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Chief Judge in Hussein's Genocide Trial Removed

By Abdul Razzaq al-Saiedi

BAGHDAD, Sept. 19 — The chief judge in the genocide trial of Saddam Hussein was removed from the case on Tuesday after he said last week that Mr. Hussein was “not a dictator,” government officials said.

Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki of Iraq decided to remove the judge, Abdullah al-Amiri, because he had “hurt the feelings” of Kurds and many other Iraqis with comments that seemed to support Mr. Hussein, according to Bassam al-Husseini, one of the prime minister's advisers.

Mr. Husseini said the judge has been reassigned to other cases. Mohammed al-Uraibiy, another member of the five-judge panel that has been hearing Mr. Hussein's case, will take over as chief judge.

Last week, a court prosecutor demanded the judge be removed for showing bias toward Mr. Hussein and letting him harangue witnesses.

A witness, a Kurdish farmer, testified that in 1988 he had pleaded with Mr. Hussein for the life of his wife and seven young children. He said a furious Mr. Hussein shouted, “Shut up and get out.”

In court, Mr. Hussein jumped up to defend himself.

“Why did he try to see Saddam Hussein?” he asked the judge, referring to himself in the third person, as is his habit in court. “Wasn't Saddam a dictator and an enemy to the Kurdish people, as they say?”

“I will answer you,” the judge said. “You are not a dictator. Not a dictator. You were not a dictator.”

Mr. Hussein, smiling, replied, “Thank you.”

The judge, a Shiite, had served as a judge in Mr. Hussein's government.

In an interview, Mr. Husseini, the prime minister's aide, said the cabinet led by Mr. Maliki asked the Iraqi High Tribunal on Tuesday to remove the judge, and the tribunal agreed.

“The government is taking into regard the feelings of the Iraqi people,” Mr. Husseini said. “When the judge told Saddam, ‘You are not a dictator,’ he hurt the feelings of the Iraqi people.”

“There was pressure from the Iraqi people and people in Kurdistan because their feelings were hurt,” he said. “The government had to respond to this pressure.”

Mr. Hussein and six other former high-ranking officials are charged in connection with the killing of at least 50,000 Kurds, including many in chemical weapon strikes in a 1988 military campaign to eliminate them from the mountainous parts of Iraq’s far northeast.

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