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# Chechen warlord dies in prison

Associated Press

MOSCOW, Dec. 15. — Convicted Chechen warlord, who led a raid on a Russian hospital in 1996 killing 78 people, died while serving a life sentence in prison, Russia's justice ministry said today.

Salman Raduyev died in the Perm region, about 1,200 km from Moscow, where he was confined to a high-security hard labour camp, a ministry spokeswoman said.

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“Currently, the exact cause of death is being established,” the deputy justice minister Yuri Kalinin said, reported the Russian news agency, *Interfax*.

But *Interfax*, citing the prisons department, said Raduyev died early Saturday morning after suffering from internal bleeding. It was not clear what led to the bleeding, *Interfax* said.

Raduyev, who enjoyed considerable notoriety in Russia, became the first prominent Chechen rebel warlord to be prosecuted by

Russian authorities. Last December, a Russian court sentenced him to life imprisonment after he was found guilty of terrorism and murder.

The charge against Raduyev, who was arrested in March

2000, focussed on a January 1996 raid on the southern Russian town of Kizlyar in which 78 people were killed. He and other

rebels took hundreds of hostages at a local hospital and used some of them as human shields.



Salman Raduyev. — AFP

1 6 DEC 2002

THE STATESMAN

# Lessons from the Moscow siege

By P.R. Chari

THE ORDEAL in the Theatre Centre at Dubrovka, Moscow, which began on October 23 ended some three days later with the 40-odd hostage-takers killed and some 118 out of the 700-plus hostages dead. The Kremlin has not issued any official statement regarding these Spetsnaz (commando) operations, except for the President, Vladimir Putin's cryptic remark, "We could not save everyone. Forgive us". In a previous crisis (1995), armed Chechens had occupied a hospital, and some 122 hostages were killed in the rescue attempt made by the Russians, whilst the Chechens escaped with another 150; so the Spetsnaz were obviously determined not to botch this operation.

Piecing together the details of this incident, it seems to have been meticulously planned by the Chechen rebels, who included a large number of women, mostly widows of killed militants. With little evidently to live for, they were ideally suited for recruitment as suicide terrorists. The Chechen hostage-takers had booby-trapped the theatre building and hung grenades on some of the hostages that could be exploded at will, making any conventional rescue operation impossible without risking the lives of the hostages. The Chechens had also announced a time limit for accepting their demands and begun executing hostages to enforce that deadline. The only solution possible without suffering any casualties would have been for Moscow to concede the single-point Chechen demand that Russia cease military operations in Chechnya. That was obviously impossible for Mr. Putin to concede without suffering a tremendous loss of face. Could Mr. Putin have bargained with the Chechens for reaching some via media solution? This would have required dilution of Russia's general policy of not undertaking negotiations with hostage-takers.

In the event, the Spetsnaz decided to risk an operation as unconventional as that adopted by the Chechens by pumping into the theatre building an odourless, colourless gas, which anaesthetised the hostages

and the hostage-takers. The commandos then entered the theatre. There was great speculation about the gas used. The Russian Health Minister, Yuri Shevchenko, said that it was a "compound based on fentanyl derivatives", implying that a cocktail of gases was used. Fentanyl is used for providing anaesthesia and is not known to be fatal. Contrary to popular belief, fentanyl is not banned under the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), which Russia adheres to, and is permitted for domestic usage under controlled condi-

salubrious outcome ensuing. The consensus of opinion is that Mr. Putin would intensify the military operations in Chechnya, taking advantage of Russian attitudes hardening against the Chechens, whilst the international milieu favours strong state action against terrorist organisations. The thesis that has gained currency among these analysts is that Mr. Putin would like to wear down the Chechen resistance before attempting to see a political solution to the problem. He has, in fact, drawn a parallel between Amer-

hostage policy. Several incidents in the recent past have witnessed the pathetic caving in of the Indian Government to the hostage-takers demands for rescuing the hostages. The hijacking of IC-813 flight, en route to New Delhi from Kathmandu, to Kandahar witnessed the spectacle of the Foreign Minister flying in the same aircraft as three dreaded militants who were released to secure the return of the hijacked aircraft and passengers. The humiliation of the Government of India apart it is worth reflecting what message was conveyed thereby to potential and prospective kidnapers, hijackers and hostage-takers? What will happen if a Moscow-type incident takes place in India? This question is not hypothetical: the Akshardham temple incident could have developed on the same lines as in Moscow. A national policy on handling hostage situations is, therefore, needed instead of the present ad hocism.

Second, the need for intelligence about terrorist organisations and their plans is of the essence to prevent such incidents. This calls for promoting greater public awareness about terrorist activities to obtain wider cooperation to detect them before they strike. It also requires greater regional and international cooperation to coordinate action against terrorist organisations and their links within organised crime and other nefarious activities in society. It is most important incidentally that counter-intelligence operations be undertaken in a covert and low-profile manner to succeed; this requires that bombastic public statements be strictly eschewed.

Third, the temptation to blame the Taliban, Al-Qaeda and our neighbours for our failures of intelligence, political management, governance and so on is, no doubt, useful to deflect public attention, but is leading us nowhere in our own war against terrorism. That war can only be won if the searchlight is turned inwards to reflect on our own inadequacies, and not remain perpetually focussed outwards.

(The writer is Director, Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, New Delhi.)

## *A national policy on handling hostage situations is needed instead of the present ad hocism.*

tions. In fact, the CWC distinguishes between long and short acting gases, permitting the latter being used for medical purposes.

Why were the casualties so high among the hostages? In the absence of fuller details it can only be speculated that the dosage of the gas cocktail used was probably not properly calculated. Nor were medical personnel trained in handling its after-effects. Perhaps, the injection of the gas could not be regulated in the obtaining circumstances. No allowance was probably made also for the hostages being in a weakened physical condition due to exhaustion and extreme anxiety, since they had been imprisoned for over 72 hours. No allowance was obviously possible to be made for different dosages to take account of differentiating factors such as age, sex and body weight, which is possible under hospital conditions. Incidentally, the toll amongst the rescued hostages is likely to increase, since many hostages were reported to be unconscious in different Moscow hospitals after being rescued.

Could this incident, horrendous in its particulars, presage a rapprochement between the Russian Government and the Chechen rebels? Could it lead to peace talks and to Moscow seriously addressing the root causes of the conflict in Chechnya? Several area specialists analysing this issue are highly pessimistic about any such

ica's post 9/11 war against terrorism in Afghanistan and the Russian action in Chechnya. Both these operations have Al-Qaeda as their common enemy, since they were in Afghanistan and are known to be assisting the Chechens. It is also known that the Chechens dominate the Russian mafia, which is largely centred in Moscow. A link could be obtaining therefore between the Chechen hostage-takers and the Chechen mafiosi in Russia. An intensification of military operations in Chechnya, however, could result in the rebellion growing. More terrorist incidents taking place in Moscow and other parts of Russia seem likely in the future.

Several commonalities are apparent between the Moscow hostage-taking incident, the 9/11 events in the United States and the December 13 attack on Parliament House in New Delhi. In all these incidents, the shared factors were the militants' desire to arrest international attention to their cause by a spectacular terrorist action, use innovative means to achieve their ambition by thinking and acting asymmetrically, thereby maximising the surprise element in their favour, and utilise suicide terrorists, who are generically described as being "beyond deterrence".

