

Chaos mars Saddam trial

Defence team briefly walked out, first witness testifies in person

AFP, Baghdad

The first witness to appear in person at the trial of Saddam Hussein gave harrowing testimony against the former Iraqi leader yesterday after a walkout by defence lawyers briefly threatened to derail the process amid courtroom chaos.

Ahmed Mohammed Hassem al-Dujaili showed no fear over worries for witnesses' security as he testified over the massacre of 148 people from the Shia village of Dujail in 1982, for which Saddam and seven ex-henchmen are on trial.

He was the first witness to appear in person at the court, which has previously held just two brief sessions after earlier adjournments and until now only heard videotape testimony from an official just before he died.

The proceedings had earlier been marked by chaos and extraordinary scenes when the defence team briefly walked out of the tribunal and the ousted Iraqi dictator shouted a tirade of impassioned abuse at the court.

The dispute -- over whether Saddam's foreign lawyers could address the court -- prompted a 90-

minute recess of the tribunal to solve the problems until presiding judge Mohammed Rizkar Amin agreed to let them speak.

As Dujaili, a prominent member of the Shia Dawa party, gave his evidence, Saddam made various interruptions from the dock, before being quietened down by Amin.

Dujaili testified to the mass arrests of residents and the murder of his neighbours, giving names of those who were killed and listing those he recognised from Saddam's forces in the Salaheddin province village.

"A friend of mine... was tortured. He was actually killed in front of me and I saw that," Dujaili said.

"People who were arrested were taken to prison and most of them were killed there," he carried on.

"I saw corpses and bodies of our neighbours. They were martyred. Some of them we couldn't even recognise their bodies," said Dujaili.

Following the walkout by his lawyers, Saddam had made his most dramatic intervention yet standing up to shout at the top of his voice: "Long live Iraq. Long live the Arab nation. Long live Iraq."

Facing charges of crimes against humanity and torture, Saddam and

his henchmen could all face the death penalty if found guilty. They have all pleaded not guilty.

Former US attorney general Ramsey Clark, who is representing Saddam, said the fairness of the trial was paramount and demanded better protection for all nine lawyers.

Referring to the dire security situation in Iraq, Clark said the trial had a fundamental role to play in either healing or dividing the troubled country.

"There is virtually no protection for the nine Iraqi lawyers and their families who are heroically here to try to protect truth and justice," he said.

Two defence lawyers have been murdered during the trial.

Former Qatari justice minister Najib Nuaimi, also a defence lawyer, insisted that the court examine its own legitimacy before proceeding with the substance of the trial.

"The charges against my client should be dealt with by an international court, if the charges as you put them are mass murder, an international criminal court should look into the charges. An international court is independent."

Officials close to the court are

hoping that this time a full four days of hearings featuring 10 witnesses is possible before the court adjourns again in time for Iraq's parliamentary elections on December 15.

At least two more witnesses were due to appear Monday after Dujaili's testimony.

However only Dujaili and one other of the 10 witnesses have consented to appear in court and be filmed by television cameras relaying the trial to the world, a US official close to the tribunal has said.

Another six were to appear in court but without being filmed. The final two were expected to speak from behind a screen.

Dozens of Iraqis in his former hometown Tikrit demonstrated in support of Saddam, while a symbolic protest against him took place outside the Green Zone in Baghdad where the trial is taking place.

There, a tent housing 18 people who lost relatives to Saddam's regime, one from each of Iraq's provinces, has been set up. "We ask for the hanging of Saddam and his aides and we ask for an immediate trial," read the banners.



PHOTO: AFP
Iraqi witness Ahmad Hassan Mohammed Al Dujaili, holding pictures of deceased relatives, testifies in open court as former Iraqi president Saddam Hussein watches from his seat during his trial in Baghdad's heavily fortified Green Zone yesterday.

'US military abusing its UN mandate in Iraq'

Washington in talks with insurgents

REUTERS, Baghdad

The US military is abusing its United Nations mandate in Iraq by detaining thousands of people without due process of law, a senior UN official said.

