

World aid asked in Pakistani POW release

By Altaf Malik

Altaf Malik is a student from Pakistan majoring in mechanical engineering.

Dear mankind, is man kind? Thousands of bewildered children ask this question as they endlessly wait for their fathers to return home from captivity. Thousands of heart-broken wives spend sleepless nights not knowing whether their husbands are alive or dead. The same story is reflected in millions of anxious eyes throughout Pakistan.

A tale of sorrow; a tale of misery; a tale of human tragedy and endurance. This summer during my visit home I got a close-up view of what, so far, I had only heard of or read through the news media.

More than eighteen months have passed since the ceasefire in the latest war between India and Pakistan. In spite of this, there are still over 90,000 Pakistani POWs languishing in Indian prison camps, where they are being detained in blatant violation of the Geneva Convention.

The United Nations has tried, the International Red Cross has tried and most peace-loving nations of the world have tried to put an end to this atrocity, with little or no results.

India claims that it can take no action until given the go-ahead from Dacca authorities. If that is so, the bulk of the blame shifts from the Indian to the Bengali leaders.

Bengalis, on the other hand, claim that they have offered to release all the POWs except 195 whom they want to hold back and try for war crime charges. Pakistan is, by now, well aware of these baseless offers. Bangladesh is using a handful of men as an excuse to create what is possibly one of the most tragic political stalemates the world has ever witnessed.

The present government of

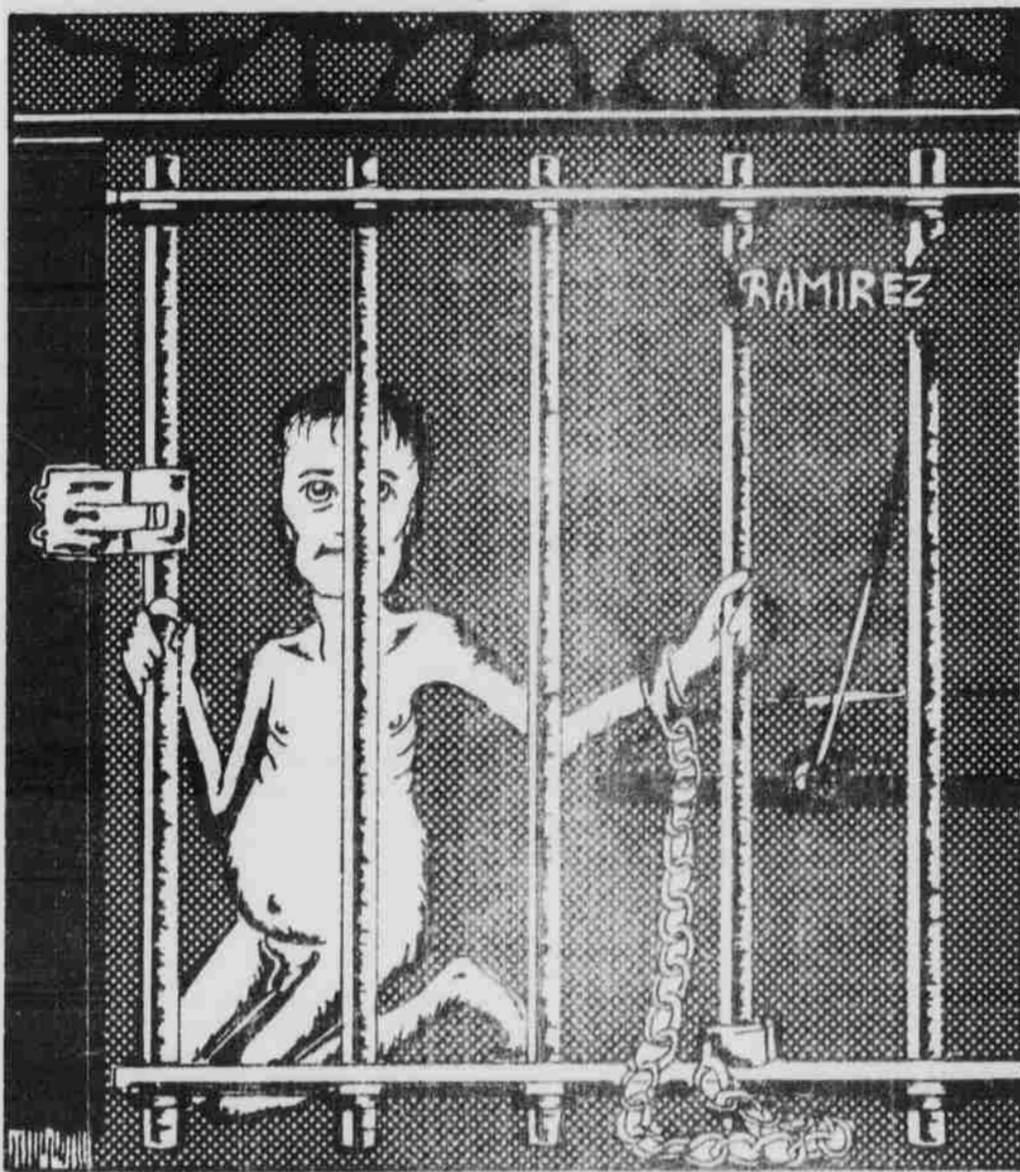
guest opinion

Pakistan, which was not the one directly involved with the war and its immediate aftermath, has a moral obligation to bring home every POW.

