

Saddam's trial and its political fallout



M. M. REZAUL KARIM

IRAQ'S trial of the century had its opening volley with the appearance of the fallen dictator before a young investigating judge in a court in Iraq. The event immediately got prominence over all other important developments in the strife-torn country. It divided the people clearly between pro-and anti-Saddam camps. That was, however, natural and well-perceived.

The appearance and conduct of Saddam Hussain in the court generated a good deal of interest to all. His physical frailty was somewhat made up by his unexpected alertness and buoyancy of mind. Saddam's legal background and extensive training as a diehard Baathist was demonstrated by his wit and clever interaction with the judge. He was seen to be aware of his rights and appeared determined to press for it during the trial. He was astute in rejecting the judge's demand to sign papers without consultation with his lawyers. He introduced himself as the President of Iraq and admonished the judge for his role as an Iraqi.

The trial is likely to produce a long-drawn debate over a vast spectrum of complex issues on domestic and international law, justice, politics and human rights. The Americans did well not to try Saddam during their occupation before handing over sovereignty to a new Iraqi government. They could have sought to try him in the international court like it was done

in case of the former Yugoslav President, Slobodan Milosevich. The difference in the two cases could have perhaps been bridged by the strong persuasive ability of the United States Administration, had the latter wanted it. But the USA did not consider that would be in her interest. An international trial could have boomeranged against the USA itself. In that event, the whole question of legitimacy of the Anglo-American invasion of

crimes and atrocities committed during his regime may not be difficult for the trying court, unless the compulsion of the law and order situation with intensified violence and armed conflicts require otherwise or delay the process.

The longer the trial the greater would be the spate of criticism. Alternatively, a short summary-like trial might cause an unprecedented outburst of feelings with the

government, which had been hand-picked by the Americans, and not by the United Nations. The United Nations had to lend its support to the present government as a fait accompli, while its envoy was still negotiating among Iraqi leaders for establishing a government that would be acceptable to all. If the Americans decide to withdraw their troops from Iraq now, the country is sure to be drawn into the vortex of unfathomed chaos, violence and armed conflicts. The different factions -- the Shiites, the Sunnis, the Baathists and the Kurds -- would definitely vogue to attain supremacy in the emerging political set up of the country. The territorial integrity of the country would be direly threatened. The neighbouring countries like Iran, Syria, Jordan and Turkey would also find a better pretext for meddling directly in Iraq in order to promote their own political agenda. It is bad for the Iraqis and also bad for the Americans.

Politically, the Americans would be faced with a government in Baghdad whose policy towards America would be uncertain. The majority Shiites population of Iraq may come out victorious in an election, provided it is fair and they remain united. They would definitely seek to foster fraternal relations with their fellow Shiite neighbour, Iran. This may not comfort the Americans. Again, if the Sunnis become predominant in the national election, they may include Baathists and Saddam sympathizers. This will also be equally disliked by the Americans.

The Kurds, who generally inhabit the northern region of the country, stand no chance of gaining power in Baghdad, except in a coalition. Their traditional movement was based on their demand for a sovereign Kurdistan which they would definitely strive to promote. For this, they would evidently have to overcome strong opposition of their northern neighbour, Turkey, who is hard-pressed to suppress similar nationalistic demand of its sizeable Kurdish population in the south. The Americans would, therefore, like to see the elected government as a conglomerate of personalities drawn from different sects and who will be of friendly disposition to the Americans. This would not merely serve their political purpose, but also ensure the unhindered flow of Iraqi oil to the West and promote her economic and financial interests by exercising continued control over Iraq's post-war reconstruction and development programmes. The American decision of a complete troop withdrawal from Iraq will, therefore, be shaped in accordance with the political texture of the elected government in Baghdad.

On the other hand, there exists no remote possibility of American troop withdrawal from Iraq before the election scheduled to be held after the new year. The continued presence and casualties sustained by the American troops there are sure to make some impact on American politics and, for that matter, on the Presidential election in coming November. That the impact will be positive or negative will depend mostly upon the astute and clever handling of the issue by the two rivals, the incumbent President and his challenger, the Democratic hopeful.

The Americans have now been sharply divided over the issue of justification of war in Iraq and the popular support of the President is gradually diminishing on this issue. The demeaning torture of Iraqi prisoners at Al Ghraib prison already caused embarrassment to the Pentagon and shame to knowledgeable Americans. The widespread screening of Bush's parody film Fahrenheit 9/11 in the USA appears to have damaged the President's image. The film Director, Michael Moore, even termed President Bush Jr a liar, who had played on the fear syndrome of the American people in justifying war against Iraq. The findings of the Congressional Commission that there was no link between Iraq and Al-Qaida and that Iraq had posed no direct threat against America accentuated the damage. The President, on his part, sought and gained some solace and support by highlighting achievements of the deceased fellow Republican President, Ronald Reagan. But the President's main gamble will now appear to centre round domestic issues and his prospect of returning to the White House for another term will be determined largely by his ability to provide improved economic and social indicators for the nation.

CURRENTS AND CROSSCURRENTS

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Iraq was sure to come up at the trial, with the consequent embarrassment, chastisement and what not for the Bush Administration. Furthermore, international court does not pass death sentence and Saddam would have been spared the severe capital punishment.

