

Bloody end to Chechen siege

What a price to pay!

WITHIN four days of the massive hostage taking by Chechen separatist rebels at a Moscow theatre it has been ruthlessly brought to an end. If the siege posed grave risks to a thousand innocent civilian lives, the storming by Russian special forces was equally fraught with danger. In actual fact also, the latter course of action taken by the Putin government has exacted a heavy price in blood, let alone the gas-induced hazards faced.

It was precipitate action; the crisis was only into its fourth day and tactical negotiations were not given chance either. In other major hostage crises time was allowed for engaging terrorists in talks and psychologically weakening them before springing into action against them. Casualties were thus minimised. The Moscow theatre siege involving by far the largest number of human lives in a single crisis warranted patient, astute and careful handling.

We agree that a state can neither succumb to terror nor be seen to be doing it. There was no point in giving in to such hostage takers. Apparently, they even did it on their own with their top Chechen leaders reportedly having distanced themselves from the action.

Storming remained an option with the Putin government; but the question is was it used after exhausting other alternatives. The answer must be in the negative, because how could the less risky approach be exhausted in four days' time. There are some developed, tested and standard techniques to secure surrender of hostage-takers by wearing them down through sustained verbal engagements. Obviously such methods were not used.

We are indeed relieved and heartened by the rescue of a large body of hostages. At the same time we grieve at the death of many an innocent civilian and wonder if a more thoughtful handling of the crisis would not have saved their lives.

Significantly, the fact that some unspecified nerve gas was used to force entry into the theatre left the doctors subsequently treating affected civilians at the hospital puzzled about what anti-dote to use. It seems custodians of human lives did not bother about human lives either.

The final point we would like to make is, innocent civilian lives are being sacrificed at the altar of both vicious terrorism and state power intent on making a point to terrorists. At least, that's the moral we derive from the way the Moscow theatre ordeal was brought to an end.

The fight against international terrorism must win to make the world safe for human beings. But in that war we have to make sure innocent civilian lives are not caught between the devil and the deep sea.

Schoolteacher slain

Need for mopping up arms stressed

WHEN a teacher of a leading public school in the capital gets shot on his way to work in the morning and is left in a pool of blood yards away from his residence, it only points to the abyss the country's law and order has hit. Frighteningly, Swapan Goswami of the Government Laboratory High School was killed on the eleventh day of the ongoing countrywide crackdown on criminals by the army, the paramilitary Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) and the police. The killing is a pointer to how pervasive crime has become in the society. It also displays the extent of proliferation of illegal weapons. Overall, Swapan's murder is a reminder that the government faces a stiff challenge in its fight against crime and violence.

Over the years, incompetence as well as indifference of the law enforcers have tipped the balance in favour of the criminal elements. Criminalisation of politics or political patronisation of criminals has only pushed the country down the law and order slope. That the government has had to call out the army to crack down on crime has been the most damning evaluation of its normal law enforcement mechanism. However, army deployment in anti-crime operation is not and cannot be a permanent arrangement. As we have said this again and again, ultimately it is the responsibility of the police to maintain law and order in the country, a responsibility they have so far floundered on.

The task ahead, if somewhat daunting, is easily identified nevertheless. The law enforcers have to rid the country of illegal weapons as soon as possible. During the caretaker administration, an independent estimate put the number of illegal firearms at around 250,000. There are reasons to believe that the number has gone up over the last one year or so. Even after the special operation is done with, police must sustain the drive against criminals and illegal weapons. Once illegal weapons stop flowing into the hands of criminal elements, the number of crimes would automatically go down and people like Swapan Goswami would not have to get gunned down by criminals on their way to work.

Afghanistan: One year after the war on terror started



M ABDUL HAFIZ

WEEDS before the first anniversary of WTC (World Trade Centre) attack was observed exactly in a manner the world's sole superpower deserves. It must have been impossible to keep any one's head above the water as the media and TV channels repeatedly reminded us of the horrors of WTC attacks, the carnage and destruction that followed, the loss of thousands of innocent lives, collapse of the towers and the clouds of dust and debris that enveloped downtown New York. The official ceremonies apart, emotionally charged memorial services were held across the country. The others were submerged under huge printed materials containing bewildering varieties of views and ideas. According to the Americans September 11 was, after all, a day that changed the world.