So what are the lessons to be learnt from the Moscow incident? Three are of particular relevance to India. First, there is an urgent need for evolving a

# Requiem for theatre victims

STEVEN LEE MYERS

**Moscow, Nov. 10:** The lights in the hall dimmed, and the musicians walked in, taking their seats.

Eight music stands stood empty to honour their dead colleagues. The actors followed and, without a word of introduction, began to sing. The audience rose to its feet in respect.

Two weeks to the day after the terrorist siege of a theatre ended with a daring, deadly rescue by commandos, the cast of *Nord Ost* returned to a new-stage last night for the first of two long-planned performances that had originally been meant as a promotional celebration of the show's role in bringing Broad-

way-style musicals to Moscow.

Instead, last night's performance — at the State Central Concert Hall inside the Rossiya Hotel beside a snowy Kremlin and Red Square — became a memorial, a fund-raiser and an emotional declaration of the resilience of popular culture in the wake of tragedy and loss.

And so, after enduring the trauma of 57 hours held hostage, the cast performed again, singing songs not only from *Nord Ost* but also rousing Russian renditions of those from Broadway productions like *Oliver*, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Phantom of the Opera* and *The Lion King*.

"As people in extreme professions like the military say, if it is painful, it means you are alive."

said Aleksandr Y. Tsekalo, the executive producer. "We want to show we are alive, though it is painful. *Nord Ost* is alive. Maybe it is wounded. Maybe it is limping. But it is alive."

The hostage crisis made *Nord Ost*, German for "North-east", famous around the world, but not in a way anyone would have wanted.

Seventeen of 76 cast members — the eight musicians, two child actors and seven stage hands — died in the rescue, while most of the rest were hospitalised from the effects of the narcotic gas used to subdue the Chechen guerrillas who had taken them hostage. Many of the sets and costumes were destroyed.

For all the show-must-go-on sentiment, however, the toll of the siege coursed like a spectre through last night's performances. The director, Georgi L. Vasilyev, spoke emotionally as he introduced each song, his voice weak at moments.

Leonid M. Roshal, a prominent pediatrician who negotiated the release of several children during the siege, appeared on stage and apologised that he had not succeeded in freeing them all. Photographs of two young actors killed during the raid — Arseny Kurilenko, 13, and Kristina Kurbatova, 14 — flashed on a screen as a young actress sang "Castle on a Cloud" from *Les Misérables*.

NEW YORK TIMES NEWS SERVICE

THE TELEGRAPH

# CHECHEN CONFLICT

## Need For A Political Solution

By GRIGORY YAVLINSKY

*Handwritten: 5-8 A/11*

**M**oscow witnessed a terrible tragedy. The losses suffered during the events at the Theatre Centre on Melnikova Street are irreplaceable. Nothing can justify terrorism — neither politics, nor religion, nor a good cause, nor even so-called symmetrical retaliation measures, or anything else. Murder or the threat, blackmail, to murder innocent and defenceless people has no justification. In this sense, the cause of terrorism is not poverty or suffering, not even revenge (targeted against those who are to blame), but unmitigated degeneracy.

### History will tell

Those in charge of the hostage release operation faced a choice between the terrible and the worst. Only the authorities could make such a choice and they did their best. And only those who came through the whole tragedy — the hostages, their relatives, Muscovites and every Russian citizen. In the final count history can tell whether this choice was right. At present, no politician can completely and objectively assess this most difficult and tragic situation.

The Yabloko Party, whose stance is that in such situations all means should be used to release the maximum number of hostages unharmed, was developing its own plan of action.

*The author is a prominent Russian politician.*

This plan was to continue negotiations step by step in order to gradually release all or at least some of the hostages. Members of the Yabloko Party believe that

from operative data, not from political or personal motives or the present-day sentiments within society.

Is it possible to say that the



the so-called demands, which are in effect one or another form of negotiations or political gestures, are at least negotiable, especially when human lives are at stake.

### Common tragedy

We firmly believe that a decision to use force like, for example, a storm should result

option we were suggesting would have drastically increased the chances of avoiding heavy casualties? Nobody could have given such guarantees. However, we believed that all resources should have been used as long as they were there.

The President took a different decision: the state will not hold any sort of negotiations with

terrorists.

At present, it's impossible to completely assess the results of this decision. It is hard to say whether there was another way to implement it. A thorough investigation into the details and facts alone can reveal the sequence of the decision-making, which was probably more than hard.

In general, the events of 23 to 26 October are our common defeat, our common tragedy. No Russian politician, no Russian citizen can say that he is not responsible for what had happened.

### Redouble efforts

The appearance of a numerous terrorist unit in the centre of Moscow testifies to a serious defeat of the Russian secret services. Without determining all of the responsible parties and essential personnel changes in the high command, it is impossible to guarantee citizens' safety. Without a doubt, those on the path of terror have to be brought to justice or, if this is impossible, be eliminated.

However, the recent events have given a new urgency to the issue of settling the armed conflict in Chechnya, of putting an end to "mopping-up" operations, disappearances of people and executions. The Yabloko Party demands that all efforts targeted at finding a political solution to the war be redoubled. We should learn all the lessons of the tragedy.

THE STATESMAN

4 NOV 2002

# No deal with terrorists, vows Putin

SEBASTIAN ALISON  
MOSCOW, OCTOBER 28

President Vladimir Putin vowed on Monday that Russia would make no deals with terrorists.

"Russia will make no deals with terrorists and will not give in to any blackmail," Putin was quoted telling ministers two days after Russian troops stormed a theatre seized by Chechen gunmen along with hundreds of hostages. At least 117 hostages died in the operation.

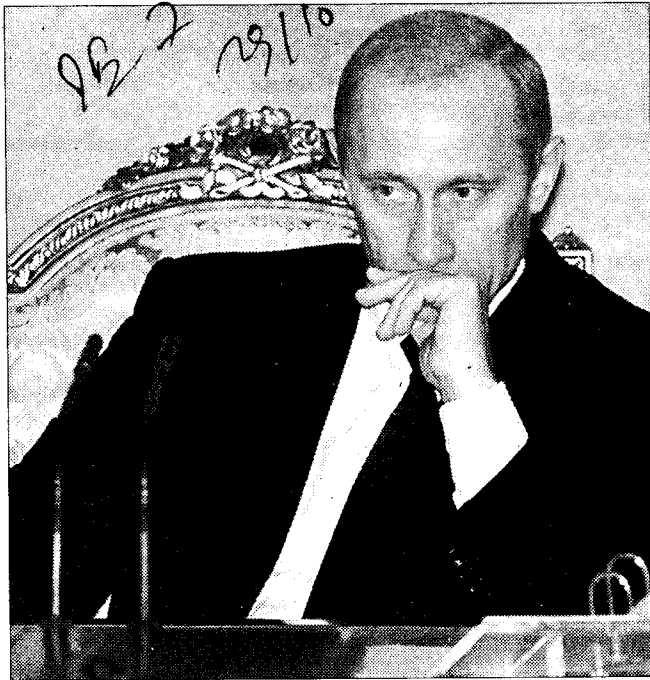
Putin also said that Moscow would respond in an "appropriate" fashion to any threat to use weapons of mass destruction against Russia.

Meanwhile, more than 200 former hostages who had been receiving treatment in Moscow hospitals following the attack, were released today.

Two hundred and thirty-nine people were released while 405 others, including nine children, remain in medical care, the sources told the *Interfax* news agency.

