

Interim Iraqi govt by mid-May: Garner

Major Iraqi factions to run country

REUTERS, AFP, Baghdad

The US civil administrator of Iraq, Jay Garner, said on Monday a collective interim leadership should be set up in Iraq by the middle of May.

"By the middle of the month, you'll really see a beginning of a nucleus of an Iraqi government with an Iraqi face on it that is dealing with the coalition," said the retired US general, in charge of postwar reconstruction in Iraq.

Garner said he expected up to nine Iraqis to form an interim leadership group that would be a point of contact for the Americans.

The group would consist of some returned exiles and some local Iraqis, representing Iraq's ethnic and religious spectrum.

Iraqis are angry at a breakdown in security and public services since the US-led war to topple president Saddam Hussein ended.

Iraqi preachers demanded on Friday that the United States establish a government to restore order after President Bush declared the war effectively over.

AFP adds: Up to nine Iraqis representing different opposition factions are to run an interim government to help rebuild the country in the coming months, US civil administrator Jay Garner told reporters Monday.

"I think what you may see is as

many as seven, eight, nine leaders working together to provide leadership," said Garner, adding he did not know how the collective leadership would function specifically.

The retired lieutenant general referred to Massoud Barzani, leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party, Ahmad Chalabi of the Iraqi National Congress, Jalal Talabani of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, Iyad Allawi of the Iraqi National Accord, and Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, whose elder brother heads the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq.

Garner said that group would likely be expanded to include a Christian and perhaps another Sunni figure.

Speaking as he prepared to leave on a one-day visit of Iraq's southern capital Basra, Garner said he expected the newly-appointed career diplomat Paul Bremer to arrive by next week and take charge of the political process within the postwar US administration.

"He will get more involved in the political process. I'm doing all of it and don't want to do all of it."

"We really need a dedicated effort," on the political side, Garner said.

He said that the appointment of someone like Bremer had been planned all along.

"I'll stay a while. There's got to be a good handoff," he said.

Garner also touched on the efforts to get Iraq's public services back up and running.

"The month of May is a key month for getting all the public services stood up or at least with a good prospect of being stood up and getting the law enforcement system back," Garner said, responding to the stringent criticism of the slow pace of rebuilding since Baghdad fell on April 9.

He voiced disappointment that the Americans had been unable to launch an extensive television and radio broadcast system for Iraq so far.

"We haven't done a good job," Garner admitted.

"I want TV going to the people... with a soft demeanor, programs they want to see."

Garner noted that the self-proclaimed mayor of Baghdad, Mohammed Mohsen al-Zubaidi, who was arrested by US forces, had been released after two days.

The condition for his release was that he not resume his activity of asserting authority in Baghdad, the general said. "I understand he was released after 48 hours," Garner said.

He was to visit a school, a hospital and an oil refinery as well as hold talks with a sheikh in Basra on Monday.



PHOTO: PID

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia poses for photograph with a 21-member delegation of the Hindu Kalyan (Welfare) Trust that met her at the International Conference Centre yesterday.

A certain quarter using religion for political gains: PM

UNB, Dhaka

Government's priorities are development of the country and welfare of its people irrespective of their religion, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia said yesterday.

"BNP never uses religion for political gains or to divide the people," she told a 21-member delegation of the Hindu Kalyan (Welfare) Trust that met her at the International Conference Centre yesterday.

Khaleda Zia reaffirmed that people of all religions and groups in Bangladesh are enjoying equal opportunities as citizens of the country.

Without naming, she accused a certain quarter of conspiring to split the society on the basis of religion for petty political gains. But she expressed her confidence that such nefarious design would never succeed if the people are educated and their employment ensured.

Khaleda Zia reminded the delegates that people of all religions and groups had fought together for the country's independence. "We have to work together with the same zeal and spirit for removing the curses of illiteracy and poverty and to make the country self-reliant," she added.

The prime minister assured the

delegates that their demands of increasing the fixed deposit of the Hindu Welfare Trust and the tenure of the Trustee Board from three to five years would be given due consideration.

The prime minister lauded the members of the Trust for their contribution to the law and order committee.

Vice-chairman of the Trust and State Minister for Water Resources Gautam Chakraborty apprised the prime minister of the programmes under implementation for the benefit of the Hindu community.

Trust secretary Mongol Chandra Chandan, Dharendra Shaha, MP, Prof Gonesh Halder, Suranjana Ghosh, Debashish Ray Mondhu, Apurba Kumar Das, Prof Poritosh Chakravarty, Advocate Swapan Sarkar, Kamakha Chandra Das, Sharika Sarmar, Pijush Kanti Halder, Shyamal Hode, Subrata Majumdar, Prof Sontosh Bhushan Das and Amalendu Das Apu participated in the discussion.