On the other hand, trial of an Iraqi national for alleged crimes committed on Iraqi soil, one expects, should take place in an Iraqi court. It is normal. The court appointed by the present provisional government of Iraq, is likely to be challenged on issues of jurisdiction of the court, legitimacy of the provisional government, justification of the invasion of the country and even Saddam's claim to continue to hold office of the President of the Republic with concomitant privileges and immunities. But the strength lies in the sword and the mighty is always right. Hanging Saddam for all the

consequent turmoil and may cause an upheaval in the country. This Catch-22 situation can be averted primarily on the success of the present government to assuage the rebel or terrorist groups and to reduce the need for military actions by the Anglo-American forces. But with the latest outbursts of the rebel Shia leader, Muqtada Al-Sadr, against the legitimacy of the present government and the demand for withdrawal of the American forces from Iraq has somewhat diminished that prospect.

The Americans are faced with a big dilemma. Their expectation of receiving support of the international community, as in the Kuwaiti war, before invasion of Iraq was belied as much as their plan for a trouble-free transfer of power to a truly representative Iraqi government. The present Iraqi government was chosen by the first Iraqi

Supplying arsenic free water to rural areas

DR. MA HOSSAIN

GROUNDWATER is the primary source of drinking water in Bangladesh. High concentration of arsenic (above WHO safe standard level of 0.05mg/l) is detected in this ground water. As a result, lot of rural people has been suffering from Arsenicosis.

It is believed that long ago, due to erosion in upper catchments of mountains and hills, arsenic might have been released into the transporting river water through weathering. Based on time and local hydrogeological structure prevailing in those times, it is found that these arsenic bearing sediments in river water were deposited in the alluvial floodplains at different depths. Arsenic is releasing from those deposited sediments to groundwater.

Studies at the author's laboratory have shown that arsenic is located in the form of a deposited layer in the shallow aquifer. The depth, thickness and size of this layer varies from area to area; in some areas, the layer may be narrow and thick, while in other areas, it may be wide and thin reflecting the variations in local hydrogeology. In the lower reduced zone of the shallow aquifers at low redox potential, arsenic previously adsorbed on finely divided hydroxy ferric oxide and manganese oxide particles is released to the interstitial water where Fe³⁺ is reduced to the Fe²⁺ and Mn³⁺ is reduced to Mn²⁺. When reduction occurs, As⁵⁺ is reduced to As³⁺. This adsorbed and coprecipitated arsenic is released to the porewater and dominates the porewater.

The correlation between increasing concentration of arsenic and decreasing particle size is related to the coating properties of hydroxy ferric oxide and manganese oxide; the more clay and more oxide coatings there are in the sediments, the more arsenic is adsorbed. In the upper oxygenated zone of shallow aquifers and in the dry season (November to April) due to lowering of water table and non-recharge, air is penetrated to the

aquifer through the void fractions of soil grains and through the annular space of the shallow tubewells as well as the deep tubewells resulting in oxidation of As³⁺ to As⁵⁺ species. During the rainy season (May to October), due to vertical recharge of the shallow aquifers, the void fraction of soil grains become filled-up with water and anaerobic condition (absence of free oxygen) prevails in the aquifers, as a result there is less arsenic in the extracted groundwater.

Works from the author's laboratory have shown that the deep aquifers below the shallow aquifers are found to be free of arsenic. Moreover the deep aquifers are composed of coarse grain soils and no question arises for deposition of arsenic there. In addition, in the deep aquifers water flows horizontally. For immediate solution of arsenic contamination in the rural areas, digging of tubewells in the deep aquifer will provide arsenic free water from a

particular area based on depth and population density. Once the arsenic free water is extracted from the deep aquifer, for the time being, this extracted water may be stored in previously constructed cubic basins having tape on all four sides but free from contamination and corrosion.

For maintenance of these basins and proper utilization of the arsenic free water, DPHE may elect/select a local community who will look after the basins and supply of water to the local people only for cooking and drinking purposes. DPHE through the elected community may impose a token tax to the users of arsenic free water on a monthly basis for maintenance services. As regards the quality of water, DPHE itself through their own laboratories will quarterly monitor the bacteriological quality of water and countercheck the results in advanced laboratories at Dhaka. Any stagnant water leads to the formation of bacteria when it is not dis-infected periodically. When financial condition will permit, the local government may construct overhead tanks, store the extracted arsenic free water there and supply through pipelines.

However, to meet the demand of agricultural irrigation water, during the rainy season, rain water be stored in sufficient number of previously constructed dams in government khass lands with proven solid walls/banks on all sides to avoid erosion and flooding. Stored water may be supplied from the dams through previously constructed and directed channels to agricultural lands on pre-paid token taxes. This should be done on short term basis (6-9 months) one in each division, then one in each district and finally, on a long term basis (5 years) all over the villages with imposition of token taxes for management. This will not only avoid arsenic contamination (through drinking, food and inhalation channel) but also satisfy the demand of water crisis in the dry season.

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Some examples of Arsenicosis



ter and besides, there may be dilution effect too.

The extracted groundwater therefore contains a mixture of As³⁺ and As⁵⁺ species. As³⁺ species are more toxic and more mobile than the As⁵⁺ species. Precise measurement of the forms of arsenic in human body from ingested water is extremely difficult due to variation in immunology and food habit which are variable from person to person, locality to locality, region to region. However it is generally agreed that when this arsenic contaminated groundwater is ingested, As³⁺ species are capable of forming complex with human enzymes and retains in the body leading to various sorts of arsenicosis while As⁵⁺ species are generally excreted with human urine and excreta as surface complex.

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