding

Moushumi Zaman BUET, Dhaka

some terrorist.

Monica and the US Media

Sir. The witchhunt by Kenneth Starr, a puppet of the rightwing Republicans of the US to get President Bill Clinton at all costs was only fuelled and perpetuated by the sensationalist and jingoistic television journalists of the US. What has happened to the media of the country? CNN (US domestic), MSNBC and other local TV stations have engaged in an unrelenting ratings shining contest for the last seven months with demeanors void of any notions of public service. TV commentators have departed from their traditional roles of reporting and have engaged in bombardments of repetitious, colourful and non-stop onslaught of subjective opinions and specula-

This time, the television even jumped the gun and attempted to portray its own vision of what the US people think. Who on earth were TV reporters to comment on behalf of the American people given that a larger portion of the people here have seen the whole Monica fiasco in a completely different light than that which the TV stations would like to have the former believe?

The US electronic media and the Republican party are jointly responsible for the deminished esteem of the office of the presidency of the United States. The president's personal conduct may and do augur disappointment but only from a personal

point of view. His extra-marital affairs bare no significance on his ability to hold his job. nor does his inclination to hide his relationship with Monica Lewinski in anyway reflect on his untrustworthiness on for-

eign and domestic affairs. A public figure cannot be tainted for his private conduct. The private conduct is simply his own affair and that of those closest to him i.e. his family and closest friends. Let the puritan Anglo Saxon culture of the US, combined with the confessional trends brought about by Oprah and Jerry Springer give way to common sense where vendetta and intrusion of privacy will end allowing public and celebrity figures to perform their job undistracted.

Riaz Osmani Michigan, USA

The flying coffin

Sir, How long will the Biman authorities play games with their passengers' lives? When Biman replaced their pre '71 aircrafts with the latest Airbuses, most of us were relieved But alas, the same routine of the usual Biman's incompetence has been proved yet again. "Narrow Squeak for Biman' (DS editorial 10.8.98) tells us how narrowly Biman averted an accident during one of its flights from Kuwait on the 29th of June. What surprises me is the fact that Biman had tried to cover up an incident as such. Probably they have no idea how dangerous a fire in the cargo compartment could be while in mid air. By covering up, they are themselves putting our lives at risk. Biman, at present, manages to charge extremely high ticket fares. For what? After passengers pay a high rate through their noses they are awarded with delayed flights. carnations, cranny hotel services, banged up aircraft as well as tubby air hostesses whose make-up could be scraped with a shovel.

What a national career we have! I think we should call this a "Flying Coffin".

Shagor Dhaka

OPINION Safety in the US Capital

A few days before the US missile strikes on targets in Afghanistan and Sudan, a classmate had asked me to explained the difference between Sunni Muslims and Jihad. thought what a question! Especially since Jihad is not a synonym for the Shi'ite sects of Muslims. Perhaps, the question is not that unfair since "jihad" is gradually becoming a wellknown word in ordinary American's vocabulary. Political commentators in the TV Radio often mention such words even though their hasty comments often leave much

more to be explained During the past few days, life in Washington D.C., the nation's capital has become quite interesting. In the media, people are repeatedly being cautioned about their day-to-day safety within the country and abroad. In the metro-rail system, frequent announcements are being made asking people not to leave the bags unattended. Police officers wearing bright orange vests are making special rounds inside each station so that passengers can eas ily identify them in case they notice something suspicious.

Security has also been enhanced in favourite tourist spots such as the Washington Monument. Same goes for various federal buildings and other places where there is a large gathering including the three nearby airports. This high alert may continue as long as for the

next six months. Though these special precautionary measures are being taken due to the supposedly "international developments", Washingtonians have very recently experienced another safety breach in the July 24 shootings at the Capitol Hill. Russell Weston, Jr. a lone gunman, who reportedly lived in a cabin in Montana, opened fired in the US Capitol on a crowded Friday afternoon. The gunman shot his way past security guards, and entered a private area near the Republican offices in Congress. Weston was wounded while he traded shots with the security officers.

Unfortunately, he killed two police officers, and wounded a tourist. The slain officers Chestnut and Gibson, were later buried in the Arlington Cemetery with full honour. The

whole incident was a major shock to both the Washingtonians and visitors to the capital The US capitol, a domed marble building stands as a symbol around the world for freedom and democracy, and to keep up that spirit, the capitol building opened as usual the next day for

While the capitol shootings had horrific results, it did not have any international consequences. It was very clear from the beginning that the shooter was a lone gunman, an American citizen. Things became almost normal the very next day. However, during the past few days, in addition to the President's personal problems, the Washington media is much more involved about actions of the newly emergent international figure Osama bin Laden It appears that the Saudi dissident bin Laden is actually affiliated with an organisation named "Islamic Jihad" which covers some principal elements of his work.

The very recent US attacks on the Afghan base of bin Laden, and the pharmaceutical factory in Sudan were of course, in retaliation of the embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania. However, even the local media acknowledged that the missile strikes divided the international community with the Russian president condemning the attacks as "indecent."

In his weekly radio address, President Clinton revealed that he signed an executive order putting bin Laden's Islamic Army and two of his main lieutenants on a list of terrorist groups. As a result of this move, the Treasury department can now block all financial transactions between US companies or individuals, and the Saudiborn millionaire.

In accordance with the new publicity campaign, Clinton asked the citizens to have realistic expectations about the effective measures being taken against terrorism and not to expect "the threat to go away quickly.

While the government announced that there could be more military responses to "terrorist" attacks, Washingtonians, and Americans as a whole are being asked to prepare and expect more of the lat-