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Memories of pain in Saddam Hussein's house of horror

Deborah Haynes in Baghdad

An iron cage shaped like a man and used to torture unsuccessful athletes; bloodstained nooses; battle plans for the extermination of rebellious Kurds: these are just a few of the exhibits to go on show at Saddam Hussein's house of horrors.

The museum, which opens in Baghdad in the new year, chronicles the crimes committed by Saddam's regime and is designed to send a clear message that even the most feared dictator cannot hope to evade justice.

Its creator, Judge Arif Abdul Razak al-Shaheem, whose tribunal sentenced Saddam Hussein to death, wants 26 million documents of evidence, including witness testimonies and defence statements, from the trials of Saddam and his hench-men to be made available. "I will be passing a message to all the dictators in the world that the time for dictatorship has gone," Mr Shaheem said.

As well as the implements of torture and murder, the museum will show items found with Saddam when US troops discovered him hiding in a hole in 2003. One of the most macabre items is an iron cage found at the offices of the Iraqi Olympic Committee, run by Saddam's son Uday, which was used to punish athletes who failed to meet expectations.

One boxer who lost a fight was stripped naked, locked inside the frame and hoisted into the air under the scorching sun for 30 days. The man was unable to bend his legs and his body was badly branded by touching the hot metal. At mealtimes guards would swing the cage to make him throw up the scraps of food he was offered.

Also on display will be "the actual maps for attacks by the Ministry of Defence on Kurds, how the planning was done to wipe out the villages", Mr Shaheem said. *The Times* was shown a map used in the so-called al-Anfal campaign in which Saddam and his cousin, Ali Hassan al-Majid, better known as Chemical Ali, used chemical weapons to kill thousands of Kurds in northern Iraq. Orange arrows illustrate the movement of Iraqi troops, while red dots mark the location of the Kurdish peshmerga, a militia that has since become the security force in the largely autonomous region of Iraqi Kurdistan.

The museum will be housed initially in a small hall, 28 metres by 8 metres (92ft by 26ft), inside a warehouse, where all the regime documents are also being archived on computer. The plan is to build steps going down into the room, with the entrance positioned so that the sun rises behind it. "This will mean that the sun is rising on something that has gone," said one of the Iraqis working on the project.

A life-size replica of the hole in which Saddam was discovered by US forces on December 13, 2003, will be built in one corner of the room. The few possessions that he had with him, including a briefcase, a plastic purple-framed mirror, a land-line telephone and two books – a copy of the Koran and a novel – will be



Torture implement

displayed.

The three front chairs of the defendants' box in the courtroom in which Saddam, Chemical Ali and Tarik Aziz, his Deputy Prime Minister, were tried will also be recreated.

In addition, a series of computers will be set up behind a partition at the back containing files of the scanned copies of all the pages of evidence against Saddam's regime. They include details of the orders given to execute Shia Muslims who rose up against the former President after the 1991 Gulf War and on the killing of 148 Shia Muslims in the town of Dujail – the crime for which Saddam was sentenced to hang.

Mr Shaheem's ultimate goal is to move the museum into the tribunal building, which used to be the Pan-Arab headquarters for Saddam's Baath party and is now down the road from the new US Embassy inside the green zone in Baghdad.

With 13 cases against the old regime outstanding, the judge predicted that the tribunal will have finished its work within a year or so, allowing it to be dissolved.

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