

# 'Black Widows' fight Chechen war against Russia



INCREASINGLY young Chechen women have undertaken suicide missions against Russian interests. Some say they have become walking bombs, striking fear in the hearts of Russians. They have become frontline fighters and are known as "Black Widows" because the women are mostly widows and wear black veils over their dress. They have often been portrayed as "religious martyrs," just like Palestinian women who often become suicide bombers and die for their land and faith.

It has been reported that there were a number of women among the dead Chechen rebels, who on September 1 laid siege to a school in North Ossetia (neighbouring republic of Chechnya), and the horrific bloodbath that followed on September 3, that killed hundreds of people including children. The barbaric massacre shows the extent of the fight between the Chechen rebels and the Russian forces. The rebels' demand was withdrawal of Russian forces from Chechnya and release of Chechen fighters arrested in June in Ingushetia , another neighbouring republic of Chechnya.

Prior to the school siege, on August 24, two aeroplanes from Moscow that crashed soon after their take off had the names of two Chechen women on their passenger lists, one on each plane. No one reportedly came forward to claim their bodies.

In 2003, a 20-year old Chechen woman blew herself up outside a rock concert in Moscow. Sixteen died. Another 26-year old woman (widow of a Chechen rebel commander) exploded a bomb near the Hotel National, originally planned in front of the State Parliament. Again six were killed and 14 injured.

In October 2002, veiled Chechen women (Black Widows) were among those who laid siege

chance to tell her story in the Russian media, via the police. Surprisingly, it was reported that Zarema is not an Islamic fundamentalist desperate for martyrdom. Her action was not based on any ideology, but arose out of helplessness and utter desperation, typical for a person that has known nothing but war for a decade and lost her loved ones.

Political observers believe that the Chechen situation is different

is non-slavic (Russians are Slavic) and non-Persian. They are rooted in Indo-European language, but distinctly Caucasian. Chechnya's population is about 1.1 million. There is a legend that to Chechens: "Their god is freedom and their law is war."

When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, many Soviet republics became independent, such as the Central Asian Muslim republics Tajikistan,

another peace agreement with President Yeltsin. But the peace agreements did not address the core issue of constitutional relationship between Chechnya and Russia. Chechnya, however, agreed to allow transportation of oil to Russia through Chechen territory.

Since Vladimir Putin became president, observers believe that he adopted a heavy-handed policy towards Chechnya and is a

international terrorism. It ignores the demands of the Chechen people. Political problems cannot be resolved militarily. We have witnessed in 1971 when Pakistani military unleashed a reign of terror and massacre on the people of Bangladesh and freedom fighters were called "miscreants." It brought independent Bangladesh into existence. Political issues relating to ethnical differences or territorial grievances need to be resolved through negotiation.

The Washington Post wrote recently that continuation of war in Chechnya has "destroyed the republic, bled and corrupted the occupying Russian army, and contributed to the crumbling of democracy and free speech in Russia itself. Responsibility for this debacle lies squarely with Vladimir Putin."

## Conclusion

Russia has to acknowledge that Chechnya war will not go away, despite its unleashing of massive forces against Chechen rebels in Chechnya. Many political observers believe that it is naïve to ignore the root causes of Chechnya's instability and Putin's hard-line policy does not seem to be the answer to a deep-seated territorial discord of the Chechen people.

In London, *The Independent*, said it was time for Putin to act for peace: "It would be in the interests of war-weary Chechens, in the interest of Mr. Putin himself, to invite all parties to renounce violence and sit around a table to talk."

Remember the old adage: "One man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter." To lump all freedom fighters as "rotten terrorists" is not likely to ease the situation in Chechnya and the terror of the "Black Widows" may remain unabated in Russia.

Barrister Harun ur Rashid is former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.



All health information to keep you up to date

## Knock out haemorrhoids with newer treatments

HAEMORROID is a problem of dilated rectal veins with tortuosity. It could be external (covered by skin) or internal (covered by mucosa) to anal orifice. But sometimes it could be both; which means covered by both skin and mucosa. There are three different degrees or stages of this ailment. Symptoms vary with different degrees. This trouble may end up with complications like suppuration (process of pus formation), ulceration to gangrene which means a death of tissue usually due to poor blood supply.

In some patients the condition becomes severe; they bear persistent bleeding every time they use their bowels. It is surprising that doctors estimate that about 90 percent of people have haemorrhoids but only 20 percent truly have symptoms, which can vary from a slight itching, burning, to a situation where the enlarged veins actually protrude from the rectum.

Throughout the world different treatments are being recommended. They are -- a. creams, b. h- scalpel, c. carbon dioxide freezing, d. surgical resection, e. stapler gun, and some prefer natural herbs. In the initial stage analgesic creams and suppositories could be helpful. But in late stages, surgery becomes the choice.

At present in most of our local clinics and hospitals surgery means resecting the enlarged veins and stitching. Some patients often report pain for weeks afterwards. These days lot of doctors prefer 'h-scalpel' or 'stapler gun'. The later one is called "stapled haemorrhoidectomy".

