

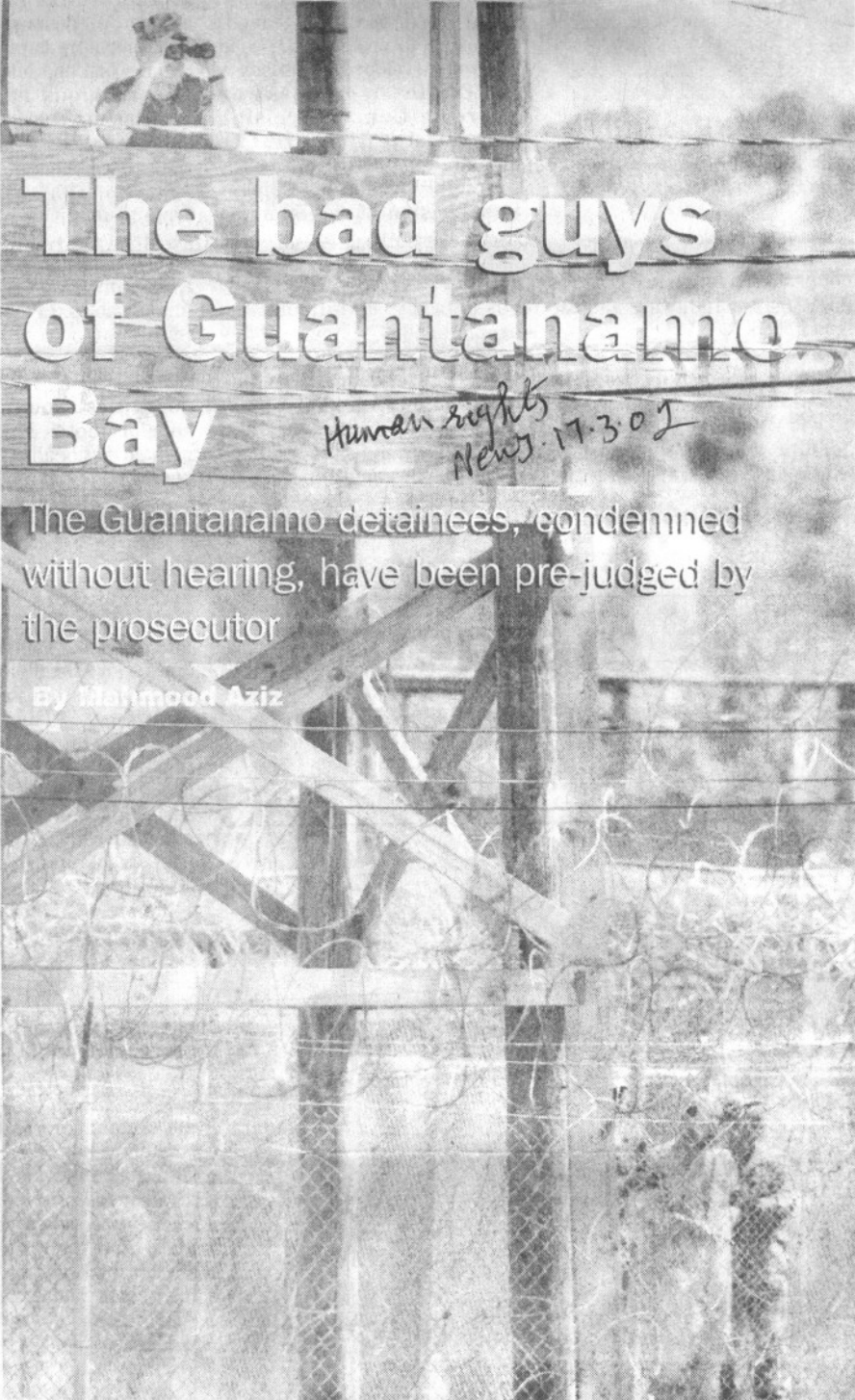
Cuba is famous for Fidel Castro, Havana cigars and for settings of Hemingway's famous novel *Old Man And The Sea*. But by now a tract of land of it has shot to much notoriety, thanks to the US, which has the audacity to transport 158 *al Qaeda* and Taliban prisoners in shameful conditions to camp X-ray, at a US base in Guantanamo, Cuba. Approximately, 300 or so men have been imprisoned there so far.

During the course of their journey some of these prisoners were sedated, shrouded in goggles, earmuffs and jumpsuits. With their hands tied in front of them, the prisoners were so humanely treated that they were not allowed to attend to call of nature. Rather, they were forced to use bedpans on this unholy pilgrimage. The prisoners were made a horrible example of helplessness.