Even if at all these men are guilty of whatever they are charged with, there are some important factors to be considered here.

For one thing, no matter what they

have allegedly done, they have more than paid for it already. At least fifty have been murdered in cold blood by the prison guards. The handful of extremely sick and badly wounded POWs who were recently allowed to return after frantic pleas from all over the world feel the gruesome story by their physical appearance.



Secondly, if there are any court-martial procedures to be undertaken, Pakistan reserves the right to carry them out at home.

A most significant fact which Bangladesh conveniently overlooks is that any of the so-called warcrimes in these men's past were not without counter-action from the Bengali terrorists.

Through the camera, American publications like *Time* and *Newsweek* are witness to the bayoneting of Urdu-speaking civilians in the streets. Who is going to try these criminals?

At first it was claimed that the awaiting of Pakistan's recognition of Bangladesh was the only obstacle to lasting peace in one of the world's most troubled spots.

It should be noted that Pakistan's National Assembly has given the President (now the Prime Minister) complete power to recognize Bangladesh whenever conditions permit.

The good and peaceful intentions of the Pakistani government were most clearly obvious when it carried out the unconditional release of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Bangladesh's most powerful leader, who was a political prisoner in Pakistan awaiting trial under charges of conspiracy against the state.

These same peaceful intentions are again reflected in Pakistan's policy of repatriation without reciprocity which it has been following in the systematic return of hundreds of thousands of Bengalis who were in Pakistan during the time of the separation.

Very briefly, that is the challenge to the world conscience. We ask for the help of every peace-loving nation and individual—not as an appeal for charity, but as our basic human right.

Help preserve our right by accepting this challenge. That is the only sure answer and the most beautiful expression of mankind.

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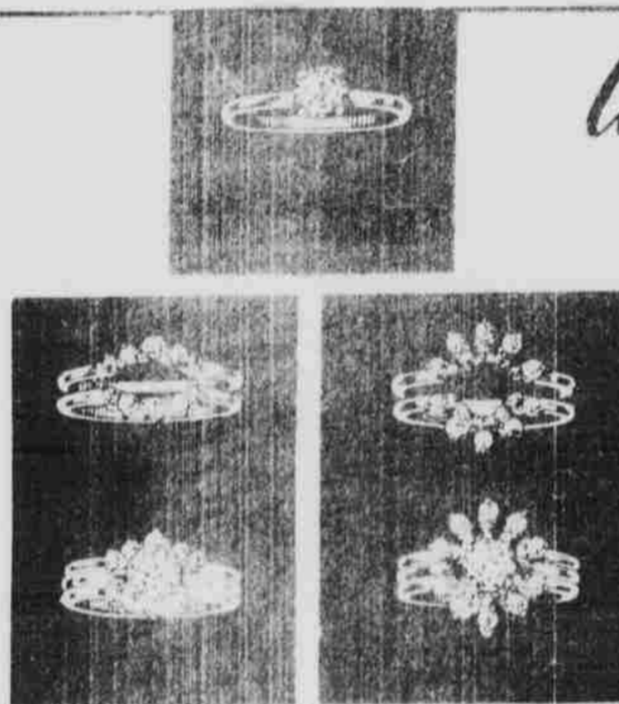
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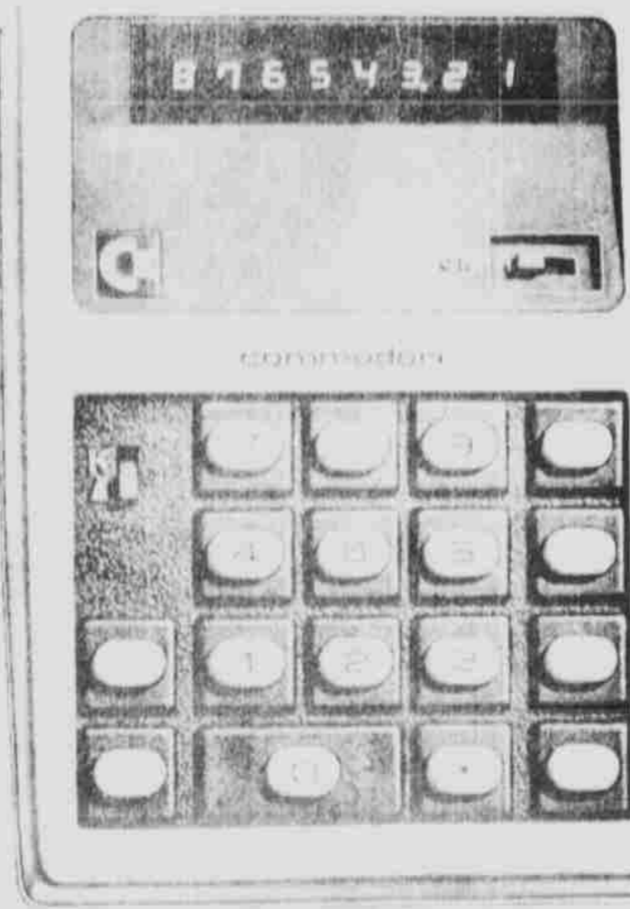
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