They appreciated the government for taking up Mandir-based primary and mass education. They also lauded the reforms and rehabilitation work being done by the government, including construction of Kali Mandir at the Ramna Park, which was demolished in 1971, and Welfare Trust Complex at Agargaon.

Human chain

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suggested Patenga and Foy's Lake area for the relocation.

FPC viewed that such construction would diminish open spaces in the port city and cause environmental problems.

CCCI Vice-president Monjurul Amin Chowdhury, former vice-president MA Latif, Directors Syed Jamal Ahmad, Hasanuzzaman Chowdhury, Kamal Mostafa Chowdhury, Anwar Showkat Afsar, C & F agents association President AKM Akhtar Hossain, FPC executive president ABMA Baset, Vice-president Bidhan Barua, General Secretary QS Touhid and Architect Zerina Hossain also spoke at the protest programmed yesterday.

10 refugees

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Commission to be included in the voter list. But the EC did not. This prompted them to go to the HC.

"We have always considered ourselves Bangladeshi citizens," said 24-year-old Mohammad Hasan, one of the 10 petitioners. "Now that I am eligible to be a voter, I will fight to establish all my rights as a citizen."

He went on, "The High Court order is applicable not only to me but also to all the four lakh refugees in the country."

Bangladesh had repeatedly asked Pakistan to take back these refugees but Pakistan avoided the issue. In 1993, Pakistan accepted only 325 refugees.

DFP: Money skimmers

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Star, a number of senior DFP officials denied their involvement in the production of the documentary.

Many officials felt government rules and procedures were violated in this case.

After publication of The Daily Star report, the DFP changed some vital papers and documents at the instruction of the higher authorities to guard against future complexity, sources disclosed. But it could not change or insert anything to the title or the credit line as copies of it have already been distributed.

Following is the credit line mentioned in the CD: Supervision: Maruf Kamal Sohel, a political appointee DPS of the PM's Press Wing; Information and Research Ashiuzzaman, executive editor of Envoiy; Nurul Azam Paban of BTV; Anwarul Islam of Dainik Ittefaq; Mehadi Hasan of Daily Inqilab; Farid Alam of Aker Kagoj (now in NTV) and Parag Arman of Dainik Dinkal. Interviews by Mehadi Hasan Palash. Producer- Sardar Amin, Management- Shamim Hasan with the co-operation of Syed Mahbubur Rahman, director general (DG) of DFP, and ABM Salahuddin, director of DFP.

Sardar Amin is learnt to be a DFP official, but his designation and official identity was not used in the credit line.

A reporter of the now defunct ETV was also involved in the production process, but his name was dropped when he quit following disagreement with the APS.

To justify additional payment, names of two persons were shown in the credit line in four different ways. Anwar Al Din and Anwarul Islam is one person who works in the Bengali daily Ittefaq. Same goes with Mehadi Hasan and Mehadi Hasan Palash of Inqilab.

In the video CD, it is clearly written that Ashik Islam and Anwar Al Din have made the documentary. Touhidul Islam alias Ashik Islam is the said APS while Anwar Al Din is a staff reporter of Ittefaq.

Both of them are members of the Film Censor Board. Known as stalwarts of Hawa Bhaban, the two are also associated with the FDC (Film Development Corporation), BTV and DFP.

The APS had no proven expertise in film related jobs; still he was sent to Switzerland in October last year as a 'technical expert' to supervise cleaning of around 20 films that contains pictures of official activities of late President

Ziaur Rahman.

His trip to Switzerland reportedly came as a favour returned by the JW Worldwide, a business firm that clinched a bid worth Tk 86 lakh for cleaning those films. A mid-ranking former Workers Party leader-turned-businessman was instrumental in getting the job for JW Worldwide, thanks to his strong connection with the Hawa Bhaban and the APS, sources said.

DFP officials said the film-cleaning task could easily have been done in neighbouring India, Thailand and Singapore. But as the cleaning was done in Switzerland for unknown reason the project cost shot up, incurring huge loss to the national exchequer.

Similar project was carried out to clean old films on Sheikh Mujibur Rahman during the Awami League period. It was done in Madras (now Chennai) with considerably low price and the quality of the job was the same as in Switzerland.

The JW Worldwide meanwhile failed to get a contract of Tk 85 crore recently to replace equipment of BTV relay stations across the country when the cabinet purchase committee rejected it.



PHOTO: STAR

Activists of the Bangladesh Mohila Awami League carry lanterns and pitchers in a procession in Dhaka yesterday to protest the erratic supplies of water and electricity.

PSC yet to decide

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"What happened the first time was unfortunate. But if it occurs a second time, it will be definitely dangerous. That's why we do not want to take any risk," said PSC member Prof Dr Mohammad Mohabbat Khan.