The Iraqi government installed after the US invasion of 2003 is also guilty of major human rights abuses, including holding people without charge in secret jails "littered" across the country, John Pace, human rights chief for the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI), told Reuters.

Referring to accusations of corruption among Iraqi justice officials and police, Pace said illegal detentions were fuelling rather than curbing revolt.

"There is no question that terrorism has to be addressed. But we are equally sure that the remedies being applied ... are not the best way of eliminating terrorism," Pace said. "More terrorists are being created than are being eliminated."

Secretary General Kofi Annan has also voiced concern about mass detentions without charge, which US commanders say are a legitimate response to security

threats under UN Security Council Resolution 1546, their mandate for occupying Iraq.

But in some of the strongest UN comments to date, Pace said in an interview on Sunday that the system, including the pattern, duration and conditions of detention, were "not consistent with what is foreseen in 1546" and complained of a "total breakdown" in individuals' rights.

Pace said that, apart from prisoners serving court-ordered sentences in prisons run by the Justice Ministry, there were between 1,600 and 2,000 people being held in up to eight known facilities run by the Iraqi Interior Ministry.

Meanwhile, the US ambassador to Iraq is holding talks with Iraqi nationalist insurgents and the Sunnis they represent, Time magazine reported on Sunday.

Time quoted US Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad as saying "We will intensify the engagement, interaction and discussion with them." He said reaching out to Sunnis regarding their "legitimate concerns" makes sense because of rifts between the nationalist and al-Qaeda camps in the insurgency.

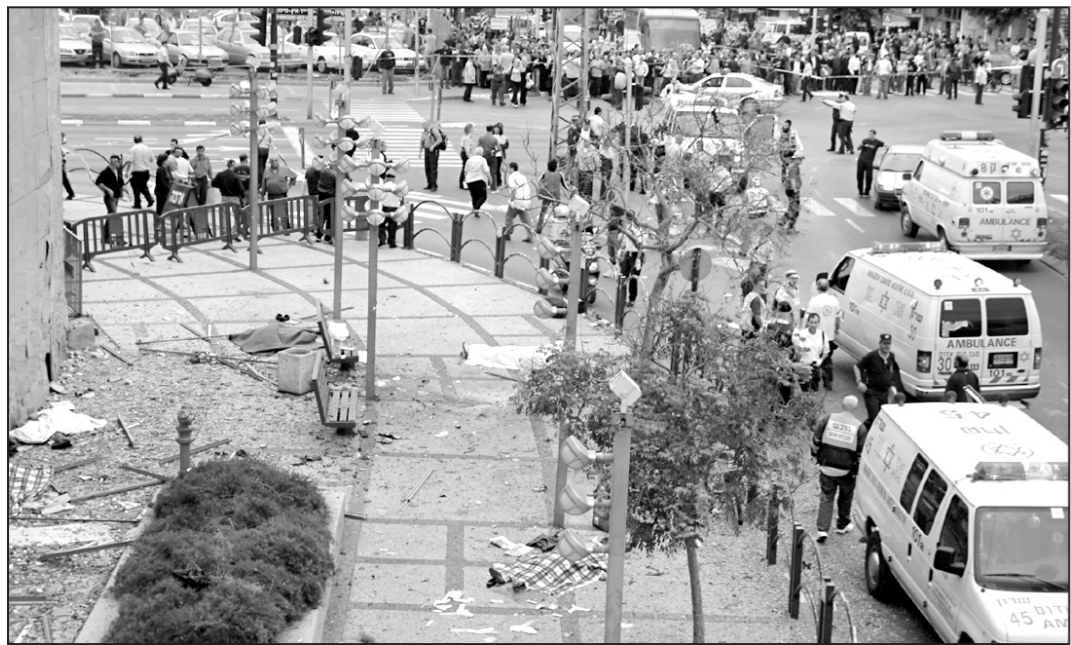


PHOTO: AFP
The bodies of the five people caught in the blast of a suicide bombing yesterday lay covered on the ground outside the Hasharon shopping centre in the up market resort town of Netanya.

