

Likely Charges Against Saddam Outlined

October 13, 2005

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BAGHDAD, Iraq

Saddam and seven other defendants are accused of killing 143 Shiites in the village of Dujail, north of Baghdad, after a failed assassination attempt against Saddam.

Prosecutors have not announced the exact charges, which are expected when the trial opens on Wednesday. Investigating judge Raid Juhi told reporters in Baghdad that the charges would focus on the areas of "crimes of premeditated murder, forced expulsion of residents, torture and forced disappearances of individuals."

Saddam could face the death penalty if convicted.

Juhi also reaffirmed that there would be no postponement of the trial's start, which Saddam's attorneys had sought to review documents they received on Sept. 25.

"The Special Tribunal has enabled the representatives of the defense through all legal means to completely review all the evidence, documents and investigation papers," he said.

The trial is expected to be the first of about a dozen involving crimes against humanity committed by Saddam and his regime's henchmen during his 23-year rule. These include the 1988 gassing of up to 5,000 Kurds in Halabja and the bloody 1991 suppression of a Shiite uprising in the south after a U.S.-led coalition drove the Iraqi army out of Kuwait <<http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/international/countriesandterritories/kuwait/index.html?inline=nyt-geo>> .

Some of those cases "are about to be concluded in a few days" and will then be handed over to the Iraqi Special Tribunal for trial, Juhi said. He did not specify which cases or whether Saddam would be a defendant in all of them.

It is not known when the next trial would start. It has taken three months between the time the Dujail case was presented to the court and the trial's start.

Saddam, 68, has been jailed under American control at a U.S. military detention complex since his December 2003 capture near his hometown, Tikrit.

The Dujail case is being tried first because it was the easiest case to prepare, court officials have said. There will be no jury. The court's five judges will question witnesses and render the verdicts.

Due to Iraq's precarious security, the judge's identities have not been revealed and may remain concealed during the trial. Juhi will not be among them. Also, witnesses are likely to testify from behind a screen to protect their identities.

The massacres were in response to a July 8, 1982, assassination attempt staged by villagers at the height of Saddam's power, court officials said. Gunmen opened fire on Saddam's motorcade as he passed through town, but he was unhurt. In swift retaliation, Iraqi army helicopters fired on villagers, and troops rounded up and imprisoned residents. Some are still missing.

The seven other defendants in the Dujail trial includes Saddam's then-intelligence chief, Barazan Ibrahim; his vice president Taha Yassin Ramadan; Awad Hamed al-Bandar, the head of the Revolutionary court; and four senior Baath Party officials in the Dujail region, Abdullah Kazim Ruwayyid, Ali Dayim Ali, Mohammed Azawi Ali and Mizhar Abdullah Ruwayyid.

The Iraqi Special Tribunal was created during the U.S.-led occupation of Iraq, which began in April 2003 and formally ended 14 months later. Its statute, however, was endorsed by Iraq's democratically elected parliament this year.