The city of Moscow's chief doctor announced yesterday that the gas used in the raid had been responsible for the deaths of all but two of the 117 hostage deaths.

Russian forces on Saturday pumped gas into the theatre where the rebels had taken more



President Putin during a meeting in Moscow on Monday. Reuters

than 800 people hostage on Wednesday.

Russia has called a national day of mourning today for the hostages who died, with flags lowered all over the country and broadcasters cancelling all entertainment programmes on radio and television.

For President Vladimir Putin, the rising death toll was an uncomfortable reminder of two other tragedies which have blighted his

term of office.

Meanwhile, Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov said that he is prepared to hold unconditional talks with the Russian leadership to find a political solution to the bloody conflict in Chechnya, Maskhadov's envoy said on Monday.

"We can only solve it politically," Akhmed Zakayev, deputy Prime minister of Chechnya, told the World Chechen Congress in

## Australia wants citizens to exercise caution in Russia

■ CANBERRA: Australia warned its citizens on Monday to exercise "extreme caution" when travelling in Russia, saying threats against Australians were high following a hostage taking by Chechen guerrillas in Moscow.

"Threats against Australians and Australian interests in the Russian Federation are high, given possible terrorist action," the foreign ministry said on its website.

"Australians...should exercise extreme caution and maintain a high level of personal security awareness particularly in commercial and public areas such as clubs, restaurants, bars, schools, places of worship, outdoor recreation events or tourist areas," the Department of Foreign Affairs said.

— Reuters

Copenhagen.

"President Maskhadov, as before, is ready without any preconditions to sit at the negotiation table. It is up to the Russian leadership," Zakayev said.

Maskhadov, elected President in 1997, and the Chechen Parliament, were the only legitimate authorities in the territory of Chechnya, a small mostly Muslim Caucasus province in southern Russia, he said.

— Reuters

## Hostage says worst part was to let daughter go

ROBYN DIXON

MOSCOW, OCTOBER 28

FOR Anna Artyomova, one of more than 750 hostages held for three days in a Moscow theatre, a terrible moment came when terrorists planted a large bomb just three rows in front of her.

But it was not the worst experience. That came after the hostages' Chechen captors announced Wednesday, the first day of the siege, that children would be allowed to leave the theatre, and she realized she must let her 11-year-old daughter, Anastasia, walk free. "I understood that was may be the only chance to save her life. But my heart was literally breaking when I saw her being led away, looking at me over her little shoulder with tears in her eyes," Artyomova recalled Sunday after her own release from a Moscow hospital.

Near her in the theatre, a couple in their 60s had their granddaughter, about 11, with them. They agonized, but when the time came to release children, they did not send the

girl out. On Sunday, the fate of the child and the couple could not be ascertained, although authorities reported the youngest casualty of the rescue operation that ended the siege early Saturday was a 13-year-old girl.

Hostages who endured the three-day ordeal recalled the growing edginess of the terrorists as the siege wore on. For most, the last thing they recalled was the smell of the gas before they regained consciousness in the hospital.

Some described the effects of the gas: feelings of floating or slow motion, distortion of sounds, weakness in the limbs and an inability to move. Artyomova said the fact that her daughter was at home and safe was her only comfort during the siege. She was sure that she would die after terrorists placed the bomb so close to her.

Thursday, the second night of the crisis, Artyomova said, hostages could clearly hear footsteps on the roof of the theatre, as if someone was running. "All the Chechens jumped up, pointed their guns at the ceiling and ordered us to lie down on the floor. I thought that the assault was beginning and we should prepare for the worst. It was very scary," she said. On the last day of the crisis, Artyomova said, the leader of the terrorists, Movsar Barayev, told the hostages that they would all be killed unless Russian President Vladimir V. Putin sent his envoy, Viktor Kazantsev, to negotiate a withdrawal of Russian troops from Chechnya.

At the end, as the smell of gas reached them, the Chechen gunmen grabbed masks or pieces of clothing and rushed toward doors leading out to a corridor. A hostage Anna Guseva, 27, who fell to the floor but felt little effect from the gas. "There was some shooting, then silence. Then I stood up. She crawled toward the stage, where confiscated mobile phones had been collected, so she could call her family. She was one of the first hostages who got out into the street.

—LATWP



A woman bursts into tears after she was released from hospital on Monday. Reuters

## Gas used to rescue hostages was chemical weapon: expert

**Moscow:** The gas used in a special forces operation that ended a Chechen hostage crisis and left 115 hostages dead was a non-lethal chemical weapon, a Russian chemical arms expert said.

"This was a simple chemical weapon, non-lethal kind developed in cold war days," doctor of chemistry and chief of Russia's chemical security union Lev Fedorov told Moscow radio Echo on Sunday.

Normally, the weapon "could temporarily neutralise scores of enemy troops, and its effects should have been reversible," but that could hardly apply when dealing with civilians whose health was not necessarily good, Mr Fedorov said.

In addition, the hostages were weakened as they were deprived of food for days, and the weapon's effects were further exacerbated, he added.

Nevertheless, it was "due to our toxicologists' lack of professionalism" that the storming troops were apparently unaware of what such a concentration of gas would do to hostages, he charged.

The hostages should have been supplied with antidote as soon as they were rescued, and if the mortality rate was this high despite antidote use, it would indicate that the gas concentration was extremely high, he explained.

However, Mr Fedorov admitted that there was probably no better

way of bowing out of the explosive situation. "It was either to clash with the terrorists head on or try to outwit them by using chemical weapons. They chose the second way," he shrugged.

So far 115 hostages died because of the gas used in the operation, Moscow chief medical officer Andrei Seltsovsky said. However, he suggested that the toll could rise further, with 145 people in intensive care, 45 of whom were listed in critical condition, suffering from the after-effects of the powerful gas.

Moscow chief anaesthetist Yevgeny Yevdokimov described the gas as a "psychotropic" substance normally used as a general anaesthetic. In high doses, it changes the basic functions of the body, possibly leading to a loss of consciousness and impairing breathing and blood circulation, he added.

So far the gas used was not officially named, prompting doctors to complain that they did not know how to treat the ailing because they had not been told what gas had been used.

Influential daily *Kommersant* said the gas used by the special forces was not in the arsenal of crack "alpha" commando team of the FSB security service and probably was provided by the British anti-terror experts, who had arrived here for consultation. AFP

# Nerve gas taint on Putin

Moscow, October 27

AS THE hostage death toll climbed to 117 today — all but two of them victims of the “sleeping gas” — there was intense global speculation that Russia had used a banned chemical, perhaps a nerve gas, in Saturday’s commando operation.

Lending credence to the suspicions, Moscow resisted all pressure to reveal the nature of the gas — even though doctors said they must be told what the gas was if they are to find the right antidote for the 650 severely ill hostages, 150 of them critical.

Several doctors told *Kommersant* daily that a nerve gas could have been used. London-based security expert Michael Yardley told *The New York Times* he believed the gas used was BZ, a



A freed hostage weeps as she looks down from a hospital window.

colourless, odourless incapacitant with hallucinogenic properties, first used by the US in Vietnam. He said the symptoms displayed by the hostages in Moscow — inability to walk, memory loss, fainting, heart-beat irregularities, sickness — all pointed to BZ.

The US joined the chorus for Russia to come

clean. “We asked the authorities about the type of gas used but we have not been informed. We’re still waiting for a response,” said a US Embassy spokesman. “We have a hostage in hospital and it’s relevant to her treatment.”