Blast rocks shopping mall in Israel: 5 dead

Tel Aviv resumes targeted killing

REUTERS, AFP, Netanya/Jerusalem

A suspected suicide bomber blew himself up at the entrance to a shopping mall in central Israel yesterday, killing at least five people and wounding dozens of others, Channel 10 TV said.

Ambulances raced to the Sharon shopping centre in Netanya, a seaside city that has been a frequent target of suicide bombings in a five-year-old Palestinian uprising.

"It appears that a person came to the entrance of the mall and blew up," Yisrael Klein, a witness to the blast, told Israel Radio.

Security guards are stationed at the doors of major shopping centres

in Israel.

A Reuters witness saw two bodies and the Magen David Adom ambulance service said at least 35 people were wounded, seven of them seriously. Channel 10 television put the death toll at four.

It was the first such bombing since October 26, when a suicide bomber killed six people in the coastal city of Hadera.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the latest attack, which dealt another blow to a ceasefire Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon declared in February.

Earlier Israel put Palestinian

militants back in the crosshairs yesterday as it vowed to hit back hard in response to an upsurge in rocket attacks from the Gaza Strip.

As Israeli warplanes buzzed over the territory throughout a sleepless night, Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz ordered a resumption of targeted killing operations as part of a package of measures.

A defence ministry spokesman told AFP that Mofaz had "ordered a harsh response to the rocket attacks, including the assassination of terrorists", reflecting Israeli anger at the pullout of settlers and soldiers from the Gaza Strip over the summer has not brought about an end to the firing.

India, Russia to start joint arms production

AFP, Moscow

Russia and India plan to begin joint work in design and production of weaponry, Indian Defence Minister Manmohan Singh said in an interview with a Russian newspaper published yesterday.

Singh, who arrived in the Russian capital Sunday for a three-day visit, was quoted by the daily Izvestia as saying that the two countries planned to move from a relationship of "buyer and seller" to joint planning and production of high-tech arms.

He did not provide more specifics, but said Russia and India would sign an accord regulating intellec-

tual property rights in several areas including military cooperation during his visit.

Indian Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee visited Russia last month and announced that the two countries were drafting contracts for the sale of Russian military equipment to India worth 10 billion dollars, Interfax news agency said.

In response to a question about a warming trilateral bond between Russia, China and India, Singh said India regarded this three-way cooperation as "very fruitful" because it would help all three countries resolve shared problems.

Situation in Bihar is like war: Nitish

Anti-insurgency sweep in northeast India

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, AFP, London/Guwahati

The law and order situation in Bihar is akin to "war" with the police and administrative structure in a state of collapse, Chief Minister Nitish Kumar has admitted 10 days after taking over power.

But talks with outlawed Maoist groups would not be a priority for his government, the Janata Dal-United (JD-U) leader, who fought so hard to wrest power from Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) of Lalu Prasad, indicated in an interview to BBC's Hindi service.

"The police and administrative structure of the state is in a state of collapse. It is a big challenge to restore it and I appeal to the people of the state to support the government in this war."

Ruling out any compromise on the issue of politics of violence witnessed in Bihar, he said his government would try to solve problems by democratic means.

Describing the Maoist violence in

Bihar as a struggle between democracy and violence, Nitish Kumar said his National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government would ensure all round development of the state without any discrimination.

Hinting that talks were not top of the agenda, he said: "With cooperation from people of the state, we would strive to bring normalcy to the state. You have asked whether the Naxal problem is socio-economic or is it a law and order problem, I say it has more elements also. There is a conflict here.

Meanwhile, Indian troops have launched a major operation in the northeastern state of Assam to quell ethnic clashes that have left at least 100 people dead and 50,000 displaced, officials said yesterday.

A government spokesman said artillery was deployed and soldiers were ordered to shoot on sight anyone involved in arson or attacks in Karbi Anglong district, 330km east of Assam's main city of Guwahati.