Prof Khan informed that the probe committee, which has some more work to do, would submit its report "very shortly."

The PSC will meet after receiving the report and decide on its next plan of action as well as fresh dates for the examination.

With the cancellation of the preliminary tests of the 24th Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) examinations, annual recruitment of government officers has stalled leaving thousands of job seekers in limbo.

Meanwhile, the viva examination of the 22nd BCS examination ended yesterday; examinations for the 23rd (special) BCS are yet to be held.

The preliminary tests of the 24th BCS examinations were held on February 28 amid allegations of leakage of questions.

Some 1,20,500 examinees appeared in the tests for 4,540 available government posts. The

examinations were held simultaneously at 111 centres in Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi and Khulna, and at one centre in London.

Many examinees alleged that questions were leaked out in the city the night before the exams and each photocopy of the entire set of questions was sold at around Tk 10,000.

A Dhaka University student went to the Ramna Police Station with the photocopy of a handwritten question paper to file a general diary on the day of examination, one-and-a-half hours before the tests began.

Initially, PSC chairperson Prof. ZN Tahmida Begum brushed aside the allegation calling it a rumour. She also dismissed the suggestion of cancelling the test.

Later on March 3, the PSC cancelled the preliminary test following an emergency meeting in the backdrop of widespread protests. On March 6, the PSC formed a three-member probe committee to investigate the allegation of question paper leakage.

In June last year, questions of the test for appointment of assistant teachers in primary schools were leaked and a fresh test was taken.

JU teachers

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It asked all students, teachers, officials and employees of the university to build strong guard against "any fundamentalist move to stigmatise the sacred campus".

An organisation, "Students against Fundamentalism", brought out another procession from the Prantik Gate in the evening. They burnt an effigy of Nizami at the Amar Ekushey.

Meanwhile, the Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal, the student chapter of the ruling BNP, also brought out a protest procession.

Lightning kills four in Sylhet

UNB, Sylhet

Four people were killed and two others injured by lightning at different places of Kanaighat and Bianibazar upazilas here Sunday.

Locals said Foyzul Haq, 35, of Birdol Sonapur village in Kanaighat upazila and Nurul Islam, 28, of Bhatidi village were struck by lightning while working in the field. Both died on the spot.

Two others killed by lightning were identified as Babul, 15, of Ghungadia village of Bianibazar upazila and Mobur Hossain Ali, 55, of Sridhara village.

The two men injured by lightning were identified as Hossain Ahmed, 25, a farmer of Bhatidi village, and Belaluddin, 18.

Food security

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tonnes of rice during the last aman season. The failure was put down to a late start of the drive and crop damage.

Although Agriculture Minister Motiur Rahman Nizami told the Jatiya Sangsad last March that Bangladesh would produce 17.50 lakh tonnes of wheat -- a 1.5 lakh rise over last year -- the cabinet lowered its procurement target to two lakh tonnes from three lakh tonnes.

Last year, the government went on buying wheat after the procurement season was over. As a result, traders with strong political backings imported substandard and low-priced wheat from India to pocket sums, depriving local growers from price support provided by the government.

Despite poor wheat output (16 lakh MT) last year, the government started procuring three lakh tonnes of wheat in March-June and went ahead with purchase of one lakh tonne more in July. During the extended period, substandard Indian wheat poured in government silos.

4 murdered

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witnesses said. Sujon was rushed to the Mitford Hospital where the on-duty doctors declared him dead. His autopsy will be performed today.

Meanwhile, the body of an unidentified 22-year-old girl was found lying on a road in Shantinagar area at 7:30am yesterday.

She was strangled with a rope during the early hours of yesterday.

The body was sent to the DMCH for autopsy yesterday.

An unnatural death case was filed with the Motijheel Police Station in this connection.

Meanwhile, locals caught Selim, 16, at Iqbal road in Mohammapur at 10:15pm Sunday when he attempted to mug a pedestrian with a toy pistol.

The mob beat him up and later handed him over to police.

Police admitted him at Suhrawardy Hospital and later shifted him to DMCH where he died at 1:45am yesterday.

His parents said Selim used to say he ran a business and went out Sunday afternoon for "trade purposes".

Pakistan

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its rival since a 17-month old impasse took hold.

"All major parties, the allies of the government and the opposition parties have been invited," a spokesman for Jamali told AFP.

The two sides have been locked in a standoff since December 2001 when India blamed Pakistan for a deadly attack on its parliament. Pakistan denied any link to the attack, in which nine people plus the five gunmen were killed.

Diplomatic, air, trade, cultural and sporting ties were severed, and for 10 months one million troops from both sides were deployed along their border.

Vajpayee on Friday announced India would send an ambassador back to Islamabad and restore civil aviation links. Pakistani officials have pledged to reciprocate the move, although a formal announcement has yet to be made.

