

## Saddam verdict deepens Iraq's sectarian divide

### Shias cheer, Sunnis protest conviction

AP, Baghdad

Iraqi Shias broke into wild celebration yesterday after Saddam Hussein was sentenced to hang, but his fellow Sunnis paraded through the former dictator's hometown chanting, "We will avenge you Saddam."

In Sadr City, the Shia stronghold of northeast Baghdad, youths took to the streets dancing and singing, despite a curfew declared for the capital and two neighbouring provinces.

"Execute Saddam," they chanted. Many carried posters bearing the image of Muqtada al-Sadr, the radical anti-American cleric whose Mahdi Army militia effectively runs the district.

Breathing heavily as he ran along the streets, 35-year-old Abu Sinan said, "This is an unprecedented feeling of happiness ... nothing matches it, no festival nor marriage nor birth matches it. The

verdict says Saddam must pay the price for murdering tens of thousands of Iraqis."

Saddam and his seven co-defendants were on trial for a wave of revenge killings carried out in the city of Dujail following a 1982 assassination attempt on the former dictator. As the verdict was read on Sunday, people in Dujail celebrated in the streets and burned pictures of their former tormentor.

Saddam was sentenced to death by Iraq's High Tribunal for crimes against humanity, along with his half brother and former intelligence chief Barzan Ibrahim, and Awad Hamed al-Bandar, head of the former Revolutionary Court. Three other defendants received lesser sentences and one was acquitted.

Similar celebrations were reported in other Shia districts of the capital and other cities, although the size of crowds seemed to have been reduced due to the open-ended curfew declared Saturday. Iraqi

security forces and US troops mounted additional patrols.

Clashes broke out in north Baghdad's heavily Sunni Azamiyah district where police were battling men with machine guns. At least seven mortar shells slammed to the ground around the Abu Hanifa mosque, the holiest Sunni shrine in the capital.

In Tikrit, Saddam's hometown, 1,000 people defied the curfew and carried pictures of the city's favourite son through the streets.

Some declared the court a product of the US "occupation forces" and decried the verdict.

"By our souls, by our blood we sacrifice for you Saddam" and "Saddam your name shakes America."

Celebratory gunfire also rang out in Kurdish neighbourhoods across the northern Iraqi city of Kirkuk, where Khatib Ahmed sat on a mattress in his living room to watch trial coverage with his wife

and six children.

"Thank God I lived to see the day when the criminals received their punishment," the 40-year-old taxi driver exclaimed on hearing of Saddam's death sentence.

His brother and uncle were arrested by Saddam's security forces in the 1980s and disappeared forever. Two cousins died in a 1991 Kurdish uprising.

The trial proceedings were shown on Iraqi and pan-Arab satellite television channels with a 20-minute delay. Ahead of the verdicts, several channels aired documentaries about Saddam's crackdowns on Kurds and Shias. They also aired videotape of mass graves being uncovered after the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003.

Al-Masai television, run by the prominent Shia Dawaa party, played solemn music as it scrolled through snapshots of Iraqis who went missing under Saddam's 23-year rule.

## Amnesty condemns death sentences

AFP, London

Amnesty International yesterday condemned the death sentences handed to Saddam Hussein and two of his senior allies, describing their trial as a "shabby affair".

The London-based human rights group -- which opposes capital punishment -- said the trial should have helped the process of establishing justice and the rule of law in Iraq but was in fact "deeply flawed and unfair".

"This trial should have been a major contribution towards establishing justice and the rule of law in Iraq, and in ensuring truth and accountability for the massive human rights violations perpetrated by Saddam Hussein's rule," said Malcolm Smart, director of the Middle East and North Africa programme.

"In practice, it has been a shabby affair, marred by serious flaws that call into question the capacity of the tribunal, as currently established, to administer justice fairly, in conformity with international standards."

Amnesty charged that "political interference undermined the independence and impartiality of the

court", prompting the first presiding judge to resign and the appointment of another to be blocked.

The court also failed to take adequate measures to protect witnesses and defence lawyers, three of whom were killed during the trial, it added.

Saddam himself was denied access to legal counsel for the first year after his arrest, while there appeared to have been inadequate responses to complaints by lawyers throughout the judicial process, Amnesty said.

"Every accused has a right to a fair trial, whatever the magnitude of the charge against them. This plain fact was routinely ignored through the decades of Saddam Hussein's tyranny," Smart continued.

"His overthrow opened the opportunity to restore this basic right and, at the same time, to ensure, fairly, accountability for the crimes of the past. It is an opportunity missed."

Amnesty's charges were backed by some British Muslim groups, who said there would now be no opportunity to force Saddam to explain issues surrounding the Iran-Iraq war and the invasion of Kuwait.



Iraqis in the predominately-Shia Baghdad suburb of Sadr City celebrate the guilty verdict handed down today against former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein yesterday. Saddam Hussein and two of his senior allies were sentenced to death by hanging after an Iraqi court found them guilty of ordering the killings of 148 Shia villagers in the 1980s.



Iraqis in ousted dictator Saddam Hussein's hometown of Tikrit carry a portrait of their native son as they protest the guilty verdict and death sentence handed down against him today during his trial in Baghdad yesterday.

## Saddam expected death, morale high

### Say lawyers

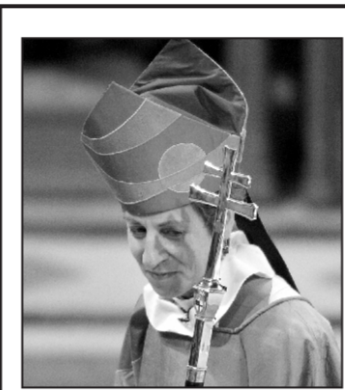
AFP, Amman

Saddam Hussein had expected to be sentenced to death but his morale is high and "made of steel", his defence team said Sunday, adding that they will appeal the verdict.