What passions worked behind transporting these prisoners in worst than cattle conditions became clear, when they were photographed kneeling, in the full glare of international media, to humiliate them, perhaps to derive pleasure from their miserable plight? To add insult to injury, a penal colony has been brought into being, having barbed wire fencing, watch towers and 2.5 meter by 2.5 meter cages with roofs, concrete floors and chain-link walls. On top of that, President Bush decreed that military tribunals, with powers to award death sentence, without a right of appeal, would try these prisoners there. Obviously, the proceedings would be conducted secretly; no lawyers will be available to the prisoners to defend themselves.

The Guantanamo detainees, condemned without hearing, have been pre-judged by the prosecutor. Ever since then, prisoners are rotting in cages, in eerie silence, at the mercy of elements. These cages are reminiscent of Nazi concentration camps. The penal colony has been set up at such a far away place with a view to give a wide berth to the long arm of American law. But this is a big mistake, because the world opinion is highly critical of this unjust and cruel act of the US. Although, it has been billed time and again that the US is an exemplary democracy, which holds the rights of prisoners as sacrosanct, and severely denounces any violation of it; but when its turn came to put into practice its cherished convictions, it turned a volt-face and violated it openly.

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The bad guys of Guantanamo Bay

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By Mahmood Aziz

withheld from the prisoners of Geneva conventions should be followed. Others favour a UN tribunal having terms of reference, which were conferred, for dealing with war crimes committed in Kosovo and Rwanda. Another view is that since the US has taken prisoners in a battle it waged against terrorism, in Afghanistan against the September 11th attack, which was declared as an act of war, therefore, they should be tried under US laws.

Far from making available opportunities of fair play and justice to the prisoners of camp X-ray and repenting for the inhuman treatment of the prisoners, they (prisoners) are being demonised by describing them as dangerous and worst of the worst. US Defense Secretary Rumsfeld, about informs a protesting world, that these prisoners are unlawful combatants, rather than prisoners of war, thus, barring Geneva Conventions, to come to their rescue. Rumsfeld happily says, "I would characterise Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, as the least worst place we could have selected!"

The UN, through its resolution, has already directed the US to vacate the island and hand it over to Cuba. President Field Castro calls the Guantanamo Base a "dagger pointed at Cuba's heart." Human rights groups The Red Cross, and most allied allies, on fighting against terrorism, have indicated their disenchantment with stripping prisoners of their status of human beings and of remedies available to them under Geneva Conventions. Mary Robinson, UN Human Rights Commissioner, and The Red Cross, are of the opinion that captives

of Guantanamo are prisoners of war. According to Mary Robinson, Geneva Conventions cover circumstances where there is a dispute about the status of captives, it would be determined by an International Tribunal, whether the disputed prisoners are, prisoner of war, or not.

French Foreign Ministry's spokesman appropriately echoed the feelings of all caring nations about the prisoners, when he said, "Whatever their nationality and legal status, we expect these detainees to be given the same guarantees as recognised by international law, particularly, concerning their conditions of captivity." It is truism that an open trial under Geneva Conventions would determine whether there is any evidence of their involvement? Even Nazi war criminals and present day villain Slobodan Milosevic—perpetrators of genocide—were not denied due process of law.

The captives of Guantanamo belong to 25 nationalities; their respective countries naturally, want first-hand knowledge of their whereabouts and their involvement. Saudi Arabia wants to interrogate its nationals with its territories. Saudi Interior Minister, Prince Nayef Abdul Aziz, made it known that Saudi Arabia, would not rely on US investigation. Briton also wants to have its prisoners. It is crystal clear from the stance taken by nations of the world that unilateral trial of prisoners by US is unwelcome. To calm the uproar over the prisoners of Guantanamo, Secretary of State Collin Powell, has advised his administration that it is in US's interest to comply with Geneva Conventions. US has

also put off prisoners' transfer to Cuba due to international pressure; though their various spokesmen are downplaying the fact that putting off transfer of prisoners from Afghanistan, where there are several hundreds, is a sequel of scathing criticism of US arbitrary handling of prisoners.

US must realise that she is setting a precedent too dangerous, for prospective American detainees. Can putting Irish and Basque terrorists in such hellish conditions, as the Muslim prisoners of Arab and Asian origin are forced to undergo, be ever imagined? The innocence of the captives is their strength. They have openly defied the uncalled for intrusion in their spiritual matters, and went on hunger strike as protest, when they were forced to say their prayers without turban. Terrorism cannot be rooted out by counter state terrorism.

Washington, in fact, is in a quandary as how to put these prisoners in the dock—because the satanic deeds billed—do not stick against these "bad guys". It appears that reality is now beginning to dawn on Rumsfeld, which impelled him to say that the prisoners could be tried in their respective countries. The lawyer of two British prisoners, who have challenged their detention, has accused Rumsfeld, of "horse trading with human beings". World community will continue to heap scorn of this sort on the US. The only honourable way left to the US for not drawing world criticism and America-bashing is to dispatch the prisoners of Guantanamo Bay to their homelands, forthwith, in answer to the call of world conscience.