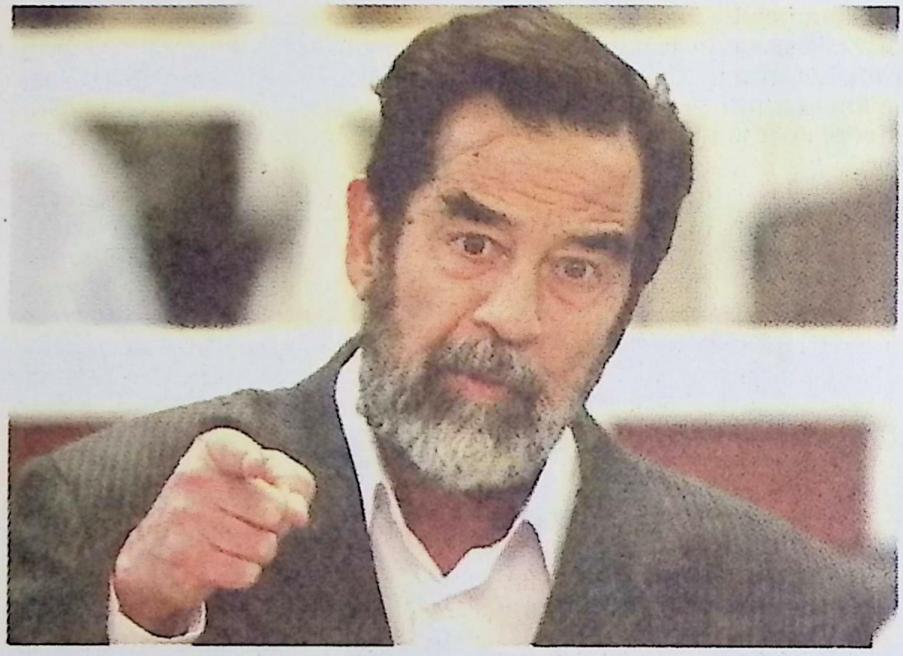


So Long Saddam...

NADER RAHMAN

A little comedy skit did the rounds on the internet a number of years ago. There Bill Clinton says "I would like you to meet the man whose incredible sense of timing contributed the most to my re-election, please welcome Mr so damn insane." What is interesting about that is on both accounts the comedian was right, Saddam did contribute tremendously to re-elect not Clinton, but Bush. And there was no denying the fact that the tyrant from Tikrit was so damn insane.

Saddam is dead; four years ago if those words were uttered in Baghdad it would have hastened the chopping of a tongue. Now his death is being used to cleanse the collective mouth of Iraq, with or without tongue, now it really does not even matter.

Much has been said of how he was tried and under what circumstances. People have claimed that he was a political prisoner and the Geneva Convention would exempt him from trial. Little did those people know that Iraq is run in exactly the same way as it was during Saddam's time, the people with power decide those who live and those who die.

That may be a sweeping statement, but now after information regarding his execution has slowly seeped out; the picture has become much clearer. One may view the actions of Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki as Saddam like. It was largely due to his coercion of second-tier U.S. diplomatic and military officials into transferring Saddam that led to his hasty death.

There are some details to sort out first, his appeal was apparently railroaded by Maliki. So much so that even prosecutors were left astonished that only three weeks into appeal, the tribunal upheld the death sentence. While the whole world was left shocked, it really should not have been the case. After the verdict Maliki told a BBC reporter that he expected Saddam to be executed by the end of the year. He moved heaven and earth to keep his word.

On Thursday the 28th of December U.S. officials were summoned to meet Maliki. Interestingly U.S. to Iraq Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad and the top U.S. military commander, General George Casey Jr., who were both out of Iraq on leave. So the U.S. team negotiating with Iraqi officials was headed by Major General Jack Gardner and Margaret Scobey, head of the embassy's political section. With the main men out of Iraq, apparently Malaki and other Iraqi officials demanded that the Americans transfer Saddam that night, for an execution before dawn Friday. Gardener was apparently in no mood to be bullied and he in turn asked for documents affirming the legality of the execution from President Jalal Talabani and the chief judge of the tribunal that convicted Saddam. Talabani was an opponent to the death penalty and refused to sign off on the hanging, but did sign a letter for Maliki saying he had no objections if the government went ahead. The Iraqi officials also said the tribunal's own statute, drafted by the Americans, placed its rulings beyond review.

All was not lost just as yet. Officials were contacted in America and the following day and they tried to save Saddam from speedy hanging. U.S. Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, apparently called Maliki asking him to postpone the saying that beyond the legal issues, there was a question