Even if it is a travesty of truth, no one in America would ever mention the day that really changed the world and the course of its history: when Enola Gay dropped its nuclear payload on the city of Hiroshima.

Surely by any objective standard -- number of deaths, level of destruction as well as the launching of a horrific nuclear age that were much more significant -- making it truly the day when the world changed.

No less ignominious -- if not significant enough -- was Bush's repeated refrain of revenge as a response to his administration's abysmal security failure by launching an attack on an already devastated Afghanistan for sheltering

rarily based in Afghanistan and headed a multinational force. So wasn't Afghanistan, Bush's target for revenge, irrelevant!

So, one year on, there was the last war and last regime change is still awaiting an objective assessment. Is Afghanistan now some briskly varnished Blair-ite vision of progress, the Switzerland of Hindu Kush? Or does it haplessly wallow in violence, tribalism and medieval poverty? And the answer unfortu-

The allied forces led by the US promised so much in that first wave of action and there were so much of rhetorical expressions that it was no vengeance but a harbinger of social revolution. If there are successes with regards to those promises and assurances they are few and far between. The most optimistic assessment is that the nest of terror lies smashed and that Hamid Karzai, George Bush's dream child will spend his dollars wisely over

enough to ensure the success of the Karzai regime. The existing political situation underscores how difficult it may become for the US to withdraw any time soon and as stated by the central command chief, General Tommy Franks, on August 16 it will have to stay there for years to "ensure that the government in Kabul was effectively able to govern the whole country".

In the last six months at least a dozen senior figures in Karzai's administration have been killed in violent attacks. They include a vice president, a cabinet minister and a provincial governor. The ex-king Jahir Shah and defence minister Qassim Fahim have escaped attempts on their lives. In each case there were allegations that it was organised by the factions within the governing coalition.

In the meantime, according to the *Washington Post*, some US officials privately concede that the US policy in Afghanistan is hamstrung by President Bush's aversion to broad based 'nation building' and refusal to extend the ISAF's role outside Kabul. This approach -- "high on the rhetoric of commitment and low on the level of engagement -- amounts to a calculated gamble that the things will work out". But it goes without saying that Washington runs great risks in failing to protect Afghanistan's post-Taliban regime from an array of forces that threaten to weaken or destroy it.

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Brig (ret'd) Hafiz is former DG of BISS.

PERSPECTIVES

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Osama Bin Laden, the US' prime suspect for the crime. Bush responded to the terror of September 11 with all the eloquence of a yokel (we are gonna get the folks who did this). But little did the president who had finally been brought to Washington after crazily zigzagging the whole country --and Dick Cheney had emerged from the underground bunker where he had been hiding -- know that to day's terrorists recognise no nation and respect no border. Bin Laden himself being an Arab was only tempo-

nately is a bit of the both. It is to undergo a jolting check particularly in absence of records as to what havoc the invader wreaked through Afghanistan since the first cargoes of the bombs were unloaded over Taliban front a year ago. Since then it was a carnage of an unprecedented scale. Seldom had there been a war having so much of 'collateral damage' in human term -- an euphemism for over kill resulting in casualties which will far exceed the total deaths of twin tower tragedy.

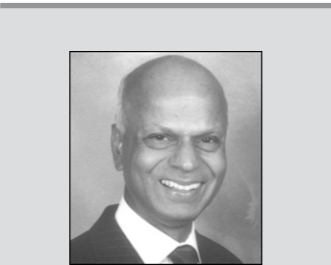
and survived to fight another day. More than two months after the Bush Administration succeeded in engineering a new political order by invoking the traditional instrument of Loya Jirga and installing a representative interim government headed by a key political ally, the country appears to be entering a dangerous phase of its troubled existence.

There are also pessimistic views bulwarked by too many assassinations plots already. Is that Karzai can't last for long? He has neither the forces on ground nor the force of personality to make his writ run. Meanwhile the terrorists are nesting again. They are hibernating at the best. There must have been casualties among them during their great escape from Tora Bora mountain complex, but the fact that Mullah

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The EU: More questions than answers after the Irish referendum



CHAKLADER MAHBOOB-UL ALAM
writes from Madrid

THE Irish voters have saved the Treaty of Nice by finally giving their endorsement to it in a national referendum held on October, 19, 2002, thus giving the green light to the EU expansion plan to incorporate twelve new members by 2007. Last year, in a similar referendum, they rejected the treaty. Many people in the EU, particularly in Germany (the German government hopes that the expansion of the EU to the east will increase its sphere of influence) breathed a sigh of relief when they came to know the results because another Irish "no" would have plunged the EU into a serious constitutional crisis. Why? To have a better appreciation of the situation, we need to address the following issues: What is the Treaty of Nice? What are its main provisions? Why the endorsement of the treaty by such a small country like Ireland was so important? What do the ordinary Europeans feel about the EU expansion? How will the expansion affect the future political integration of Europe?