Initially, Deputy Interior Minister Vladimir Vasilyev kept contradicting doctors’ claim that it was the gas that had killed the hostages, who died choking on their own vomit. But late tonight, Moscow’s chief medical officer Andrei Seltsovsky revealed that 115 hostages had fallen to the gas and only two to bullets. An AFP staffer who was among those taken captive, too, said only four or five of the slain or injured hostages bore bullet wounds.

More reports on Page 13

## **GAS: Hostage toll 118**

(Continued from page 1)

If confirmed, use of a chemical gas would surely unleash an avalanche of criticism of Mr Putin, who came to power riding support for his hardline stance against Chechen rebels.

"For us, there was nothing surprising in the toxicological composition itself," said the city's chief anesthesiologist, Dr Yevgeny Luzhnikov. "What was unusual was its use in these circumstances." He said the main causes of death were respiratory failure and cardiac arrest.

Mr Lev Fedorov, a chemist, alleged the medical and rescue services were poorly prepared for the evacuation of the hostages, and that increased the casualties. He also speculated that the commandos had been treated with an antidote to the agent they used.

An AFP employee who was taken hostage said today that none of the dead or injured had bullet wounds — an account that seemed to confirm reports that gas was the killer. At least three Chechens were arrested in Moscow today, police said. They were carrying arms. Two others were picked up in Grozny, Chechnya, after being found with a grenade.

Four foreigners apart from the American — Dutch Natalja Zjirov (38), 13-year-old Kazakh girl Alexandra Litiaga, Lyu-dmila Bogacheva (55) of Belarus, and an Austrian woman — also died in the theatre. There were 75 foreigners among the 800 hostages. The toll was put at 90 captives and 50 gunmen yesterday. Kommersant said 100 people are still unaccounted for.



# Russia faces gas after-effects

Moscow: Russia was facing hard questions on Sunday over its gas attack on the Chechen hostage-takers in a Moscow theatre as authorities said the death toll had mounted to 118, with hundreds more seriously ill.

Hundreds of hostages who survived the ordeal are ill in hospital, many in a serious condition from what is believed to be the after-effects of the unidentified gas used to incapacitate the rebels before the assault.

An AFP employee who was among the hostages said that none of the bodies of the dead or injured bore bullet wounds—an account that seemed to confirm reports that the gas caused some of the hostage deaths.

Deputy interior minister Vladimir Vasilyev denied reports that the gas had caused deaths but doctors said they did not know how to treat the ailing because they had not been told what the "special substance" was.



A candle burns outside the scene of the hostage drama as Moscow mourned its dead on Sunday.

Speculation in the foreign press that the Russian forces may have used nerve gas is likely to put further pressure on President Vladimir Putin over his handling of the crisis. If confirmed, the use of a chemical gas will unleash an avalanche of criticism of Mr Putin, elected more than two years ago on a wave of support for his hardline stance against

the Muslim separatists in Chechnya.

A US embassy spokesman said in Moscow that the United States had asked the Russian authorities to reveal what gas was used but had not received any reply.

American experts said the Russians may have released a gas concentration of a powerful sedative like Valium or may have used a form of BZ Gas, a hallucinogenic drug widely researched in the 1960s. "The thing that pops into my mind is aerosolized Valium," said C. Holstege, medical toxicology director at the University of Virginia.

Others said the agent used by the Russians didn't seem to be like anything that has been part of the US arsenal. "It's no surprise that the Russians have that kind of stuff," said Ron Madrid, an expert on non-lethal weaponry at the Pennsylvania State University. "They spent 30 years putting it together. We're prevented from doing that by treaty and executive order." Agencies

Russia ①  
19-10

## A RUSSIAN RESCUE

28/10 ✓

WHILE THE TOLL of the dead and wounded among the hostages who were freed from captivity in a Moscow theatre — and among the soldiers who rescued them — might eventually turn out to be much higher than initially assumed, the action taken by the Russian authorities was unavoidable. Those not affected by the loss can find some consolation from the understanding that it was based on sound principle. The action had become unavoidable since the terrorists (who claimed that they fought for the independence of the province of Chechnya), by executing two hostages in the early hours of the day, had given the firm indication that they were about to carry out their threat to kill all of the more than 700 people they had trapped inside the theatre from the night of October 23. Russian special forces and other troops stormed the building after they heard explosions and gunfire from within. Unconfirmed reports state that the Russian forces used sleeping gas to subdue those inside the theatre and this coupled with the fact that the whole operation was accomplished very swiftly suggests that the rescuers prepared and executed their mission with a measure of skill. The facts that 36 of the 40-odd hostage-takers including the leader, Movsar Barayev, were killed, that some of the remainder managed to escape and that the casualty-figures for rescuers and the rescued alike were heavy, however, indicate that the operation was not as smooth as Moscow would have hoped it would be. Given the circumstances, especially the rapidity with which the terrorists moved into the end game of their mission, the outcome could not perhaps have been more blemishless. Whether the rescue operation was triggered by a rapidly deteriorating situation or whether it was the culmination of a well-performed exercise, the rescue of the hostages has vindicated the Russian President, Vladimir Putin's stand that he would not offer anything more to the hostage-takers other than a safe and free exit from

the site of their operation.

Even if there is some element of genuineness in the grievances that the Chechens harbour against Moscow, the resort to kidnapping, the killing of hostages and other forms of terrorism de-legitimise the campaign for self-determination. Russian forces have succeeded in ousting the armed rebels from the urban centres of Chechnya and the military campaign is currently being conducted in the lightly-populated rural parts of the province. This could have caused a decrease in the brutality inflicted by the Russian armed forces but the remnants of the hardcore of separatists appear to have been coarsened even further by the induction of a younger generation of fighters who have known little other than war throughout their lives. Jehadi elements from outside Chechnya had joined the indigenous fighters years ago and the whole cause had been transformed from one of self-determination (an issue that is morally examinable) to that of a religious millenarianism promoted by indiscriminate violence (a manifestation that is clearly abominable).

Morality apart, the Chechen rebels had committed a strategic blunder by persisting with linkages to global jihad even after the international community started consolidating into the coalition that has been established to fight the terrorist menace. This has enabled Mr. Putin to drain the pool of international sympathy for the Chechens that had been created as a result of the high-handed measures that Moscow had utilised in the past to crush the rebellion. This time around there was no challenge to the Russian leader's assertion of a link between the Moscow hostage-takers, the rebel leadership in Chechnya and the Al-Qaeda. Neither was any responsible power willing to give any measure of support to the hostage-takers' demand that Russia concede independence to Chechnya and that it withdraw its army at least from a part of the province so as to establish its credentials in the matter.

# TERROR THWARTED

## Putin still has the Chechen problem

PRESIDENT Putin must be congratulated for successfully bringing the hostage crisis in a Moscow theatre to an end — his handling of the crisis shines in contrast to the bungling of the IC-814 crisis when Indian authorities were caught flat-footed and unprepared. The options before Russian security officials seemed fiendishly difficult, as 40 to 50 Chechen rebels, armed to the teeth, some with explosives strapped on to their bodies, were holding about 700 hostages in the theatre; their statements indicated they would not hesitate to sacrifice themselves and they had packed the building with explosives. Neither were their demands such that Putin could have conceded — withdrawal, within seven days, of the Russian army from Chechnya. The theatre was surrounded by elite commandos from the Alpha group of the FSB, successor to the KGB, and when the rebels began executing hostages, the commandos succeeded in overwhelming them with the innovative stratagem of pumping sleeping gas into the building. Tragically, about 67 hostages were killed in the incident, some by booby traps set by the terrorists. This is a better record compared to a similar incident in 1995 in the southern Russian city of Budyonnovsk, when 1,200 civilians were taken hostage in a hospital. On that occasion the commandos had gone in with guns blazing, which resulted in the death of 120 hostages. Relatively speaking, the freeing of the Moscow hostages has been managed with much greater finesse.

