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Hussein Trial Resumes; Sectarian Attacks Continue in Streets

By [PAUL von ZIELBAUER](#)

BAGHDAD, Tuesday, Sept. 12 — The trial of [Saddam Hussein](#) on charges of genocide against [Iraq](#)'s Kurds resumed Monday, after a nearly three-week hiatus, while sectarian violence continued on Baghdad's streets, including the suicide bombing of a crowded downtown bus that killed more than a dozen people.

At a meeting of Parliament inside the fortified Green Zone, meanwhile, an effort by a group of Shiite lawmakers to promote legislation that would allow Iraq to be partitioned into autonomous regions appeared to lose some momentum on Monday after a rival Shiite bloc dissented.

Also Monday, Prime Minister [Nuri Kamal al-Maliki](#) said in a statement that he planned to make his first state visit to Iran on Tuesday, to discuss security and political issues.

In the trial, Mr. Hussein and six other former officials in his government face charges that they killed more than 50,000 Kurdish Iraqis, during a campaign in northern Iraq in 1988 in which the government used conventional and chemical weapons against civilians. Mr. Hussein also faces the charge of genocide.

He and his co-defendants maintain that the campaign was military in nature, to support Iraqi troops who were trying to suppress Kurdish militias backed by Iran.

On Monday, three Kurdish witnesses described attacks in 1987 and 1988 in which chemical gas attacks in Iraq's mountainous northeast region by Iraqi troops left villagers blinded and desperately ill.

Katrin Michael, 56, a Kurdish woman who said she now lived in Virginia, said she and several other villagers saw Iraqi military planes drop bombs that issued white smoke that smelled of garlic. Villagers who did not die from the chemicals developed large blisters, she said.

A second witness, Ahmed Abdel Rahman Ahmed, described Iraqi troops razing his village in September 1987. "They evacuated the village and burned the houses," he told the court, adding that they also stole farm animals, including 100 of his sheep and goats.

Defense lawyers characterized those raids as a necessary reaction to the Kurdish villagers' refusal to leave their homes after being ordered to relocate to a new, restricted area by the Hussein government.

As has become his custom, Mr. Hussein spent part of his day lecturing the chief judge, Abdullah al-Amiri, about what he characterizes as the illegitimacy of the charges against him. At one point, Mr. Hussein accused the Kurdish witnesses of trying to exacerbate the ethnic divisions between them and the country's Arab majority.

"The whole point is to make a split between the Arabs and the Kurds," Mr. Hussein huffed, before being told to be quiet.

In Parliament on Monday, lawmakers aligned with the political movement led by the radical Shiite cleric [Moktada al-Sadr](#) came out against efforts to enact legislation that would allow Iraq to be divided into autonomous regions, with Shiites and Kurds controlling the oil-rich south and north. Sunni Arabs, who would be left holding the barren western and central regions, are vehemently opposed to the legislation.

Baha al-Araji, a Shiite member of Parliament from Mr. Sadr's political movement, which controls about 30 seats in Parliament, said the movement would not support the bill or its reading next week.

“We believe that this draft does not serve the interest of Iraq now,” he said in an interview on Monday afternoon.

“It is better to discuss it after the withdrawal of the occupation,” he added, referring to the 138,000 American troops in Iraq. “Discussing this subject will increase disharmony with our Sunni brothers, so we should have more time so that Iraqi people can understand the real meaning of federalism.”

But other Shiite members of Parliament, mostly from the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, a powerful party with close ties to Iran, said they would press a reading of the bill next week regardless of whether other Shiite political parties supported it.

“We will go with them or without them,” said Khalid al-Atiya, the Shiite deputy speaker of Parliament, in an interview on Monday evening.

Violence continued in Baghdad and nearby cities on Monday. At 9 a.m., a man wearing a belt of explosives boarded a minibus full of Iraqi Army recruits and blew himself up, killing 13 people and wounding 3 others, an Interior Ministry official said.

Early Tuesday morning, American soldiers from a patrol in the Ghaziliya neighborhood of Baghdad, a religiously mixed area where Sunnis and Shiites have clashed, delivered six headless bodies to Yarmouk Hospital, a hospital official said. They also turned over a seventh body, which was not mutilated and was found in another neighborhood, in northeast Baghdad, the hospital official said.

Outside of Baquba, a city northeast of Baghdad that has fallen into an almost daily cycle of sectarian revenge killings, Sunni insurgents attacked a Shiite mosque with mortars and small-arms fire, killing four guards, a provincial police official said.

The attackers then rigged the inside of the mosque with explosives, which they detonated, razing the mosque, the official said. A gun battle between local residents and the insurgents left three more people dead.

Near the northern city of Kirkuk, four oil refinery workers were killed in an attack as they drove toward south toward Tikrit, the Iraqi police said.

Khalid al-Ansary, Khalid W. Hassan and Abdul Razzaq al-Saiedi contributed reporting.

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