

IRAQ'S former Information Minister, whose outlandish wartime briefings earned him the nickname "Comical Ali", is the only member of Saddam Hussein's Baath Party to have made President Bush roar with laughter.

Perhaps that explains what happened to him yesterday. Mohammed Saeed al-Sahhaf, whose wildly implausible claims of heroic Iraqi resistance became compulsory viewing in the White House appeared on Arab television to tell the world that he had given himself up to US troops only to be released.

Although he is not named as one of the Pentagon's "most wanted" set of 55 playing cards, many believe that Mr al-Sahhaf's failure to make the deck as the Joker was a glaring omission. His performance yesterday only strengthened that argument.

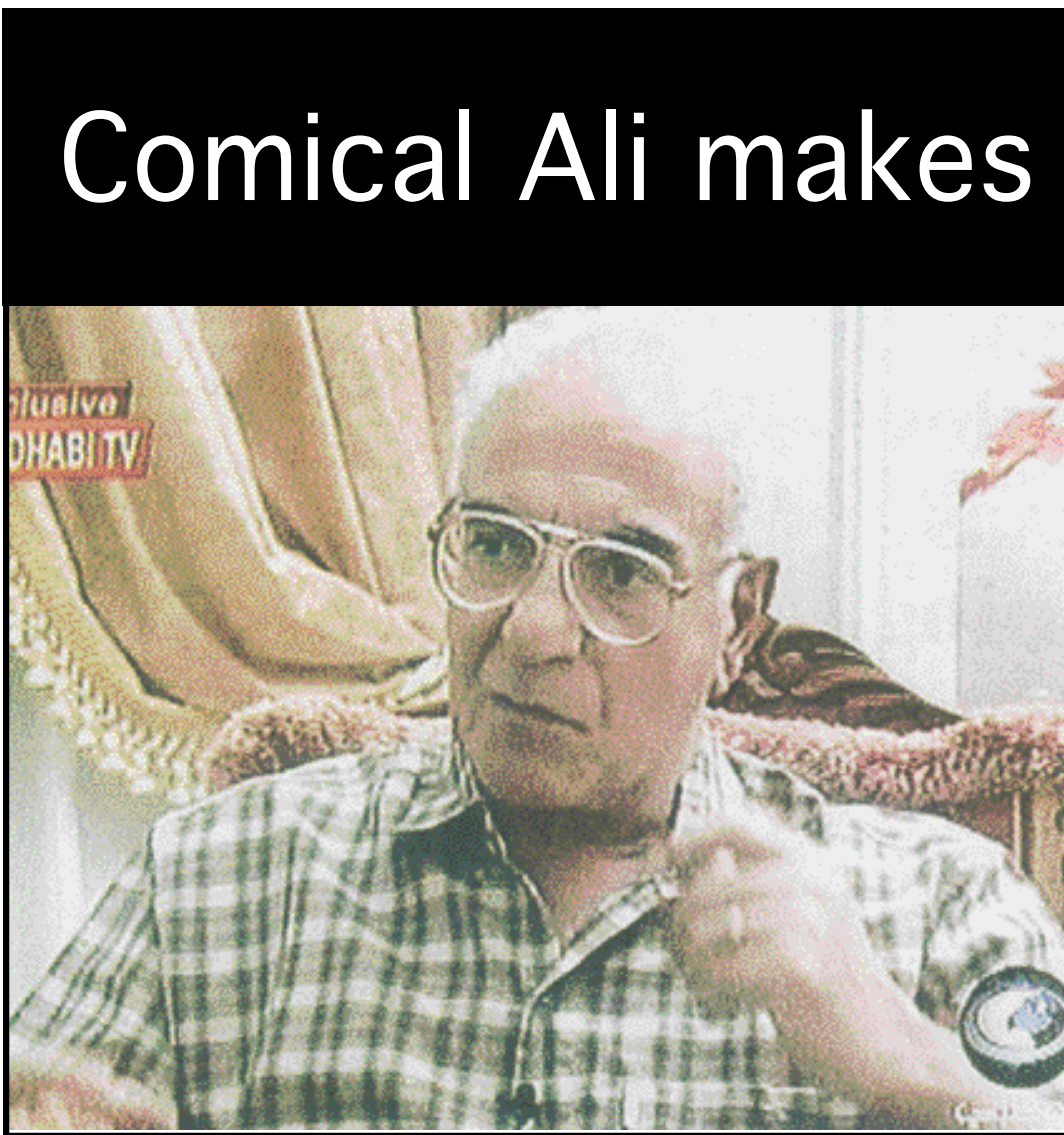
Making his first public appearance since the fall of Baghdad on April 9, Mr al-Sahhaf was interviewed on the al-Arabiya satellite network. He said that he was interviewed by US troops after surrendering to them, but released after questioning.

