

# HAARETZ

English Edition

## Police on alert to protect New Year's revelers

Jonathan Lis  
Page 2

## Chelsea eyes Tal Ben Haim

Sports  
Page 7

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## Saddam's execution

Zvi Bar'el

### Was it worth it?

Yesterday's execution of Saddam Hussein raises the question: "Was it worth it?" If daily life in Iraq is the criterion by which this question is answered, the execution of Saddam has had no impact. On average, 60 people a day lose their life in Iraq, and yesterday was no exception. There are those who will draw a link between the execution and acts of violence in the coming days, but it will not be a very convincing argument, just as it has been difficult to explain the violence since Saddam's fall as being related to the tyrant himself in any way.

The fall of Saddam's regime in 2003 did not create any natural alternative, or even any option that had legitimacy in the eyes of a majority of Iraqis. The simplistic view that guided the American administration – that the Shi'ites and Kurds would support the American effort and the Sunnis would be crushed – failed. What Saddam seemed to know, the coalition forces could not see: Shi'ites, like Sunnis, are not all the same, while the Kurds are a breed apart. Each ethnic group is divided by different religious leaders, clan interests and tribal leaders.

As a result, their shared hatred for Saddam – genuine hate on which the coalition forces depended – was transformed into a sectarian conflict. Dozens of groups, some with links to Al-Qaida, others to Shi'ite or Sunni tribes, as well as dozens of criminal gangs, took the place of Saddam's iron fist. With its cruelty, Saddam's regime created the semblance of a unified state and national sentiment. It imposed a shared culture from the top, which was secular and based on Iraq's ancient history. This state was viewed by the West, until the Gulf War in 1991, as a defensive barrier against Iran.

The result is that even the current coalition that comprises the elected Iraqi government is unable to manage the state – and it is certainly incapable of establishing a unified force, under one

See WORTH, Page 2

# Saddam Hussein executed; Sectarian strife may escalate



A video image released by Iraqi state television showing guards placing a noose around Saddam Hussein's neck moments before his execution early yesterday morning.

Agencies

Saddam Hussein was hanged at dawn yesterday for crimes against humanity, after Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki rushed through an execution that delighted victims of Saddam's harsh rule.

The former president, toppled by the U.S. invasion four years ago, was seen going calmly to his death on the scaffold in images of his last moments broadcast on state television.

"It was very quick. He died right away," said one official who witnessed the execution, adding that the body was left to hang for 10 minutes and death was recorded at 6:10 A.M.

The bearded Saddam, still robust at 69, refused a hood and the presence of a cleric, but did say a brief prayer before dropping to oblivion on a gallows once used by his own secret police. Grainy video later showed his body in a white shroud, the neck twisted and blood on a cheek.

However, as U.S. President George W. Bush noted in a statement, the execution did not end the sectarian violence that is pushing Iraq toward civil war. Car bombs set off by suspected insurgents from Saddam's once dominant Sunni minority killed over 70 people in Baghdad and near the Shi'ite holy city of Najaf.

Maliki, his fragile authority

over fellow Shi'ites enhanced by having forced through Saddam's execution, despite Sunni and Kurdish hesitations, just four days after the former ruler's appeal failed, tried to reach out to Saddam's Sunni followers.

"Saddam's execution puts an end to all the pathetic gambles on a return to dictatorship," he said in a statement, as state television showed film of him signing the death warrant in red ink. "I urge ... followers of the ousted regime to reconsider their stance, as the door is still open to anyone who has no innocent blood on his hands to help in rebuilding" Iraq.

Maliki and Bush hope that moderate Sunnis may choose

negotiations over violence.

As on November 5, when Saddam was sentenced to death over the killings of 148 Shi'ites from Dujail, reaction among the Sunni population was muted. Unusually, the government did not even see a need for a curfew in Baghdad, and protests in Saddam's hometown of Tikrit and in the Sunni west were small. Though resentful of a loss of influence and fearful of the rise of Iranian-backed Shi'ite militants, few Sunnis find much to mourn in Saddam's passing.

With violence killing hundreds every week, Iraqis have other worries. Even celebrations in Shi'ite cities and Baghdad's Sadr City slum were

brief and fairly restrained.

"It's a great joy that I can't even express," said Mohammad Kadhem, a journalist in the Shi'ite city of Basra. "I can't believe what I'm seeing on television – Saddam led to the gallows where he hanged tens of thousands of innocent Iraqis."

"Bringing Saddam Hussein to justice will not end the violence in Iraq, but it is an important milestone on Iraq's course to becoming a democracy that can govern, sustain and defend itself," said Bush, who has consistently defended the 2003 invasion.