"I was among 12 defence lawyers who met Saddam Hussein for four hours on Saturday afternoon. His morale was very high, it was made of steel," Tunisian lawyer Ahmad Siddiq told AFP in a phone interview from Baghdad.

"He told us he was convinced he would get the death sentence and he said 'you have done everything you could but the court was manipulated,'" Siddiq said.

"We will appeal the verdict," Siddiq added.



## Episcopalians install female leader

AP, Washington

Katharine Jefferts Schori took office Saturday as the first female leader of The Episcopal Church and the first woman priest to head an Anglican province, two landmarks that could quickly be overshadowed by divisions over the Bible and sexuality throughout world Anglicanism.

Jefferts Schori, who supports ordaining gays, acknowledged the rift in an elaborate ceremony at the Washington National Cathedral, urging parishioners to "make peace" with those who oppose the direction of the US church. In 2003, the denomination consecrated its first openly gay bishop, V Gene Robinson of New Hampshire.

"If some in this church feel wounded by recent decisions, then our salvation, our health as a body, is at some hazard, and it becomes the duty of all of us to seek healing and wholeness," Jefferts Schori said during her ceremony.

Jefferts Schori, 52, was bishop of Nevada when she was the surprise winner of the election for presiding bishop at the Episcopal General Convention in June.

## Iraq war protagonists hail Saddam verdict

AFP, London

Iraq war protagonists the United States and Britain yesterday led those welcoming the death sentence handed to ousted Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein, but other nations and groups were more guarded, voicing concerns over his trial.

Britain said Saddam had been "held to account" for his crimes after Iraq's ex-president was sentenced to death by hanging for his role in ordering the deaths of 148 Shia villagers in the village of Dujail, north of Baghdad.

"Appalling crimes were committed by Saddam Hussein's regime. It is right that those accused of such crimes against the Iraqi people should face Iraqi justice,"

said British Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett in a statement.

The first reaction from the United States came from the country's ambassador in Baghdad who said the verdicts against Saddam and his co-defendants marked an "important milestone" for Iraq.

"A former dictator feared by millions, who killed his own citizens without mercy or justice, who waged wars against neighbouring countries, has been brought to trial in his own country -- held accountable in a court of law with ordinary citizens bearing witness," Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad said.

"Today is an important milestone for Iraq as the country takes another major step forward in the

building of a free society based on the rule of law," said a statement from Khalilzad.

"Although the Iraqis may face difficult days in the coming weeks, closing the book on Saddam and his regime is an opportunity to unite and build a better future," he added.

Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, currently visiting Paris, said the trial of his predecessor was "fair" but refused to comment on the death sentence, according to an aide.

"He would not comment because any comment might be seen as an interference with the court" pending the appeal period, which runs for a month, his chief of staff, Kamran al-Karadaghi, told AFP.



Former Baath party officials Abdullah Kadhem Ruweid (R) and his son Mezhar Ruweid react after each being sentenced to 15 years in prison during Saddam Hussein's trial, held under tight security in Baghdad's heavily fortified Green Zone yesterday.

## Was Saddam's trial fair?

AFP, Baghdad

Before Saddam Hussein's trial for crimes against humanity even began, his case was beset by debate over who should try him and whether those who did would be genuinely impartial.

More than a year later, as the former Iraqi president was condemned to death Sunday along with two of his former top aides for the killings of more than 140 Shia villagers, the question is still being asked.

The initial debate focused on whether Saddam's trial, as well as a separate ongoing case of "genocide" against the Kurds of northern Iraq, should be held inside the country or abroad.

Those arguing against a home-grown process -- particularly the defence team and human rights organisations -- warned that the cases could degenerate into a political vendetta.

They also raised questions about the security of the proceedings, a concern borne out by the murder of several defence lawyers, and the heavy influence on the case of a clearly biased party, the United States.

What they proposed was that the case be taken before an international tribunal, such as the International Criminal Court (ICC).

An alternative would have been to set up a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, as was done in South Africa following the end of the apartheid era.

It had been decided that Saddam was to be liable for trial on any crimes committed between July 17, 1968, when his Baath party took power in a coup, and May 1, 2003 when the US-led campaign to topple him was declared a success.

The legal argument was that the

ICC could not have jurisdiction over events that occurred before it was created in July 2002.

The die was cast when the US-run Coalition Provisional Authority created what was known as the High Tribunal in December 2003, the same month Saddam was captured by US forces.

When the first trial got underway in October 2005, then Iraqi Prime Minister Ibrahim Jaafari took pains to defend the court's impartiality.

But international human rights groups remained sceptical.

At the opening of the trials, the New York-based Human Rights Watch issued a statement in which it said "we have grave concerns that the court will not ensure fair trials".

Among other things, it cited a lack of equal rights for the defence and the prosecution and no requirement to prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

HRW's Richard Dicker said at the time that "if justice, rather than vengeance, is to be delivered" the court "must establish its credibility ... by demonstrating its commitment to principles of impartiality ... and fairness".

For its part, Amnesty International senior executive Claudio Cordone said the London-based group was also monitoring the trials.

Critics have pointed out that Saddam was being held in an American jail, that the trials were held in Baghdad's Green Zone, which is controlled by the US military, and that American legal experts have had an omnipresent role in preparing the cases against him.

The Iraqi government responds that the trials were controlled by Iraqis and held on Iraqi soil under Iraqi judges.