"Via some friends, I went to the Americans, and there was an interrogation about a number of issues concerning my work. After the interrogation, I was released," he said in a clip aired by the channel. "A difficult situation has passed by, not for one person but for everyone," he added.

Every other captured Baath Party official has at least had the status of a secret prison cell and daily grillings by the CIA.



As he was: Al-Sahhaf speaks during the war



Here's the news: Mohammed Saeed al-Sahhaf, whose war briefings made President Bush roar with laughter, reappeared on an Arab TV channel

The Arab cable network which said that it would air the full minute interview today, said that Mr al-Sahhaf was "exclusively interviewed in his hideout in Baghdad", although a hideout from whom is not clear.

The interview, the network said, would include "important information about the last war and the fall of the Iraqi regime". In the brief clip aired yesterday, Mr al-Sahhaf appeared fit, although his jet black hair had turned grey since his last televised briefing in April, probably the result of lack of access to hair dye, rather than stress.

Although Mr al-Sahhaf was questioned about the whereabouts of Saddam Hussein, his wartime briefings, twice daily and televised, may give a clue to how much weight his US interrogators gave to the accuracy of his answers and the depth of his knowledge.

On the day that US tanks entered Baghdad, he declared, in a press briefing within earshot of American gunfire and armoured vehicles: "I triple guarantee you, there are no American soldiers in Baghdad." Later he said: "We are winning!"

It was not only his wild over-optimism, but his language, that turned his briefings into "The al-Sahhaf Show". When US troops captured Baghdad Airport, he declared: "Those rascals are now committing suicide on the gates of Baghdad. I would encourage them to increase their rate of committing suicide."

A White House favourite was his claim that "Americans are wild donkeys!"

Mr Bush has said that he found the briefings so funny that he used to leave meetings when they came on his Oval Office television. "He's my man, he was great," Mr Bush said. "Somebody accused us of hiring him and putting him there. He was a classic. I did watch some of his clips. Somebody would say, 'He's getting ready to speak', and I'd pop out of a meeting or turn and watch the TV."

One Iranian news agency surmised that Mr al-Sahhaf also known as Baghdad Bob, the Loveable Liar, Uncle Mo and Little Al, had hanged himself, but his appearance yesterday came as a great relief of his many fans in America.

One US website is devoted to him, selling al-Sahhaf T-shirts. They place him at various battles in history including Normandy—"Americans? What Americans?" — and the site is filled with jokes.

How many al-Sahhafs, for example, does it take to change a lightbulb?

"There is no need to change the light bulb. It glows brilliantly. The room is not dark, and there is no bruise on your knee from the furniture you didn't walk into."

by Jagath Gunawardena

Members of the family Campephagidae are similar to shrikes in general appearance and, for this reason some species are known by names such as cuckoo-shrikes, flycatcher-shrikes and wood-shrikes. All members of this family have strong beaks that have hooked tips to the upper mandible, followed immediately by a notch, an arrangement that is also found in shrikes. They have long wings that gives them a strong flight and much

others.

The larger of the two species of minivets found in Sri Lanka is the Orange Minivet (*Pericrocotus flammeus flammeus*), which is also known as the Flame Minivet, Scarlet Minivet and Sultan bird. It is known in Sinhala as Gini-kurulla (flame bird). It is 20 c.m. (8 inches) long or about the size of a red-vented Bulbul and has a slim, long build with a long, tapered tail. The males and females have different colours. In the males the head, chin and throat are dark black. The black colour extends down

have two yellow patches. The black parts in the tail is as same as in the male but the other parts are yellow, instead of orange-red. The chin, throat, face, breast, abdomen and the rump are a bright, dark yellow in colour. The eyes are dark in both sexes who also share black beaks, feet and legs.

