

# A senseless act



MUSLEHUDDIN AHMAD

## SPOTLIGHT ON MIDDLE EAST

**It's time to "internationalise" (as said by John Kerry) Iraqi issue and hand over the command and everything to the UN. Further continuation of the occupation may bring unknown disasters to everyone engaged in Iraq. Some countries have already deserted American coalition; others may now do so after the prisoner abuse stories. We have said time and again that the very decision and announcement of the departure without any big if of the American forces may reduce the "fight" to half and rest can be achieved through implementation of the withdrawal of the American forces.**

**E**XECUTING someone and that also without going through the due legal process is against the tenets of any religion and undoubtedly against the international law and justice. Punishment is awarded to those who commit crime and one cannot be punished for other's crime. Nicholas Berg, an American civilian contractor who was looking for work in Iraq was abducted in April by some Iraqis and they finally beheaded him to avenge the prisoner abuse by the American forces in Iraq. This was totally a

senseless act as Nicholas Berg was not at all responsible for any prisoner abuse in Iraq. Indeed, he himself was reportedly arrested by the Coalition forces and later released as his family filed a case against the American arrest. Indeed, Berg family has reportedly blamed American Administration more than the Iraqis for Berg's execution. Michael Berg, the father of Nicholas Berg, said, "My son died for the sins of Gerge Bush and Donald Rumsfeld. This

Administration did this. ... I am sure that he only saw the good in his captors until the last second of his life. They did not know what they were doing. They killed their best friend..."

As it seems, an unknown group of Iraqi radicals did this gruesome execution. They apparently tried to find justification for their crime in the American abuse of the prisoners in utter disregard to the Geneva Convention. At best Nicholas Berg could have been treated as a prisoner in the

armed conflict as he was an American (the conflict was between America and Iraq) and treated fairly under the Geneva Convention. However, it appears from Berg family statement that Nick Berg was treated well since his abduction in mid April, but suddenly environment changed when the news and photos of Iraqi prisoner abuse by American forces came out in the media. This is why Berg family put the blame squarely on Bush Administration. But whatever may be the arguments, nothing could justify the execution of Nick Berg.

There is no doubt that this execution has produced adverse reactions around the world and particularly in the USA. But the world would expect delivery of justice from the US Congress keeping in view America's values about which they are so rightly boastful. This is all the more necessary in today's turmoil in the Middle East and particularly in Iraq. Iraqis are the real sufferers. It is good that the US has started to release some prisoners from Abu Graib prison. Indeed, it's high time to demolish Abu Graib and release all prisoners. However, if anyone has committed crime, he should be dealt with according to law.

Abuse of Iraqi prisoners was a completely different issue which was being condemned by the world as a whole and by most Americans. Indeed, the way the US Congress has reacted on the prisoner issue and been conducting the inquiry clearly show that such abuses were totally unacceptable to the Americans. Of course, nearly all have blamed the Administration for this disaster which may cost President Bush his November election despite the fact that he also expressed his 'abhorrence' on the prisoner abuse. President Bush probably could not have asked Rumsfeld to resign for domestic political reason, but the general view is that Rumsfeld, being the head of the Ministry of Defence should have resigned soon after he took the responsibility for this disaster.

There were horrifying pictures, nearly 1800, and videos depicting the crimes committed by some of the soldiers. There was serious failure of command responsibilities and the chain goes up even beyond Rumsfeld.. So there were sufficient reasons even for dismissal of Rumsfeld; but instead President found some nice words like "good Secretary" to praise him. But the question is why did President Bush reportedly rebuke Rumsfeld privately if he was a good Secretary? It was a question of America's honour and prestige which stands "tainted" as President himself said. So it was reasonable to suggest that Rumsfeld failed to act effectively even after he knew that such abuses had been systematically going on (Red Cross reports) for some time. If he acted effectively and kept the President informed, things would not have gone so far. So there is justification for the demand for Rumsfeld's resignation. It is unfortunate, but Rumsfeld will be the real liability of President Bush in his November election.