While Putin will no doubt reap political capital from this incident, he may need to rethink Russian strategy in Chechnya. Although his popularity surged when he ordered the Russian army into that difficult province, the Russian public is swinging round to the idea of talking to the Chechens. Russian military operations in Chechnya have been brutal, leading, for example to the levelling of the capital Grozny. President Bush's war on terror has led Western governments to turn a blind eye to human rights in Chechnya. Lurking in the background are also the terrible mass deportations of the Stalin era, of which the Chechen people were among the primary victims. According to a recent poll, 60 per cent of the Russian public now favours talking to the Chechens, which Putin has so far refused to do. But he could use some of the political capital from this successful anti-terrorist operation to negotiate some sort of autonomy deal with Chechnya to fulfil both Chechen and Russian aspirations. Suicidally motivated terrorists are notoriously difficult to handle; the only effective long-term way of doing so is by getting at the ideological sources of their motivation.

## 90 HOSTAGES, 50 GUNMEN KILLED IN PRE-DAWN RAID

# Commandos storm Moscow theatre

By Vladimir Radyuhin

**MOSCOW, Oct. 26.** About 90 hostages died and over 700 were rescued when security forces on Saturday morning stormed the theatre held by Chechen gunmen for three days in Moscow.

In a lightning pre-dawn assault, the forces killed 50 terrorists, including their leader, Movsar Barayev, and 18 women, and captured two gunmen alive, a police spokesman told reporters today.

He said some of the gunmen could have escaped mingling with the hostages. An estimated 50 gunmen had stormed the theatre in the middle of a musical on Wednesday night.

Commandos used sleeping gas to neutralise the terrorists and prevent them from deto-

nating the numerous explosives set up inside the building. There were no casualties among the

security forces and only one commando was wounded. Officials described the operation as a "brilliant success".

The decision to storm the theatre was taken after the captors started executing hostages and some hostages tried to break out in the early hours of Saturday, the First Deputy Interior Minister, Vladimir Vasilyev said. The terrorists had on Friday threatened to start shooting hostages if their demand to stop the war in Chechnya was not immediately met.

The gunmen killed at least two hostages and wounded two more at around 5 a.m., according to the Deputy Interior Minister, following which the commandos stormed the building. Television cameras allowed inside the theatre shortly after

the raid showed the auditorium and corridors strewn with the killed terrorists, some of them with apparent explosive devices strapped to their bodies.

The Russian President, Vladimir Putin, who had taken a hard line on the terrorists from the very beginning of the crisis, visited a Moscow hospital and talked to the released hostages.

PTI reports:

Mr. Vasilyev, a key member of the crisis management group, said the security forces blew up a wall to enter the building and quickly took control of the ground floor. The actual operation lasted only 10-15 minutes and evacuation of over 750 hostages was completed within 40 minutes.

**More reports, photos on Page 14**



**Russian President, Vladimir Putin, after the end of the siege. — AP**

# Chechens free 19, call for Putin

PTI & AFP

MOSCOW, Oct. 25. — The world's biggest hostage crisis escalated today with the Chechen gunmen holding 700 people hostage in a Moscow theatre threatening to start killing them early tomorrow if their demands of a total Russian military withdrawal from Chechnya weren't met, even as the Kremlin offered them safe passage in return for the captives' freedom.

Nineteen people, including eight children, were freed by the gunmen today, but the fate of 700 others hung in the balance for the third day, with the situation worsening after a basement water pipe burst, flooding the building.

Talks resumed late tonight — after US consul-general Mr James Warlick claimed this morning, without giving details, that negotiations had broken down — with former Prime Minister Mr Yevgeny Primakov joining a four-man mediating team. Mr Primakov, known as a skilled nego-



TRAUMA: Children released by the Chechen fighters in Moscow on Friday. The fate of 700 other hostages is uncertain. — AFP

tiator who recently authored a peace plan for Chechnya, spent 30 minutes before leaving, but refused to elaborate, Interfax reported. A mediator said the fighters wanted to

negotiate with a representative of Mr Vladimir Putin.

The heavily-armed gunmen, numbering over 40, handed over eight children aged, including a Swiss girl,

to Red Cross representatives, Interfax reported. The children looked frightened as they were led from the building. The rebels also released seven hostages, said to be Ukrainians, this morning and another four Azerbaijanis late tonight.

As the hostages spent their third day in captivity without proper food and water and amid deteriorating toilet conditions, President Putin held a series of talks with advisers. **Saddam appeal:** In Baghdad, President Saddam Hussein urged the Chechens to free the hostages, saying the standoff will anger Russians when the real enemies of Islam are the USA and Israel. "The tyrant of the age, namely Zionism and USA, and not Russia, or China or India are our enemies," he said in a statement on Iraqi TV. If there is bloodshed, he said, Chechens "will lose sympathy of Russians" and give America and Israel the opportunity "to stab Islam and Muslims", adds AP.

More reports on page 3

# 'Family' of hostages struggles to survive

Cellphones let kin hear about ordeal

SABRINA TAVERNISE

Moscow, Oct. 25: In a large school gymnasium rimmed with television sets and steamy windows, relatives of the 700 hostages being held captive inside a central Moscow theatre held their vigil throughout the night.

One sound punctuated the constant blare of news reports: the electronic warble of cell phones. It was not just friends calling. It was the hostages themselves, phoning from inside the theatre.

In most hostage crises, it is the terrorists who do the talking, sending scrawled messages or issuing demands to the outside world via the telephone. But this time, it is the hostages who have become the messengers, using their cellphones to relay the terrorists' demands to the outside world and to President Vladimir Putin.

The strange events of the past two days reflect a deliberate decision by the Chechen militants to use hostages as the vehicles of their demands, possibly to evoke sympathy from anxious television viewers.

Many of the hostages in the three-storey theatre own cell phones. Furthermore, this former Palace of Culture was wired for in-house video. Audience members watching the gunmen on the video screens on Wednesday thought they were watching part of the show. "It was totally unclear what was happening and who these men were," said Olga Veselova, an actor in the performance who escaped through a dressing-room window.

One hostage, a children's cardiologist named Maria Shkolnikova, spoke several times to Russian radio and news agencies with the voices of the terrorists in the background. During one call yesterday, Shkolnikova repeated the words of the terrorists into the receiver: "You've been here for 10 hours but your government has done nothing to save you." She also aired publicly a rare voice of doubt in Putin.

"Where is Putin?" she said, impatience in her voice. "Has he spoken on television yet?"

While she repeated the demands of the hostages — full withdrawal of Russian troops from Chechnya — for all to hear, Russian forces acknowledged talks were proceeding with difficulty.

At about 4 pm yesterday, Shkolnikova talked her way to freedom by bringing the demands of the terrorists — to reporters outside the theatre.

"Today we have found ourselves in a situation between life and death," she said, reading from a statement that she said had been written by hostages. "You at the top, you decide these issues, while we can only watch. Our lives are on your conscience. We ask you to solve this issue peacefully or too much blood will be shed."