Meanwhile, the deaths of six more soldiers pushed the U.S. death toll to just two

short of the emotive 3,000 mark and made December the deadliest month for Americans in Iraq in over two years. Bush has promised to unveil a new strategy in the new year.

The United Nations, the Vatican and Washington's European allies all condemned the execution on moral grounds. Many Muslims making the hajj pilgrimage to Mecca, especially Sunnis, were also outraged by the symbolism of hanging Saddam on the holiest day of the year, the start of Id al-Adha. And many Kurds were disappointed that Saddam will not now be convicted of genocide against them in an unfinished trial.

But some Shi'ites said his death was a suitable gift from God for the holiday.

"There is no God but God and Mohammad is his prophet," Saddam intoned when asked to do so, according to a witness.

"We heard his neck snap," said Sami al-Askari, an adviser to Maliki. The prime minister himself, who fled Iraq as a young man in fear of his life from Saddam's agents, was not present.

A witness in the Dujail trial said that he was shown the body at Maliki's office. "When I saw the body in the coffin, I cried. I remembered my three brothers and my father whom he had killed."

Saddam was convicted of killing, torture and other crimes against the population of Dujail after militants from Maliki's Dawa party tried to assassinate him there in 1982. But after complaints of interference by Shi'ite politicians in the trial, the speed of the execution may fuel further unease about the fairness of the U.S.-sponsored process.

Saddam's half-brother, Barzan al-Tikriti, and former judge Awad al-Bander are to be hanged for the same crimes in January.

Saddam's body was taken to his hometown of Tikrit after his execution, and tribal elders may bury him in his nearby

See SADDAM, Page 2

## Lebanon wasn't a failure?

Chief of Staff Dan Halutz's lightfooted leap onto the podium at the pilot course graduation ceremony Thursday hinted at the news that was to come. Following weeks of killer investigations, ex-chief of staff Dan Shomron presented the final report on the in-house investigations the Israel Defense Force conducted into its performance during the Lebanon war. Halutz had received a sneak peek, and had good cause to feel relief.

Shomron was critical, but he was not deadly. He blamed the "system," not Halutz, and his conclusions were not limited to the 33 days of fighting, but rather addressed a whole decade. Not only does Halutz not have to resign as a result of

### Shomron inquiry Amos Harel

the war, Shomron believes he is the right person to rebuild the army. The chief of staff of the first intifada has cleared the chief of staff of the second Lebanon war.

Halutz has passed yet another obstacle in his struggle for survival. In meetings, the chief of staff has been signaling to his officers that the investigation findings, however serious they may be, do not require him to resign.

Now he will wait for the government-appointed Winograd Committee to publicize its findings, expected in two months.

If the committee does not name him as the main culprit in the failures, Halutz can look forward to finishing his term, which has more than a year left. Neither the prime minister nor the defense minister, who considered passing on responsibility to Halutz immediately after the war, are in a position to replace him.

As things appear now, the only officers to pay a real price for the war are the two who resigned: GOC Northern Command Udi Adam, and Division 91 commander Brigadier General Gal Hirsch. They surely must be wondering whether they acted rashly. Major General Eyal Ben-Reuven, Adam's deputy, is also paying: He was informed on Friday that his services would no longer be needed. For the remaining officers, the lesson is clear: If the top brass stays, it is best to close ranks and play by the rules.

The massive investigation into the wartime press leaks is also coming to an end. Some officers who leaked information on secret operations and intelligence may pay with their careers. But dozens of their colleagues, who underwent long and humiliating investigations, got the message: We know you complained to the press, so be careful.

In the coming weeks, we will hear a great deal of slogans about how the army is rebuilding. Television crews will be invited to report on reservist training. We will hear about the equipment being acquired for the store-rooms. The General Staff will speak of the experience it gained as a result of the war, the depth of the investigations and the new threats – which demand continuity and stability in the ranks to be countered effectively. The press will have to figure out what is spin and what is truth, whether the investigations were carried out in order to maintain appearances or actually touched the foundations.

Halutz's next leadership challenge will take place tomorrow, when the chief of staff is scheduled to meet with close to 600 officers ranked colonel and higher to discuss the lessons from the investigations.

## In mourning

In the West Bank and Gaza, Saddam Hussein will be remembered as the Arab leader who stood up for Palestinian rights

Page 2



## Indonesia hopes for the best

Rescuers pull 59 survivors from the sea as Java-bound ferry sinks carrying 600

Page 3



## Canada seeks to verify if asylum seekers' kids face abuse here

By Ruth Sinai

Canada's Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) has asked Israel's National Council for the Child for information on immigrant children in Israel. Canadian authorities want to know whether immigrant children in Israel are being harassed or abused, in order to evaluate political asylum cases.

