

NOTE

Saddam Trial

A Correspondent writes:

The farce that is the trial of Saddam Hussein has been continuing. Saddam is charged with ordering the illegal arrest of 399 people, torture of women and children, the destruction of farmland and the murder of over 150 people in the aftermath of an assassination attempt on him in the town of Dujail in 1982.

From the start it has been clear that Saddam will not receive fair treatment. Successive judges have gone to considerable lengths to try and silence him and his lawyers (it is to Saddam's great credit that he has been able to use the court-room to make a number of important statements against the illegal occupation of Iraq). Everything has been pitted in favour of the prosecution. Defence lawyers have been regularly ejected from the court, as have the defendants. Defence witnesses have been intimidated and assaulted (the BBC reported on 12 June that four witnesses who had accused the prosecutor of trying to bribe them have been arrested). Whereas the prosecution was given five months to put its case, the defence was given only 10 court sessions over the course of a month, and was constantly rushed by the judge. The judge has disallowed dozens of defence witnesses. The first chief judge of the trial even resigned as a result of accusations from government officials that he was too lenient towards the defendants. The conduct of the trial has been so outrageous and so blatantly loaded in favour of the prosecution that it has drawn extensive criticism from international legal experts.

The recent murder of leading defence lawyer Khamis al-Obeidi at the hands of hired goons makes it a total of three defence lawyers in Saddam's case that have been killed.

In spite of the odds being stacked against them, Saddam and his defence team have put an effective case, with multiple witnesses claiming that the prosecution had tried to bribe them. Some defence witnesses had even been defendants in the Saddam assassination case. At the time of writing Saddam was reported to have been hospitalised due to the effects of a hunger-strike.

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