NEW YORK TIMES NEWS SERVICE



(Left) A terrorist poses with explosives strapped to her abdomen and a pistol in one hand and a detonator in the other as (right) a group of hostages look into the camera of the Russian TV channel NTV in the Moscow theatre. (AFP/AP/PTI)



ELIZABETH PIPER

Moscow, Oct. 25 (Reuters): The lights burn constantly. The chairs are beds and the orchestra pit is a toilet. There is no toilet paper or running water. The smell is getting worse.

People huddle in the middle of a cavernous theatre in Moscow, trying to comfort other members of their new-found "family" — thrown together after a Wednesday night out at a stage musical was suddenly transformed into a terrifying siege.

A Russian doctor who spent over six hours in the theatre yesterday said hundreds of the hostages being held by a Chechen "suicide squad" were struggling to keep going as the minutes, hours and days dragged by. "They have become a kind of family. Some of them even argue with each other. They try to laugh. They are just trying to survive," Dr Leonid Roshal, chairman of the International Committee for Paediatric Disasters, told Reuters.

"Many are suffering from stress, of course they are. Can anyone imagine living under those conditions? They don't know whether the troops will storm the building, whether they will be shot or not... They don't know what is going to happen."

Roshal, who has been dubbed the children's doctor of the world by local media, is one of five doctors allowed so far to enter the theatre, which was stormed on Wednesday night by 40 heavily armed Chechen guerrillas demanding Russia pull its troops out of their homeland.

Most of the younger children

have been freed including, this morning, eight who thought they had landed the parts of their lives when they were selected to participate in the musical *Nord-Ost* — the tale of a Russian Arctic explorer.

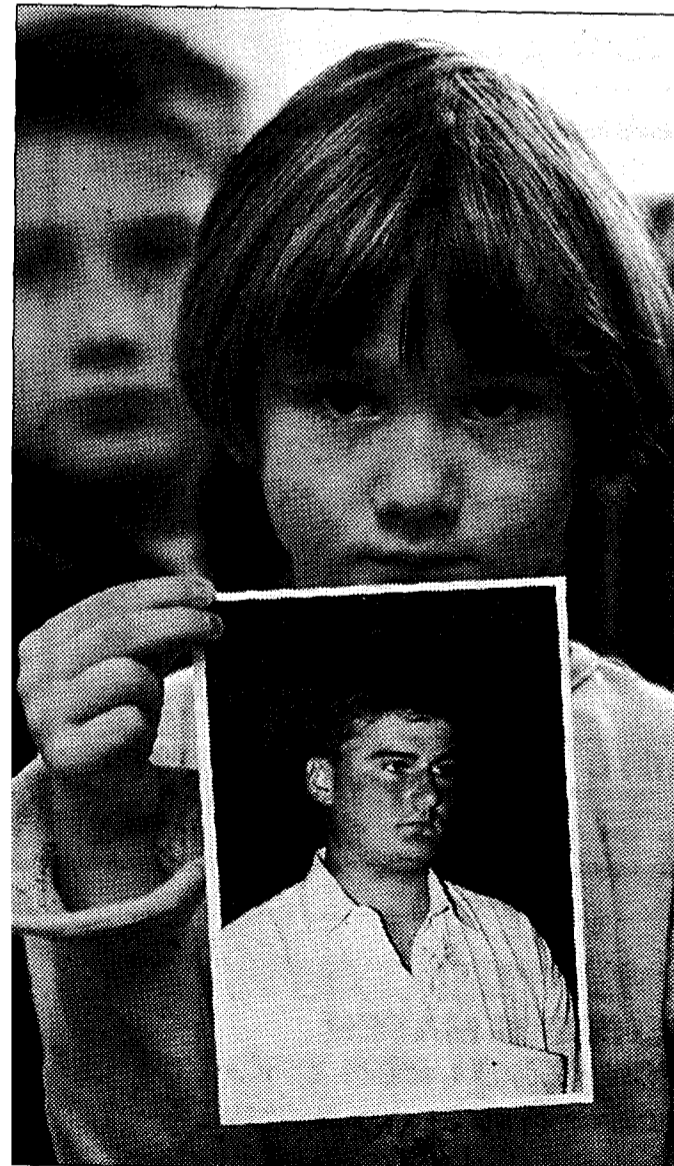
But Roshal feared for some adults who were suffering from sharp abdominal pains which could indicate appendicitis. There were some hostages with heart problems and some women who were increasingly uncomfortable as they lacked sanitary products.

"There are women who need hygiene products, antibiotics and eye-drops," he said, lowering his voice. "There is not enough medicine, and that means things can only get worse." He also feared sanitary conditions would deteriorate.

"There are toilets, but not enough. So they go in the orchestra pit and another room close by... The women are trying to establish some kind of order," Roshal said. "We are trying to supply them with everything, but there is not enough toilet paper. Hopefully we can get some through tomorrow."

Two people may also be in need of surgery. But as yet the guerrillas had refused to allow them to leave for hospital. Roshal said they could die.

"They have told us to come here and operate... But that would be very complicated," he said. Whatever the outcome, Roshal said all the hostages would carry their ordeal away with them. "The majority will need psychological help after this," he said. "They are under immense stress because they don't know what is going to happen. This will leave its mark."



Andjelka Maksimovic holds a picture of her father Milos in a village near Belgrade as her brother Mitar looks on. Maksimovic is being held by Chechen terrorists in a Moscow theatre. (Reuters)

## Suicide squad leader comes out of the cold

JON BOYLE

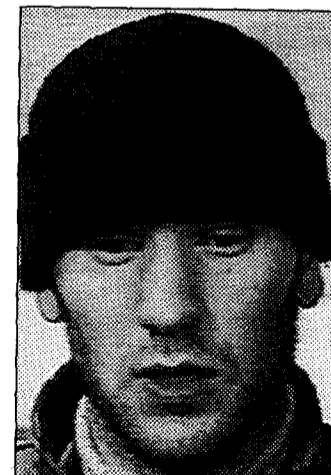
Moscow, Oct. 25 (Reuters): A few days stubble on his chin, dressed in combat gear and dark woollen hat, Movsar Barayev, leader of a Chechen "suicide squad" holding some 700 people hostage in a Moscow theatre, bared his face to the world early today.

A relative of well-known Chechen field commander Arbi Barayev, Movsar Barayev was one of a handful of guerrillas shown for the first time on Russia's private NTV channel, whose crew was briefly allowed inside the building.

Barayev — the only one to show his face — was filmed with two masked men, all three heavily armed with AK-47 assault rifles, their ammunition pouches clearly full, grenades hanging from their belts.

The trio were later joined by two women, dressed in black, an inscription in Arabic prominent on the front of the dark hoods that covered their heads and masked their faces.

One woman was shown holding a pistol and appeared to be fingering a detonator attached to what NTV correspondent Sergei Dedukh said looked like a bundle of explosives wrapped in cellophane and strapped to her abdomen. The brief footage, about five minutes long, showed Barayev and his associates in the



Chechen suicide squad leader Movsar Barayev speaks in footage filmed by Russian TV channel NTV on Friday. (AP/PTI)

in the name of the faith, as they say," he said. The guerrillas were clearly seen talking but their voices were indistinct. It was not clear if the audio had been masked because of demands by the Russian authorities.