The Treaty of Nice was signed at the summit of the European Union's fifteen member countries, held in December 2000 at the Mediterranean port-city of Nice. In a way, it was the culmination of the long European integration process which started more than fifty years ago. The search for an integrated European Union owes its origin to the age-long rivalry between Germany and France, which caused two World Wars in the twentieth century with devastating consequences. In order to build a bridge between France and Germany and to lessen the risk of another Franco-German war, in May 1950, a French civil servant called Jean Monnet and the then French foreign minister Robert

Schuman put forward the idea of setting up a new economic framework for western Europe. The process of European integration that was started by Monnet and Schuman in 1950, is still continuing but meanwhile it has produced an immensely powerful economic entity (with as yet unfulfilled political ambitions) called the European Union, which covers almost the whole of western Europe with a population of over 375 million people, an enviable economic potential and a stable common currency called the Euro.

had to reach decisions by unanimous votes, which virtually meant that every decision could be vetoed by any single country. This procedure seriously hampered the process of integration. The Single European Act of 1987 modified the voting system by introducing the weighted majority system for certain subjects. The Treaty of Nice extended this voting system to 29 new areas, although the intention was to cover many more areas.

Although it was not spelt out in the treaty, there is a general consensus among the analysts that the

membership in 1987)

Why was the Irish endorsement so important? It was important because the treaty had already been ratified by the governments of all other members of the Union. From a legal point of view, since unanimous approval was necessary for the treaty to come into effect, a little country like Ireland with a population of approximately 1 per cent of the total EU population was in effect holding up the entire integration process, already officially approved by the rest (99%). (It

per capita income of the new comers is only 40 per cent of the average per capita income of the EU citizens.

With more than four million unemployed people and a stagnant economy (maximum growth in 2002 is expected to be 0.4 per cent), Germany is currently undergoing a serious economic crisis. Unemployment situation in many other EU countries is gradually getting worse. All across Europe, economic activity is slowing down. The questions that both many Europeans are: Under the current economic conditions,

original Maastricht pact (1991) still remains unaccomplished (Britain has not yet dared to call a referendum to join the euro), when the EU institutions are already creaking under the strain of existing legislation and bureaucracy (for example, the Economic Stability Pact, the Common Agricultural Policy etc.), is it a good idea to expand rather than consolidate? Finally, will there ever be another constitutional crisis like that of the Irish rejection of the treaty in an earlier referendum? If so, how will the EU circumvent the situation?

The Europeans are banking on the Constitutional Convention on the Future of Europe, which is currently being presided over by the former French president Valery Giscard d'Estaing to come up with answers to most of these questions. But it seems to me that the more the EU expands the less chances there are of a politically integrated Union of all member states. The EU will gradually become a free-trading area but with restrictions (at least initially) on free movement of labour. Under the two-tier system there will most probably be an increasingly cohesive political framework of several west European countries (the UK will, in my opinion, not be one of them) under the leadership of Germany and France, with a common foreign policy and a common defence policy. But the rest of the members will merely be privileged trading partners. In a strange manner it will satisfy both the federalists like France and Germany and the con-federalists like the Scandinavians and the British who want a looser set-up. As far as the east and central European countries are concerned, they are not in any hurry to surrender their hard-earned sovereignty to a supra-national institution like the EU. Allow me to quote a resolution passed by the Polish Senate in 1998, "The European Community will continue to develop.....(However),the role of the supra-national institutions will be limited exclusively to the execution of the policies formulated by the governments of these countries.the sovereign nation states will continue to be the cornerstone of social, economic and political life of the EU".

