

16/05/2004

Why the cruelty?

By Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad

THE maltreatment of Iraqi prisoners at the hands of United States (US) and British soldiers is barbaric. The terrible torture and humiliation perpetrated is beyond the comprehension of the civilised mind. It is an act that cannot be accepted in any way, whatever may be the excuse.

Now, it is very hard to imagine which is worse for the Iraqis; Saddam Hussein's alleged torture and killings of his own people or the humiliation and torture accompanied by innumerable deaths, injury and suffering of the Iraqis by a foreign occupying force, which had glibly claimed they were there to liberate the Iraqis from the tyranny of Saddam.

The demeaning acts suffered by the Iraqis show a total absence of morality on the part of people said to be highly advanced and civilised as the British and the Americans claim to be. Certainly there seems to be a lack of understanding and respect for Islam and the culture and moral values of other people. The claim that these are aberrations due to a few soldiers and does not reflect the American attitude or culture is not credible. It is even more unacceptable considering that not so long ago, an international magazine boasted and nominated these soldiers as 'Person of the Year'. The fact that these soldiers are very ordinary people from their society makes it difficult to dissociate their society from them.

President Bush and his Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld must take full responsibility for this heinous crime. After all, one can hardly lay total blame on the soldiers. Many openly declared that they were acting under orders. They may have gone against the Geneva Convention on the treatment of prisoners or prisoners of war but it is impossible to imagine that Bush knew nothing about the ill-treatment before the pictures were printed. Maybe not in full but surely sufficient information to arouse curiosity and to want to know more. But obviously there was no desire to know more about unpleasant things. Truly, whatever little credibility the ground forces of Britain and the US had in Iraq would be totally destroyed by now. Today, American citizens and people around the world know all about the humiliation and ill-treatment of the Iraqis. A Presidential election is coming in the US. If Bush is returned, then can we assume that the behaviour of American soldiers under Bush's presidency is acceptable to the American people?

Americans are wont to blame the leaders for any misdeeds by the people in developing countries which they do not like. Will we now see double-standards again?

We had always maintained that invading Iraq would not solve the problem of terrorism. Nor would it serve the interest of the Iraqis to be 'liberated' by an invading foreign force, even from the tyranny of Saddam. Today, we see the truth in our fears. We have no love for Saddam nor do we condone the brutalities perpetrated by the Iraqis under Saddam, but should we condone the brutalities perpetrated against the Iraqis under President Bush's Government? And Blair, the British Prime Minister who believed he could influence Bush, is he influencing Bush to have the kind of occupation force brutality that we are seeing? If, as he claims, his total support for Bush would moderate the latter, that is certainly not happening. The whole episode reflects badly on these two leaders who believe they know better than everyone else, including their European colleagues, (French President) Jacques Chirac and (German Chancellor) Gerhard Schroeder. There will never be democracy in Iraq. The great super

powers will ensure Iraq is ruled by a regime of their choice, one which submits totally to the whims and fancies of its overlords, a puppet regime. A puppet regime cannot be democratic. If the Iraqis are allowed to be truly free and democratic, the majority Shiites would rule. But Shiites are totally unacceptable to the Americans and therefore another regime change will be needed. So how do you reconcile this with democracy?

If it is not because of weapons of mass destruction, not because of a regime change for democracy, then what were the war and the killings for? Is it the oil or is it the old Anglo-American arrogance of power?

Dr Mahathir is former Prime Minister and currently Advisor to Petronas and Proton.

(END)