The Orange Minivet is an active bird that is found as pairs or small flocks. Flocks often consist of family parties, comprised of parents and young. It is an entirely arboreal bird, spending the time among higher branches of the trees, and have a distinct preference for well-foliaged trees. It flits from branch to branch in search of prey. They constantly utter a melodious whistling "twee twee" note whilst moving. A flock moves about a great extent during a day. According to Mrs. Cicily Lushington, a pair of Orange Minivets in a tea estate may have a territory of 12 acres, which she says is nothing out of ordinary, although may be satisfied with a lesser extent of territory in a forest.

It feeds on a wide range of small insects caught on the wing, and also picked off from the foliage at times. A flock or pair methodically go through the foliage of a branch or tree before moving to the next. In the hills, they are often seen hunting in the company of Grey Tits. The tits disturb a lot of insects and some fall prey to the minivets. It is a peaceful species both to members of the same and to other species. Their flight is direct and fast. In flight the orange red of the male and the yellow of the female show to the greatest extent. The patches on the wings are seen clearly and the tail is frequently spread, revealing the coloured feathers which often remain hidden by the central tail feathers which are black.

The breeding season is, according to both G. M. Henry and Mrs. Lushington, is from February to May and again in August and September. According to W. W. A. Phillips, the breeding season is from February to April, and occasionally in May, August, September, November and December. The nest is cup-shaped and is made up of thin fibrous material woven together with cobwebs into a neat structure. It is placed on a branch and fastened with cobwebs. The nest is always made in a high branch of a tall tree and the

colouration and the form of it makes a good camouflage, making it look like a part of the branch. It always lays two eggs which are bluish-green and speckled with brown or grey. Both parents tend to the eggs and young.

The Orange Minivet is a species where young from previous broods hang on with the parents for a long time after leaving the nest. Young birds of both sexes resemble the females in colouration. Thus, a family party may look like a male with several females in company. The early Europeans mistook it as a polygamous bird and therefore called it the Sultan bird. Some juvenile males have the yellow of the underparts suffused with orange. When they get older, the young males develop patches of orange in the yellow areas and the black colour of the head and back can be seen. They stick together with parents until the young start their breeding.

The behaviour of the family parties of Orange Minivets show some interesting patterns which deserve more attention. A family party can consist of young of different broods in different levels of maturity and may have young from about three previous broods. Parents leave the group to rear the next clutch but the young hang around, and at times even feed the young in the nest but often play the role of vigilants. When the nestlings become able to fly, the parents rejoin the flock with the new young. At times, there are flocks of about 30 individuals, that have several mature males. It is not clear whether these are made up of several different families coming together or comprises of a family party in which the mature young had their own makes and progeny making it an extended family group.

The Orange Minivet is widely distributed in the low country wet zone and the central hills, both in forests and plantations like rubber and tea. It is more common in hills, both in Uva and Central Provinces and upto the highest elevations. In the dry zone it is rare and locally distributed, found mainly in the foot hills and riverine forests. The Orange Minivet needs tall trees and the denudation of forest cover in some areas and the replacement of rubber with trees like the oil palm in other areas have caused local reductions in some wet zone localities.

Male



Female



manouevrability. They have short, strong legs and feet. This family is represented in Sri Lanka by six species made up of two cuckoo-shrikes, two minivets, one flycatcher-shrike and one wood-shrike. They are all residents but none are endemic species. These known as minivets have strong-bright colours as opposed to the muted colours of the

the nape to the back and the wings. The wings have two orange-red patches. Rump, breast and belly, a deep orange-red. The two central tail feathers are black, the next two black partly and the other tail feathers are orange-red. In females, the crown, nape and back grey. The forehead is yellow, and is joined by a yellow supercilium. The black wings



ANTI-SMUGGLING TUSK FORCE: A Thai Customs official examines elephant tusks which smugglers tried to sneak through the Bangkok international airport on Friday. The elephant tusks and rhinoceros horns — numbering 65 in total — were believed to have come from Africa.