The duration of this operation is short and not complicated. But it is also important that you need an expert and knowledgeable surgeon who is used to this new equipment. Enlarged skin tags on the outside, essentially are the remnants of large haemorrhoids, which stick out beyond the anus itself. The stapling procedure involves inserting a disposable gun into the anus, and removing the core of blood vessels, which feed the haemorrhoid. At the same time, the two edges are joined with a titanium staple.

The most sensitive nerve endings are around the opening, so the surgery is carried out high up inside the rectum, where it is less painful. The skin tags shrink because there's no blood going to them, and some of them will be drawn inside the anus. The above procedure takes about 15 to 20 minutes. A patient usually doesn't need to stay in the clinic for more than a single day.

# Depleted uranium's deadly poison

## Making of a health disaster in Iraq

RON CHEPESIUK

MEMBERS of the 442nd Military Police Company of the New York National Guard remember the place in Iraq where they were stationed as a hellhole. "The place was filthy; most of the windows were broken; dirt, grease and bird droppings were everywhere," Sergeant Agustin Matos, a member of the Guard Unit, later recalled. "I wouldn't house a city prisoner in that place."

And there were frequent sandstorms. The dust would blow right into area where Matos and his fellow company members were based. Sergeant Hector Vega, a retired postal worker from the Bronx, who had served in the National Guard for 27 years, recalled that the smoke 'was so thick, you could see it.'

Both Matos and Vega, survived the Iraq War and returned to the US But all has not been well since then. They and other members of their company now suffer from a variety of illnesses: nausea, dizziness, shortness of breath, fatigue, joint pain and excessive urination, for starters.

The soldiers repeatedly asked the army to test them, but the army refused. So the soldiers went public and contacted the New York *Daily News* with their story. Early this year, the newspaper asked Dr. Asaf Durakovic, a former army doctor and medical expert, to conduct laboratory tests on the soldiers. The New York Daily News reported Durakovic's conclusion: "four soldiers 'almost certainly' inhaled radioactive dust from exploded American shells manufactured with depleted uranium."

The newspaper's investigation caught the attention of Senator Hillary Clinton (D-New York), who chastised the US Defence Department for not screening soldiers returning from duty in Iraq. "We can't have people coming back with undiagnosed illnesses," Senator Clinton said. "We have to have before and after testing programmes for the soldiers." Under fire, the Pentagon reversed its decision and began to test some of the soldiers from the 42nd who had returned to the US.

But the testing may come too late not just for the soldiers of the 42nd but for other military personnel as well, both from the U.S. and other countries, who have served in wars where depleted uranium has been used indiscriminately.

Depleted Uranium (DU) refers to the uranium that's left after enriched uranium is separated from natural uranium so fuel can be produced for

nuclear reactors. DU is an extremely dense metal that's used in armour penetrating shells and to strengthen tank armour. Military contractors like to use DU because it's so cheap. Indeed, governments will often make it available for free.

Those who defend the use of DU claim that most of the element's radioactive qualities have been removed before use. A growing number of critics charge, however, that mounting evidence suggests DU can pose serious health risks. CADU (The Campaign Against Depleted Uranium) reports that fifteen countries have used DU as part of their military arsenal. In addition to the US they include the United Kingdom, France, Greece, Israel, Turkey, Russia, Egypt, Bahrain, Thailand, Iraq, Pakistan, Taiwan, Kuwait and Israel. The US has had DU ammunition since the 1950s, but it's believed that Uncle

In the 1991 Gulf War, DU was mainly used against Iraqi forces in the desert. In the Iraq War, the Pentagon used its radioactive arsenal in Iraq's suburban areas. According to Pentagon and United Nations statistics, the US used between 1,100 and 2,200 tons of shells containing DU during the Iraq War in March and April, 2003.

Today in Iraq, parts of spent DU shells and DU-contaminated debris have been found strewn on the streets of urban areas. Contaminated sites have been marked for cleanup, but at this late date, many of the contaminated sites have yet to be cleaned up. This has created a potential health hazard for many Iraqis.

The ICBUW reports that " to minimise the risk of exposure, foreign troops have been instructed to stay away from potentially contaminated areas as much as possible, or, at least, to wear respiratory

banned. As Ed Ericson, wrote in the May-June 2003 issue of E: The Environmental Magazine, the Pentagon, "has cashiered or attempted to discredit its own experts, ignored their advice, impeached scientific research into DU's health effects and assembled a disinformation campaign to confuse the issue."