Swimming pool roof collapses in Russia: 14 die

AFP, Moscow

At least 14 people were killed and several more injured when the roof of a public swimming pool collapsed in the Urals region of Russia, officials said early yesterday.

Of the 14 victims, 10 were children between nine and 12 years old and four women, local emergency ministry official Anatoly Shinakov said as quoted by the ITAR-TASS news agency.

Earlier officials said that only eight bodies were found, but then "two more bodies -- those of a woman and a girl -- were recovered from underneath the ruined roof that fell into the pool," Shinakov said.

The eight bodies that had been recovered earlier had already been identified, Shinakov said.

"Only a little part of" the 100 square-metre (1,100 square-foot) roof, which collapsed on Sunday at the municipal pool in Chusovoi, a town near the city of Perm in the Ural mountains, "is yet to be cleared away, this is the hardest part, but will be only an hour of work," Shinakov said.

Up to 30 people could have been in the pool at the time of the accident, officials said.

Lankan army warns Tigers over attacks

Security stepped up

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's outgoing army chief yesterday accused Tamil Tiger rebels of trying to provoke the military with a series of truce-breaking attacks that killed 12 people over the weekend.

Sri Lankan troops and police stepped up security following the attacks and killing.

Lieutenant General Shantha Kottegeda warned the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) that the army could now defeat them, despite repeated failures in the past.

He said the LTTE had stepped up organised attacks against government forces in the former rebel stronghold of Jaffna in a bid to draw fire from the military.

"I am very confident that with the training we have done in the past three years we are better prepared today than we were before the ceasefire," the general said, referring to the February 2002 truce with the rebels.

"Our troops will be able to fight and defeat them."

Kottegeda, who retires as army chief Monday, said the Tigers may resort to more hit-and-run style attacks in order to minimise losses to their own cadres following a split in the rebel outfit in March last year.

"They could resort to more guerrilla tactics because they may want to retain their cadres," he said.

Kottegeda, who had earlier been an advisor to Sri Lanka's peace negotiators, said the government of President Mahinda Rajapakse, who was elected last month, must also push ahead with moves to try to revive direct talks with the Tigers.

"We have to make a move. We need to take some steps with regard to the peace process," he said, adding the two sides should be able to discuss the implementation of the ceasefire.

His tough talk came as both the Colombo government and the Norwegian-led truce monitoring mission expressed fears for the peace process and efforts to jumpstart talks that have been stalled since April 2003.

EX-INVESTIGATOR SAYS Australia a safe haven for war criminals

AFP, Sydney

Australia has developed a reputation for being a safe haven for war criminals attempting to avoid prosecution, a former war crimes investigator said Monday amid media reports that as many as 30 people accused of crimes against humanity have lived here freely.

Former deputy prosecutor at the United Nations War Crimes Tribunal at The Hague, Graham Blewitt, said some "perpetrators are being allowed to roam free in this country without any fear."

"I believe that Australia has a reputation amongst those who have been involved in war crimes as a safe haven," he told ABC radio.

"You are not going to be prosecuted and frankly that is a reputation that Australia should not be prepared to wear."

Blewitt, formerly the head of an Australian unit investigating Nazi war criminals, was responding to a

report in the Sydney Morning Herald that a member of deposed Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein's family and personal security force, had been given temporary residency here.

Oday Adnan Al Tekriti, 38, was initially refused a visa after he arrived in the country six years ago because immigration officials found serious reasons to believe he had committed crimes against humanity.

But the visa refusal was overturned and he has been given temporary safe haven in the southern city of Adelaide where he lives with his wife, an Australian doctor.

Speaking in parliament Monday, Prime Minister John Howard said the immigration department had not wanted to give Al Tekriti a temporary residency visa but the decision was overturned by the independent body of review, the Administrative Appeals Tribunal.



PHOTO: AFP
Prince Karim Aga Khan (L), spiritual leader of Ismaili Muslims, watches pictures of earthquake ravaged areas during a visit in Muzaffarabad, the capital of Pakistani controlled Kashmir yesterday. Khan visited relief camps and quake affected areas around Muzaffarabad.