Also shown was a group of women hostages, well dressed for what they had expected to be an enjoyable night at a popular musical, *Nord-Ost* (North-East) — the heroic musical tale of a Russian Arctic explorer.

One of the women nervously played with her fingers, while the others appeared calm.

The Chechen guerrillas, who are demanding Russian forces withdraw from their separatist homeland in southern Russia, shot dead one woman hostage who tried to escape when the theatre was seized late on Wednesday.

### Saddam appeal

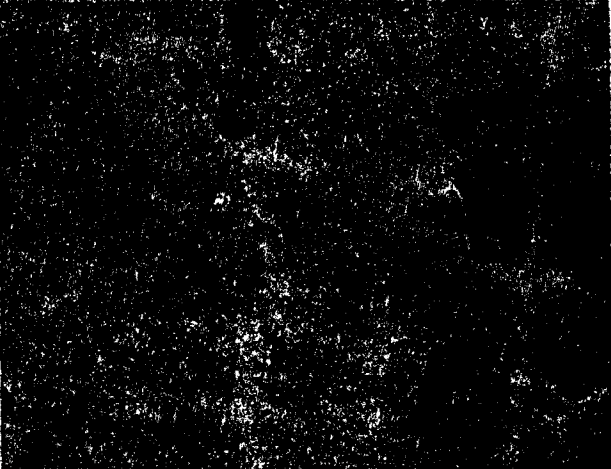
Iraqi President Saddam Hussein today denounced the seizure of hundreds of people at a Moscow theatre by Chechen guerrillas, saying it would only end up benefiting the US and Israel.

In an appeal to "Muslims in general and Chechens in particular" released in a statement read on Iraqi television, Saddam said the siege would hurt the Chechen cause. "It is not wise that the Chechens lose the sympathy of the Russians... and others," the statement said.

646 fight for life in hospital | USA enquires about gas used

# Gas killed hostages, says Moscow doctor

Moscow, Oct. 11 — Doctors today faced tough questions from the world community over the use of a small, so-called "lethal" gas in the Melnikovo street house where ten Soviet hostages held nearly 80 days ago. The doctor as the health ministry raised the number of hostages killed to 18 and police broke up at least three suspects. Another 646 victims were taken to hospital. Doctors today in intensive care of victims state their condition only slightly better in some instances.



TRAUMATIC ONCE Relatives of injured or hostages wait for news of their loved ones. Sunday's pain to find out if any of the hostages had survived the ordeal. — AFP

wound to the head. The 117 hostages were killed by the gas, the doctors told the press. In standard situations, the compound that was used on people does not act as aggressively as it turned out to do," said Dr. Seltsovsky. "But it was used on people who were in a specific (extreme) situation for more than 50 hours, all of this made it difficult." He said doctors were not told the composition or name of the gas. The gas used can paralyze breathing, cardiac and liver functioning and circulation, the doctor said. The effects were worsened by the conditions in which the hostages had been confined — no movement, lack of water, food and sleep and severe stress — and by ailments some of them suffered from. But deputy interior minister Mr. Vladimir Vasilyev denied reports that hostages died due to gas. Authorities refused to say what gas was pumped through the ventilation system to incapacitate the rebels. The *Kommersant* newspaper quoted doctors claiming it was a sleeping gas or a nerve gas.

Russia  
2/10/01

## Chechens kill one hostage

By Vladimir Radyuhin

**MOSCOW, OCT. 24.** Chechen rebels holding hundreds hostage in a Moscow theatre have killed a woman and threatened to blow up the building if Russia does not stop the war in Chechnya and pull out its troops from the region within a week.

The body of the young woman with a gunshot wound was removed from the theatre today. It appeared as if she had been killed during the storming of the theatre on Wednesday night, security officials said.

(A PTI report said five hostages were released this afternoon, shortly after four mediators holding white flags entered the building and began talks to end the stand-off. And a hostage taker was quoted as having said that he might set free Ukrainian hostages and all other foreign captives, "whose countries are not at war with Chechnya.")

About 50 rebels broke into the theatre

when a popular musical was on. There were over 700 spectators and a hundred actors in the building when it was stormed. About 200 escaped or were released by the captors in the first hours of the storming, but about 600 are still being held. There are 20 to 60 foreigners among the hostages. A rebel who contacted authorities by phone said there were 50 "shahids," (suicide bombers) inside the theatre, half of them women. The hostages, who were allowed to call their relatives on cell phones, said many rebels carried "shahid belts" with explosives, and had mined the building. They are reportedly being led by Movsar Barayev, a Chechen warlord.

Two Russian parliamentarians met the rebels today. Red Cross officials have also been negotiating with the gunmen for the supply of food, water and medicines to the hostages. Some shots were heard from inside the theatre during the night as hundreds of security personnel, backed by

armoured personnel carriers, sealed the area. Police have evacuated nearby buildings, including a hospital in what could be a sign of a planned storming of the theatre.

This is the worst hostage crisis in Russia since 1995, when rebels captured a hospital during a raid on the southern town of Budyonnovsk. The attack forced Moscow to begin peace talks with the separatist leaders in Chechnya which led to the end of a two-year war and de-facto independence of the region a year later. However, in 1999, Russia launched a second attempt to crack down on the Chechen rebels after a series of apartment bombings.

The Russian President, Vladimir Putin, meanwhile, issued a tough statement, making it clear that he was not going to give in to the rebels' demands. He called on the securitymen to free the hostages while taking every precaution not to harm their lives.

**More reports on Page 14**



# Moscow opens talks with Chechen fighters

Agence France Presse & PTI *Russia*

MOSCOW, Oct. 24. — Russian authorities today began negotiations with the heavily-armed Chechen fighters who late last night took control of a Moscow theatre holding over 800 people hostage. Interfax quoted a Russian intelligence official as saying. No details of the talks were, however, available, but news of the killing of a woman hostage, shot dead this evening, poured in. There were no Indians among the captives.

Itar-Tass said the gunmen refused to release any of the captives till their demands of a complete halt to military operations and total pull-out of troops from Chechnya were met.

(Two women managed to jump out of the besieged building here today, police said. They were fired at with grenade launchers while trying to escape, reports PTI). President Vladimir Putin,

who cancelled his trip to Portugal and Berlin, has called this "the largest hostage-taking not only in Russia but also in the world". He blamed international terrorist centres for the siege, saying that these were also involved in the Bali blasts that killed nearly 200 people.

About 40 fighters, including women, armed with automatic weapons, grenades, belts with explosives and mines stormed the theatre last night. The Chechen separatist website, *kav-*

*kaz.org*, said the group was led by Movsar Barayev, nephew of warlord Arbi Barayev who reportedly died last year. Some of the women hostage-takers were widows of Chechen fighters. The hostage-takers called themselves "smertniki", a word that in Russian refers to fighters who die for a cause. The website said

the guerrillas have issued a seven-day ultimatum to Russia to fulfil their demands, failing which they threatened to blow up the building.

The captives include Americans, Britons, Dutch, Germans and Canadians. The fighters late last night released 180 hostages including 24 children and two pregnant women. Five more were released this afternoon shortly after four mediators with white flags entered the building for talks to end the stand-off.

But the Chechen fighters went back on their word to release all foreign captives, a Kremlin spokesman said, after diplomats who were to

be present for their release arrived late. A hostage-taker was quoted as saying he might set free Ukrainian hostages and all other captives "whose countries were not at war with Chechnya". Earlier, the fighters shot dead a Russian policeman, the website said. A journalist from Moscow Echo Radio, one of the captives, reported on her cellphone: "There is panic among the hostages, they are begging not to start an assault under any circumstances."