LETTER FROM EUROPE

The expansion will cost the EU at least 25,000 million euros in subsidies. How will the EU finance it? (The French and Spanish farmers are afraid that they will eventually lose the huge agricultural subsidies, they receive from the EU under the so-called Common Agricultural Policy). Will there ever be a political entity with a common foreign policy and a common defence policy? Under the current economic and political conditions, when so much of the original Maastricht pact (1991) still remains unaccomplished (Britain has not yet dared to call a referendum to join the euro), when the EU institutions are already creaking under the strain of existing legislation and bureaucracy (for example, the Economic Stability Pact, the Common Agricultural Policy etc.), is it a good idea to expand rather than consolidate?

The Treaty of Nice redefined the balance of power between the big and small members of the Union by reallocating the voting weight of member countries in the Council of Ministers, the Commission and the European Parliament. Although ostensibly the parity between France and Germany was maintained, in reality Germany came out as the winner, because it will have more members in the European Parliament than any other country because of its huge population (82million). In the Council of Ministers, Germany, France, the UK and Italy will each have 10 votes (Spain,8). Luxembourg, the smallest country will have only two votes. But after the incorporation of twelve new members, the bigger countries will each have 27 votes, and the smallest only three. Therefore, after the expansion, the voting weight of the bigger countries will, in effect, increase.

Prior to 1987, the Council of Ministers of the European Union powers of the Commission were reduced and the Council of Europe, which is composed of either the head of state or head of government of member countries came out as the most powerful organ of the EU government.

The treaty accepted the idea of a two-tier membership system, which is a huge departure from the previous position of having only one category of members. A group of eight or more countries, could, if it (the group) wanted to, proceed with enhanced co-operation in certain areas like taxation and social security. Some even went so far as to talk of a "federation of nation states".

The treaty provided for the extension of EU membership to twelve east European and Mediterranean countries by 2007--Poland, Hungary, Slovenia, Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, the Czech Republic, Malta, Cyprus (only the Greek part) and Slovakia by 2004 and Romania and Bulgaria by 2007. (Turkey was again left out, although it applied for

should, however, be mentioned here that the only member that required a referendum for ratification was Ireland.) The EU's current constitutional framework does not provide for any other alternative means to circumvent the situation. No wonder, there was a sense of, as the Danish prime minister put it, "unpredictable and unprecedented crisis" in many European capitals. Does this mean to say that the vast majority of the ordinary Europeans are in favour of the treaty?

No, many Europeans, including the Irish have mixed feelings about the treaty. While they like the idea of redrawing the frontiers of capitalist Europe to include former communist countries of east and central Europe, thus forming a huge economic bloc of more than 450 million people, they are also afraid of this expansion primarily because of the enormous gap between the standard of living of the newcomers and that of the current EU citizens. The

how will the EU cope with millions of migrant workers from these poorer members? Labour costs are much cheaper in these east and central European countries. On top of that, their governments are offering significant tax benefits to the EU industrialists, some of whom are already planning on transferring their manufacturing facilities to these countries, like Volkswagen from Spain to Slovakia. This inevitably will worsen the unemployment situation in the EU. How will the EU cope with this situation? The expansion will cost the EU at least 25,000 million euros in subsidies. How will the EU finance it? (The French and Spanish farmers are afraid that they will eventually lose the huge agricultural subsidies, they receive from the EU under the so-called Common Agricultural Policy). Will there ever be a political entity with a common foreign policy and a common defence policy? Under the current economic and political conditions, when so much of the

OPINION

The US returns to UNESCO: Wisdom prevailed

MOHAMMAD AMJAD HOSSAIN

PRESIDENT George W Bush should deserve congratulations at least on one count -- for his speech at the General Assembly of the United Nations on 12 September recognising the importance of UNESCO. While announcing the decision for rejoining UNESCO the President of the United States, which ignored the role of the United Nations so far, said, "America will participate fully in its mission to advance human rights, tolerance and learning." It may be recalled that the United States withdrew from UNESCO in 1984 during Reagan Administration of the Republican Party. Only Britain in Europe and Singapore in Asia followed suit. No other country followed the path of the United States, but Britain and Singapore rejoined UNESCO in mid 90's.

dom has ultimately prevailed on the Administration of the Republican Party to rejoin UNESCO after 18 years of abstention on the pretext that UNESCO was involved in promoting a new world information order which was seen by the western media as an attempt to muzzle the press.

