

Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo, Bagram...

ABU GHRAIB IS HISTORY. SO IS Guantanamo. But the most shocking abuses have yet to come to light, that these people are in Bagram and have yet to talk to anybody and what America is doing is hiding the ghostly secrets.

The US is holding 630 prisoners—more than twice the number being held at Guantanamo—at the Bagram Air Force Base, north of Kabul in Afghanistan. The prisoners are crammed into wire cages, forced to sleep on the floor on foam mats and until about a year ago, to use plastic buckets for latrines. Some have been detained for up to five years. They have no access to lawyers. They are barred from even hearing the allegations against them. America has virtually recreated a war time Vietnam scenario in the rugged hills of Afghanistan. Prisoners do not have the opportunity to demonstrate their innocence.

Last summer the International Committee of the Red Cross filed a confidential complaint with the Bush administration about Bagram, charging that prisoners were being held incommunicado for weeks or even months in a previously undisclosed area of isolation cells and subjected to cruel treatment in violation of the Geneva conventions. Then 'GENEVA' does not exist in America's prison culture. The Bushes have the divine right to violate international laws and conventions.

The Bagram horror story can be best guessed from the film 'Taxi to the Dark Side' which has recently been nominated for an Academy Award for best feature-length documentary in America. The film begins with a car driving down a road in rural Afghanistan, stirring up a cloud of dust. This is the road Dilwar drove one day in December 2002. This 22-year-old taxi driver thought he was just taking passengers to town, but he disappeared that day and never came home to his family.

A few months later he was found dead, chained and hanging by his wrists from the grated ceiling in a small cell in the notorious Bagram Prison, his legs reduced to pulp by being kicked and kneed repeatedly by US military guards and interrogators. He was never charged with any crime. Then this is the American way of dealing with 'suspects'.

Nearer home things are no better when it is the question of dealing with Maoist detainees. P Govindan Kutty, editor of monthly *People's March*, was transferred from jail to hospital January 9. He had been on hunger strike since December 20, when he was remanded to prison following his arrest the day before. And Dr Vinayak Sen, a civil rights activist continues to languish in a Chattisgarh jail despite outcry from civil society groups against his illegal detention. The fact is that hundreds of Maoist prisoners in India are experiencing brutalities in custody having no access to law. Human Rights Organisations are periodically producing bone-chilling reports with practically no impact on the authorities. □