APPEAL TO SANITY: A woman talks to reporters with fellow-hostages' letters as she leaves the theatre in Moscow on Thursday. — AFP

# Chechens take 1,000 hostage in Moscow

Handwritten scribble

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**Press Trust Of India**

MOSCOW, Oct. 23. — About 20 alleged Chechen fighters took up to 1,000 people hostage tonight in a Moscow theatre staging a popular musical, Russian TV channels said.

An Interfax news agency correspondent, among the spectators, called her office from a cellphone to report that at the end of the first act of *Nord-Ost* (North-East), some masked men stormed the stage and fired in the air, driving the actors into the hall.

Later, the actors were locked in green rooms. The fighters released 20 children and Muslim spectators.

A French diplomat too was released. He said the hostage-takers were in camouflage fatigues; the women among them being more fierce than men. The fighters demanded an

end to the war in Chechnya and were planting explosives in the hall.

FSB special anti-terror force, *Alpha*, along with anti-terrorist squads have been rushed to the theatre in the House of Culture of a local ball-bearing plant.

Russian channels interrupted regular transmission to air the stand-off live. According to Channel 1 TV, President Vladimir Putin, who is scheduled to leave on foreign tour tomorrow morning was immediately informed of the incident and was in full control of the situation.

Producer of *Nord-Ost* musical Alexander Tsekalo told reporters that he managed to get through to one of the actors on mobile phone.

He said he could hear a voice in Caucasian accent saying "this is war".

# 34 killed in Russia blast

FROM JON BOYLE

**Moscow, May 9 (Reuters):** A blast tore through a Victory Day parade in a southern Russian republic bordering rebel Chechnya today, killing at least 34 people, including 12 children.

President Vladimir Putin vowed to hunt down and punish the the attackers, whom he described as "scum" who should be treated like Nazis.

He blamed the attack in the Caspian Sea port of Kaspiisk on "terrorists", the usual Kremlin term to describe separatist Chechen rebels. Chechnya neighbours the impoverished province of Dagestan where the attack took place.

"This crime was carried out by scum who hold nothing sacred," an ashen Putin told a solemn Kremlin reception after a parade in Moscow's Red Square to mark the defeat of Nazi Germany 57 years ago.

"We have every right to treat them as Nazis, whose sole aim was to spread death, sow fear and to murder," he said. The audience observed a minute of silence. Putin has made combating terrorism a rallying cry of his two-year-old rule, and says Russia is fighting the same brand of Muslim militants in Chechnya that Washington blames for the September 11 suicide attacks on the United States.



**Russian soldiers march during a military parade in Moscow. (Reuters)**

Police said a remote-controlled mine hidden in bushes exploded as a military band surrounded by children and World War II veterans marched through Kaspiisk, home to a big military base some 1,600 km south of Moscow.

Dagestani authorities, who announced a day of mourning for Friday, blamed lax security for the attack, news agencies said.

THE TELEGRAPH

10 MAY 2002

## Georgia, Russia lock horns again

BY 4 AFD-15  
TBILISI (GEORGIA), APRIL 5. In the latest sign of tension between Russia and Georgia, Georgian authorities have detained two trucks from a Russian military base saying they lacked proper documents, a Georgian official said Friday.

A Georgian Defence Ministry spokeswoman said the two trucks were detained in Tbilisi on Thursday because the Russian military had failed to duly notify Georgian authorities about their movement.

Lt.-Gen. Nikolai Zolotov, chief of the Russian military in Georgia, told AP that the trucks didn't violate the agreed rules of travel for Russian military vehicles. He said the trucks were carrying supply materials, not weapons. The detention of the trucks followed the claims by Georgian officials that some Russian servicemen deployed in

Georgia were involved in selling weapons to rebels from Russia's breakaway Chechnya region who are holed up in Georgia's Pankisi Gorge. The General on Friday angrily dismissed the allegations as "sheer nonsense".

Russia has long accused Georgia of harbouring Chechen rebels and urged Georgia to let in Russian troops to flush them out.

Tensions have risen even further after recent announcement that 200 U.S. military instructors would arrive to train Georgian troops for fighting gunmen with alleged links to the al-Qaida terror network. The Russian President, Vladimir Putin's reaction to the prospective U.S. troops deployment in Georgia has been calm, but many Russian politicians have termed it as a threat to Russia's security. —AP

THE HINDO

# Evidence mounts of Russian troops' abuse in Chechnya

MAURA REYNOLDS  
MOSCOW, JANUARY 7

HUMAN-RIGHTS workers are collecting what they describe as mounting evidence that Russian troops committed unjustified killings and other abuses during military operations in two towns in separatist Chechnya over the past eight days. Usam Baisayev, deputy director of the regional office of the Russian human-rights group Memorial, said the first military operation began in the town of Tsotsin-Yurt on December 30 and appeared to target Chechen men.

"The soldiers kept shooting at any Chechen male they saw for four days in a row," Baisayev said from his office in the city of Nazran, on the border with Chechnya. "They did not even bother to figure out whether the person they were about to deprive of life is or was a member of a rebel gang."

The operations began as Russia shut down for the country's biggest holidays — New Year's Day on January 1 and Orthodox Christmas, which is being observed on Monday. Most newspapers stop printing during the period, and TV news broadcasts are reduced.

Russian military officials have issued perfunctory reports about the operations, saying the troops are rooting out rebels hiding among the civilian population. The official reports have said Russian troops "destroyed" 100 rebels, including several field commanders, during a "special operation" in Tsotsin-Yurt. They have not mentioned any detentions or arrests; officially, suspected rebels are supposed to be taken into custody during an investigation into their activities.

The second operation began on Thursday in the town of Argun to hunt down as many as 30 alleged rebels who may have escaped from Tsotsin-Yurt, according to official reports. No civilian was allowed into or out of Argun for a fourth day on Sunday.

"The ring around militants is getting tighter," Colonel General Georgy Shpak, commander of Russia's paratroop force, told the Itar-Tass news agency Friday. "The troops are intensifying special operations because it is easier to fight militants in winter." Russian officials say the Federal Security Service, the main successor to the Soviet KGB, is overseeing the Argun operation along with military and civilian prosecutors. They have reported that 38 suspected rebels have been detained there. "I have been there myself today," Vsevolod Chernov, the chief prosecutor of Chechnya, said in an interview broadcast on Sunday on the TV-6 network.

"There have been no complaints from the people. Military and local prosecutors as well as representatives of the public — elders from the city of Argun — are taking part in the operation." Information about events in Chechnya is often fragmentary and unverifiable because of poor communication and a lack of impartial observers. Most Russian news reports are based on official statements from military headquarters; the Chechen rebels' website routinely exaggerates rebel gains.

Kheda Saratova, an investigator with Memorial, spent three days in Tsotsin-Yurt before leaving on Saturday and collected evidence that at least 37 civilians were killed by Russian troops. She said that in order to retrieve the bodies, relatives of the victims were forced to sign a statement acknowledging that their loved ones were members of rebel groups. "Troops kill peaceful civilians and then try to pass them off as rebels," she said after reaching Nazran, in the neighboring Russian republic of Ingushetia. —LATWP

INDIAN EXPRESS

8 JAN 2002