The stonewalling began after the 1991 Gulf War, in which the US and British military forces fired about 350 tons of DSU at Iraqi tanks and other targets. After the war, Iraqi doctors began reporting shrapnel increases in cancer and birth defects in southern Iraq. The suspicion has been that DU may have caused the problems, but the Pentagon has claimed that the charge is unsubstantiated. During Saddam Hussein's regime, Iraqi medical researchers wanted to present their findings at interna-

Since the Gulf War, the US military has denied that depleted uranium (DU) poses any health risks and has even tried to suppress the growing evidence that DU is a toxic killer that should be banned. As Ed Ericson, wrote in the May-June 2003 issue of E: The Environmental Magazine, the Pentagon "has cashiered or attempted to discredit its own experts, ignored their advice, impeached scientific research into DU's health effects and assembled a disinformation campaign to confuse the issue."

Sam didn't use it until the Gulf War. DU has since been used in Bosnia in 1975, in the Balkan War of 1999 and, in Iraq last year.

This past July (2004), RAI, Italy's national television station, reported that 27-year old Luca Sepe, an Italian veteran of the Balkan War, was the "27th Italian victim" of the DU used in bombings over the Balkans. It's estimated another 267 Balkan veterans from Italy are currently sick with cancer. It hasn't been proven yet that the Italian soldiers died for exposure to DU, but, as is the case with the governments of the US and other countries using DU, the Italian government has stonewalled any investigation of the illnesses and death.

The International Coalition to Ban Uranium Weapons (ICBUW) noted in a report about what it label's as today's "Balkan Syn-drome," that the " Italian Minister of Defence, refuses to give compensation to their families (the Italian soldiers), let alone to admit that depleted uranium has played a role in these cases. Hardly any information is given to soldiers currently on missions abroad about the risks they are facing, and whoever complains is treated as a traitor and marginalised...."

protection and gloves when it is necessary to enter such sites.'

In May 2003, Scott Peterson, an Iraq-based staff writer for the *Christian Science Monitor*, took Geiger counter readings at several sites in Baghdad. Peterson found that the readings in some places registered more than a 1000 times the normal radiation levels. Three months later, the *Seattle Post Intelligencer* newspaper reported elevated radiation levels at six sites located between Basra and Baghdad.

Soon after the Iraq War, the World Health Organisation and other leading scientific organisations began to warn that children who come into contact with DU-contaminated shells faced health risks. Their warnings were based on expert analysis. "Children playing with soil may be identified as the critical population group, with inhalation and/or ingestion of contaminated soil as the critical pathway," the scholarly peer-reviewed Journal of *Environmental Radioactivity* reported in February 2003.

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tional conferences but were prevented by the economic embargo of Iraq.

The US military insists that studies from the Gulf War have shown no long term problems from DU. It claims that its studies show that only soldiers who had shrapnel wounds from DU or who were inside tanks shot by DU shells and accidentally breathed radioactive dust were at risk. This would exclude any of the soldiers from the 42nd who have gotten sick after their Iraq tour.

But independent organisations say studies show DU can pose a health risk. In April, 2003, the Royal Society, Britain's leading scientific organisation, said that some soldiers could suffer from "kidney damage and an increased risk of lung cancer," depending on level of exposure.

The problem is no real studies of DU's long-term effects have been done. Scientists, in effect, have just begun to measure how much uranium is actually released when uranium-tipped ammunition hits its targets. Without these studies, no way can it be determined how much uranium dust soldiers are exposed to.

Until these studies are done and the findings released, it's outra-

geous that the US and Britain have not moved to de-contaminate the DU affected areas in Iraq and to implement a moratorium on the military use of DU. So far, we've seen a few modest steps in the right direction. In April 2003, Congressman Jim McDermott (D-Washington) introduced the Depleted Uranium (DU) Munitions Study Act of 2003 to the U.S. House of Representatives. The bill calls for studies of DU's health effects, requires the Environmental Protection Agency to identify sites in the US where DU munitions have been used in test firing and recommends study of the water/vegetation/soil at these sites for possible DU contamination. The bill also requires the cleanup of contaminated sites.

In May of this year, another bill cited as the Depleted Uranium Screening and Testing Act of 2004 was introduced in the House. It would require the Pentagon to identify those members of the US armed forces who have been exposed during military service to DU and to test their health.

Meanwhile, the US General Accounting Office has undertaken a study of the health of DU exposure in veterans of the 1991 Gulf War, as well as the policies of the Department of Defence and the Department of Veteran Affairs in identifying and medically treating veterans exposed to DU.

Ironically, Germany, one of the strongest critics of the Iraq War, is sending a team of environmental experts to Iraq under the auspices of the UN. The team will evaluate the policies of Saddam Hussein, the UN embargo and the impact of the two invasions on Iraq's natural resources. The US and British governments have given their blessing to the mission. "That is significant because they will also face some critical questions, such as the impact of using depleted uranium munitions." Juergen Trittin, Germany's environmental minister, told the press.

These developments, however, fall far short of what needs to be done to deal with the DU issue. Meanwhile, soldiers and civilians will continue to die from the element's radioactive poison in the wars of the 21st century. This raises a pertinent question: Does this policy constitute a war crime?

Ron Chepesiuk, a South Carolina based journalist, is a Visiting Professor of Journalism at Chittagong University and a Research Associate with National Defence College.