In the 80's the information media was considered as pro-western. The flow of information was lopsided. The Western media began dominating the realm of information and the media in the third world countries in particular was flooded with all kinds of information pertaining to the west. Only adverse situations, which include flood, cyclone, drought, military takeover, poverty or war in the third world countries were reported by the media. In early 70's some third world countries voiced concern over the so-called 'free flow of information'. It was argued that such information was in fact a vehicle to impose cultural and

political influence of some technologically advanced countries on the third world countries. Free flow of information could be compared with concepts like free market or free enterprise.

In view of the imbalance in and distortion of information the movement for changing concept of free flow of information acquired significance in September 1973 at Algiers Non-aligned summit. It was pointed out that developing countries should take concerted action to 'reorganise existing communication channels which are legacy of the colonial past and have hampered free, direct and fast communication between them.'

The 23rd session of the general assembly of the 20th conference of UNESCO adopted the resolution unanimously for the creation of an international programme for developing communication (IPDC) under the auspices of UNESCO. This was incidentally seconded by the United States on behalf of the western

countries and the former USSR on behalf of socialist countries of the Eastern Europe. Consequently the UNESCO had set up an international commission in 1977 for the study of communication problems under the chairmanship of Sean Macbride, an Irish diplomat, who had been awarded both the Nobel and Lenin peace prizes. The western countries led by the United States expressed skepticism about the independent character of the commission as its interim report was drafted by the UNESCO secretariat.

However, the role of UNESCO in studying the problem of communication and in working out a possible means for a more balanced flow of information between the developing and the developed countries was appreciated by the non-aligned countries. At the time UNESCO was headed by Amadou Mahtar M'bow of Senegal. His idea of the new information order to bring about a balance in the flow of information

was seen by western media as an attempt to muzzle the media and the Reagan administration brought about charges of corruption and regarded particularly the Director General as a pro-Moscow individual. Reagan administration held the opinion that UNESCO had become the forum for criticism of the United States and Israel by the third world countries.

In one of his hard hit articles, S M Ali, then UNESCO's Regional Communication Adviser for Asia and the Pacific (who later was the founder Editor of the Daily Star) gave a reply to western media criticism leveled against UNESCO, which happened to be instrumental in bringing about qualitative change in the existing news agencies and broadcast media in Asia. Pointing out some projects initiated by UNESCO, S M Ali maintained that it was hard to think that any of those projects could be seen by any section of US media as an attempt

to muzzle the free press or to deny access of western news agencies to the Asian markets. Therefore, it is very clear that orchestrated campaign by Reagan administration and western media against Amadou was wrong.

Another important development was the inter-governmental conference on communication policies in Asia and Oceania held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia between 5 and 14 February 1979 under UNESCO. The meeting aimed at preparing a plan for harnessing the media to further social progress and development on the national plan. This writer participated in that conference as Bangladesh delegate. The delegates, inter alia, suggested efforts to speed up the building of communication infrastructure in order to increase information flow in their own countries as well as to facilitate such flow between the countries of the region and outside the region. The conference stressed

the urgent need for acquiring and developing technology that was appropriate to the requirements and capabilities of the countries in the region.

The work of the IPDC was, however, limited because of shortage of funds and the communication Division of UNESCO was confronted with financial constraints following withdrawal from UNESCO by the United States, Britain and Singapore as together these countries contributed a third of the budget of UNESCO. I have had discussion with Amadou in Kuala Lumpur who appeared to be composed, straight forward, unambiguous in his thinking. The present Director General Koichiro Matsuura, a Japanese diplomat, reshuffled the administration after dismissing some senior advisers and suspending 120 promotions and appointments which perhaps suited the thinking of the United States. As a result of his efforts in streamlining

the administration, despite protest and even hunger strike, Koichiro Matsuura, who joined UNESCO in 1999, received appreciation from the United States. This has amply been reflected in the speech of the President George W Bush, who acknowledged that "UNESCO has reformed its finances, bureaucracy and political focus to be a leaner, more effective organization under Director General Koichiro Matsuura."

It is true that UNESCO will be strengthened in terms of financial matter following the rejoining of UNESCO by the United States but its programmes most likely will be scrutinized by the latter. This, according to some analysts, reflected to signal US' ability to recognize valid opportunities to work with the United Nations and its affiliates.

Mohammad Amjad Hossain is a former diplomat.