It's time to "internationalise" (as said by John Kerry) Iraqi issue and hand over the command and everything to the UN. Further continuation of the occupation may bring unknown disasters to everyone engaged in Iraq. Some countries have already deserted American coalition; others may now do so after the prisoner abuse stories. We have said time and again that the very decision and announcement of the departure without any big if of the American forces may reduce the "fight" to half and rest can be achieved through implementation of the withdrawal of the American forces.

The latest decision of the US to leave Iraq if asked by the Interim Government after June 30 with handing over of sovereignty to Iraqis may reduce the tension somewhat. It's certainly a good decision provided the US does not demand too much from the Interim Government. Once the sovereignty is transferred through the UN resolution, the Iraqis and the UN should handle the matter in Iraq. America should decide to leave. By such a gesture America can show to the Iraqis that it did not intend to go for occupation of Iraq; it only wanted to remove dictator Saddam. This may gradually improve American position in Iraq and probably in the Middle East as a whole.

Muslehuddin Ahmad, a former Secretary and Ambassador, is presently the Vice Chancellor of Presidency University.

# The danger of importing avian flu

ABDUR RAHMAN

**F**or the past few months the government has banned the import of parent stock chicks (which are raised by Bangladeshi hatcheries to produce commercial chicks) from a number of countries. Most of the countries from which imports were banned are countries like Thailand and Pakistan whose governments had reported outbreaks of avian influenza (bird flu). This import ban has been hailed by the poultry industry as a decisive action which has prevented the spread of avian flu to Bangladesh.

Two of the countries on the list, India and Malaysia, have not reported any outbreaks of avian influenza; however, as India and Malaysia border countries which are known to be infected with avian flu, there is an extremely high probability that both of these countries will also soon suffer outbreaks. So, banning poultry imports from these countries was a necessary precaution.

Recently, a small number of poultry hatcheries have been pressuring the Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries allow the import of parent stocks from India. These hatcheries have been complaining because importing parent stock from India is much cheaper than importing from Europe. These hatcheries argue that the OIE (Office International des Epizooties - the international organisation which monitors animal health) has not reported any avian influenza outbreaks in India, and that we can therefore import chicks from India without fear of importing avian flu.

This argument is misleading. The OIE is not a worldwide health-testing and certifying body. The way in which the OIE works is clearly stated on its website:

"Each Member Country undertakes

**Highly-pathogenic avian flu is unmistakable as it kills almost all the chickens on an infected farm in just a few days; the low-pathogenic strains of avian flu are less deadly to chickens and easily mistaken for other poultry diseases. However, flu viruses mutate very quickly; a virus which is today low-pathogenic, and which affects only poultry, may mutate and become highly-pathogenic and infect humans as well as poultry.**

to report the animal diseases that it detects on its territory. The OIE then disseminates the information to other countries, which can take the necessary preventive action." ([http://www.oie.int/eng/OIE/en\\_transparence.htm](http://www.oie.int/eng/OIE/en_transparence.htm))

The fact that the OIE has not reported Avian flu outbreaks in India does not mean that the OIE has sent veterinarians to poultry farms all over India and given them a "Bird Flu Free Certificate." All it means is that the veterinary authorities of the government of India have not reported any outbreaks to the OIE.

The case of Thailand illustrates this point. Months before Thailand officially reported its outbreaks of avian flu, Bangladeshi poultry hatcheries had already learned through private sources in the Thai poultry industry of huge mortality on poultry farms, probably caused by avian flu. The Thai government was covering up the avian flu outbreak under pressure from chicken (and parent stock) exporters. These companies knew that official admission of an avian flu outbreak would immediately end all exports.

On January 23, 2004, Thailand reported its avian flu outbreak to the OIE and began destroying infected birds in

order to stop the spread of the outbreak. What made them suddenly decide to report the avian flu outbreak? The answer is that on January 23, the first human cases of avian influenza in Thailand were confirmed by laboratory tests. Once it became clear that humans were dying of avian flu, the Thai government could no longer deny the presence of the disease.

The Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries must realise, then, that the OIE's function is to disseminate reports from national veterinary authorities. If we examine critically the report submitted to the OIE by the Indian veterinary authorities, we see the following statement:

"So far there has been no case of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza in India and if there is any such incidence in future the same will be informed to OIE..."

(<http://www.oie.int/download/AVIAN%20INFLUENZA/India%2004-03-2004.pdf>)

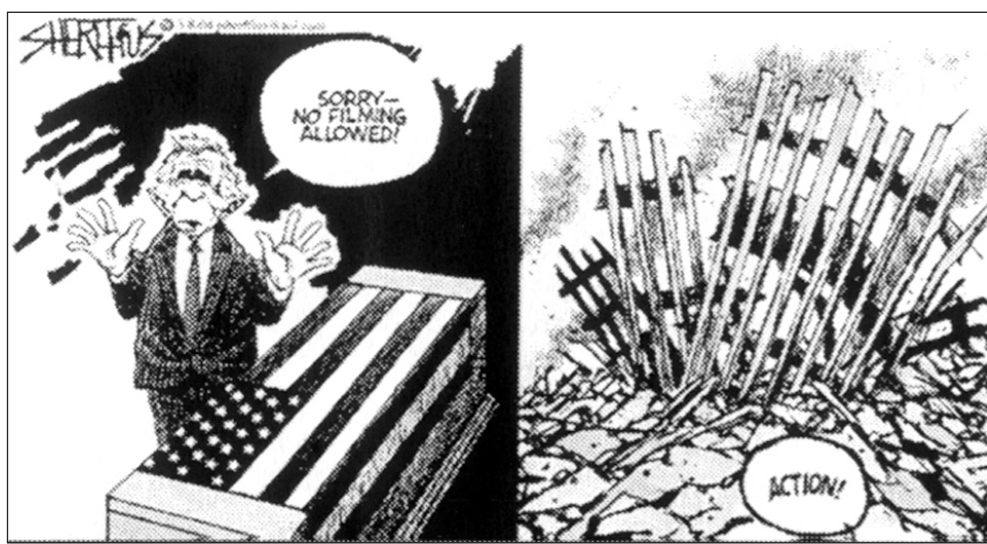
What is most important is what this statement omits. The Indian veterinary authorities denied having outbreaks of highly-pathogenic avian flu, but did not deny outbreaks of low-pathogenic avian flu. For months now, private sources in the Indian poultry industry

have informed Bangladeshi hatcheries that low-pathogenic avian flu has spread everywhere in India. The government of India has been covering up these outbreaks in order to protect India's exports of parent stock chicks to Bangladesh, Nepal and the Middle East. It was because of these unofficial reports (which had proven to be true in the case of Thailand) that poultry hatcheries pressured the government to include India on the list of countries from which the import of parent stock was banned.

Low-pathogenic avian flu is not as dramatic as highly-pathogenic avian flu. Highly-pathogenic avian flu is unmistakable as it kills almost all the chickens on an infected farm in just a few days; the low-pathogenic strains of avian flu are less deadly to chickens and easily mistaken for other poultry diseases. However, flu viruses mutate very quickly; a virus which is today low-pathogenic, and which affects only poultry, may mutate and become highly-pathogenic and infect humans as well as poultry.

The ban on parent stocks from India must be maintained. We know that Thailand covered-up its avian flu problem until human deaths brought it out into the open; it is likely that the same subterfuge is going on in India at this moment. We cannot risk importing even low-pathogenic avian flu. If the virus mutates into highly pathogenic bird flu, it would at the very least destroy our poultry industry. The worst case scenario is if the virus mutates into a highly pathogenic flu virus which is transmissible between humans. That could cause a worldwide flu pandemic like the 1918 pandemic which killed millions of people.

Abdur Rahman is a researcher.



3X3

4x2

4x2

8.5x3

5x2

5x2

3.5x4