In 2005, 679 Israeli citizens sought asylum abroad, mainly in Canada. Some 200 requests were approved, mainly of citizens of the former Soviet Union who came to Israel but left claiming they were persecuted, because of their origin or religion.

In a letter last month, the IRB asked the council whether it could provide examples of mistreatment of immigrant children; whether children of immigrants from the former Soviet Union were subject to harm at school or violence in their neighborhoods, and whether certain groups of immigrant children were more at risk of abuse than others. The Canadian authorities also sought to understand how the Israeli government has been responding to reports of abuse of immigrant children.

The head of the Council for the Child, Dr. Yitzhak Kadman, said in response that official bodies do not have clear policies that put immigrant children at a disadvantage, but that these children encounter problems typical of an immigrant population. For example, the number of immigrant children involved in crime and substance abuse is proportionally high, and investment in programs to deal with these crises is insufficient.

Kadman said immigrant children are not particular victims of violence or abuse in the schools, but those from Central Asian countries, or lacking legal residency status faced particularly difficult adjustment problems.

## Disabled would like to work, but NII pays better

By Ruth Sinai

Chico (not his real name) was born 32 years ago with muscular dystrophy and uses a wheelchair. He studied computer science, but has not been able to find a job for five years due to his disability – and because it isn't worthwhile for him to earn more than NIS 1,600 a month. Any amount over that sum will be deducted from his National Insurance Institute (NII) disability allowance. If he makes over NIS 2,800, the allowance will be discontinued.

A year ago, the Society for the Rehabilitation and Support of Children, better known as the House of Wheels, found Chico a part-time job where he earned NIS 3,000 a month. But by earning that amount, he had to give up NIS 4,000 a month: an NIS 3,136 per month disability allowance (for himself and his wife), a discount of NIS 700 a month in rent, a discount of 80 percent in municipal taxes amounting to NIS 170 and NIS 80 toward his monthly phone bill.

To enable Chico to work and earn a living, the chairman of House of Wheels, attorney Avi Ezer Grauer, decided to provide

the income Chico was liable to lose. Every month, Grauer transfers NIS 1,500 to Chico from his own pocket and other contributions.

By law, as decided by the cabinet on the recommendation of a government-appointed public committee, the government is supposed to provide the income supplement for Chico and others in his position. Putting the law into effect would not only cost very little, if anything, but it would encourage thousands of people with disabilities to work, reach their potential and lessen their dependence on allowances.

Over a year and a half has passed since the committee, headed by retired judge Ephraim Laron, made its recommendations to the cabinet, which voted to accept them. Over a year has passed since the NII was supposed to have formulated regulations to implement the law. Despite this, the situation has not changed.

Grauer, who was a member of the committee, last week petitioned the High Court, together with Chico, to instruct the NII, Ehud Olmert (acting welfare minister) and the Finance Ministry to



Nir Keidar

Attorney Avi Ezer Grauer of House of Wheels paid Chico's lost income out of his own pocket to make holding a job worthwhile.

carry out the cabinet decision.

One of committee's main recommendations was to remove incentives for disabled people not to work. It recommended gradually reducing allowances while ensuring that total incomes grew with increased salaries. For example, people with disabilities earning NIS 2,600 a month or more lose their allowances. The committee proposed continuing to allocate the allowance, but reducing it to NIS 1,826 a month; thus a person's

total income would be NIS 4,426. Not only would the NII save NIS 300, in this case by reducing the allowance, but the individual's standard of living would rise.

People with the most severe disabilities would stop receiving their allowances only if their income was over NIS 5,100 for a single person or NIS 7,400 for a married person.

Many disabled people are afraid to work, because if they are fired or cannot manage,

they face a long and complicated process having their allowances reinstated. The cabinet accepted the committee's recommendation that a person can automatically have his allowance reinstated within two years of finding a job.

Not only did the NII not institute the new regulations, based on the committee's recommendations, but the treasury failed to transfer NIS 25 million to workshops for people who cannot enter the regular work force.

The committee, which includes a treasury representative, seeks to implement the reform without additional expenses to the government, because of the state of the economy.

However, Grauer says that the situation has improved according to statements by Olmert and others, and there is no reason not to allocate the promised funding.

Attorney Ofer Lariman, representing Grauer and Chico, noted in the High Court petition that the government has for years failed to implement the clause in the Equal Opportunity Law that obligates it to provide an employment program for people with disabilities.