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CRP AS TRAGICOMEDY

To the Editors: Louis René Beres is right to ridicule the U.S. Government's Crisis Relocation Planning ("On the Road From Apocalypse," May), but he stops one step short of the mark. Not only is the CRP ludicrous, but it is highly unlikely that our government would ever mobilize the plan even if attack were imminent and our government knew it. Didn't we hear Secretary of State Haig when he carried on about the survival capacity of high-level government? I suspect that some people in high-level government consider survival capacity one of the perks of the position, not available to mere citizens. Besides, in what realistic scenario would a president alert New York City of an imminent attack (thereby causing rioting, looting, death, etc.) that had not been launched already? And if it had been launched, wouldn't it be useless, and mightn't there be strategic and political reasons to keep mum? Remember, we aren't going to get a midnight phone call a week in advance to tell us that the bombs just left Odessa by tramp steamer.

Michael B. Huston

Kalamazoo, Mich.

IN BANGLADESH

To the Editors: ...Here in Bangladesh problems are anything but abstract and distant. At home it's the media that interpret reality; here it's the reality that needs editing. I feel close to the earth, to the people, to the real issues of health, food, housing, production. Every day that I work something good comes of it. What a great feeling.

I take frequent walks through Old Dacca, down near the Padma (Ganges) River. It's a densely populated area built during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Narrow streets, magnificent two and three-story stone buildings, many in the Muslim style, with balconies and arches, thousands of shops filled with handicrafts, artisans, restaurants, and other potpourri of a bazaar. I like the sheer life of the place, if not the smells of open sewers. One feels transported back to a lost century,

where streets are jammed with bicycle rickshaws; where men use ancient tools to fashion seashell bangles or intricate gold jewelry by the light of kerosene lamps; where milk is sold by the pitcher from enormous tin tubs; where tin pots are being hammered into shape and soap is being made. Except for a scattering of electric lights, Old Dacca is a well-preserved eighteenth-century bazaar complete with shadows, beggars, and craftsmen of voluminous variety.

In the countryside the land is flat, except for mounds of green forest in which are found the villages where people live in tree-shaded bamboo huts. The trees protect them from the merciless midafternoon sun in the hot season (though it's quite hot the rest of the year too), but the trees also keep from escaping the smells of other humans, cows, goats, and chickens. The village people live sixteenth-century lives, barely touched by modernity. The smell of mud, excretion, and stagnant pools of water is everywhere, as is the hum of insects.

The clumps of foliage *cum* villages are surrounded by fertile fields of verdant rice, with tubewell water amidst the paddies reflecting the pastel blue sky and the cumulus clouds like cotton candy. The people know nothing of life elsewhere, not even in the next village. The world, for them, does not exist. Even Dacca or Chittagong are almost meaningless words. There is no radio, no TV, no other modern amenity. In two hundred years of British rule and thirty under Pakistan it is doubtful that most villages have ever been visited by a foreigner. Can someone like me relate to such a place?

As for the modern sector of Bangladesh, tremendous strides have been made since 1976, when I was here last. Then Dacca was still a provincial city, dark at night and with only a few autos and rickshaws. Now it is twice the size and sports broad avenues, electric lights everywhere. There are at least 250,000 bicycle rickshaws and perhaps 15,000 autos. The main road to the port of Chittagong is now open, and telephone, telex, and mail systems have been developed and are functioning fairly well. Compared to Saigon or Canton in the 1940s, it is an easy city to live in....

Jeremiah Novak

Jeremiah Novak retired recently as Worldview's economics columnist.