Khan said the Indian moves were not groundbreaking.

"These are all welcome measures, but these are measures that bring us to a situation where we were almost a year and a half ago," he said.

However he added: "For every gesture there will be a positive response from our side."

Twister

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Munna Begum, 10, Jalfu Mia, 65, Nazim Uddin, 15, Tahmima Begum, 14, Eva Akther, 4, Naima Akther, 6, Shahid Mia, 14, Anwara Begum, 55, Sahadat Mia, 70, Saiful Chaudhuri, 20, Moyna Begum, 7, Ayesha Begum, 55, Arif Mia, 12, Mohammad Badal, 6, Ratna Begum, Ridoy, 8 and Mohammad Ibrahim 70.

Of the injured, 100 were rushed to Akhaura Health Complex and 22 to Brahmanbaria Sadar Hospital. Doctors said seven of the injured were in a critical condition.

Villagers and 20 policemen began rescue operation yesterday morning, said Abul Kalam Azad, superintendent of police of the district.

Officials from the district administration, local MP, Sadar Upazila Nirbahi Officer and officials of Bangladesh Red Crescent Society visited the scene yesterday.

Meanwhile, President Iajuddin Ahmed, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina expressed deep shock at the loss of life in the tornado.

They prayed for the eternal peace of the departed souls and early recovery of the injured and conveyed sympathy to the bereaved families.

Khaleda asked the authorities concerned to take immediate steps for proper treatment of the injured and welfare of the affected people.

Mariners

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the country's lone institute of marine education of international standard.

Before leaving the academy the cadets also ransacked the dormitories and dining halls and damaged the notice board of the administrative building.

It is the first ever incident of students quitting en masse in the 41-year history of the academy situated at Jaldha under the Karnaphuli Police Station.

However, the Marine Academy authorities said they imposed some restrictions on the senior cadets who used to harass and oppress juniors in the name of training. The senior students of the 38th batch left as they could not accept the restrictions, they claimed.

The commandant of the academy filed a general diary with the Karnaphuli Police Station on Sunday night.

Academy sources said the shipping ministry has formed a high-powered committee to investigate the matter.

No step would be taken to bring back the cadets before the submission of the committee's report, they added.

Illegal Bangladeshis No letters from German, Italian govts on deportation: Ministry

UNB, Dhaka

The government has not received any letter from the German or Italian governments about the reported deportation of illegal Bangladeshis from those countries, a spokesman for the Foreign Ministry said yesterday.

Body to examine draft law on voluntary organisations

BSS, Dhaka

A high-powered body was formed yesterday to give recommendations after examining the draft integrated law on voluntary organisations.

The committee, comprising five secretaries, was formed at an inter-ministerial meeting at the LGRD and Cooperatives Ministry with LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan in the chair.

The committee has been asked to submit its recommendations on the draft law by May 30.

Social Welfare Secretary Abdul Jabbar has been made convener of the committee. Other members of the committee are: Home Secretary Omar Faruk, Economic Relations Division Secretary Anisul Huq Chowdhury, Commerce Secretary Suhel Ahmed and Law Secretary Mohammad Asaduzzaman.

Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Barister Moudud Ahmed, Social Welfare Minister Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mujahid and Minister (without portfolio) Harunur Rashid Khan Munno were present at the meeting.

SARS virus

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four days. This could explain the disease's spread in a 33-storey apartment building in Hong Kong where hundreds were infected.

Researchers now suspect it was spread at the Amoy Gardens complex by a SARS-infected man with diarrhoea, via a crack in a sewage pipe.

Densely populated Hong Kong has been badly hit by the virus. Five more SARS fatalities and eight new cases were reported there Sunday, pushing the local toll to 184 deaths and 1,629 infections.

Only mainland China has been worst hit. Beijing took strict measures to contain the SARS outbreak in its capital Sunday, placing close to 16,000 people under quarantine.

China also sacked officials nationwide for failing to implement tough measures to contain the deadly disease as the health ministry reported seven new deaths from the pneumonia-like respiratory illness and 163 new infections. There are now some 197 dead and 4,125 confirmed or probable cases in the world's most populous country.

The capital city Beijing has

borne the brunt of the epidemic in China, with 100 deaths and at least 1,803 known cases.

The good news is that standard disinfectants such as chlorine bleach killed the virus in five minutes, WHO found.

Temperatures of 56 degrees centigrade and above also quickly destroy the virus, the WHO said in a report published on its website on Sunday.

"It's the first time we have hard data on the survival of the virus. Before, we were just speculating," Klaus Stohr, WHO's top SARS scientist, told the Washington Post.

"These studies are very important for designing strategies for cleaning and disinfecting."

The new data suggest that infection can occur simply from touching a contaminated table or doorknob, the report said.

Outside of China, SARS deaths and infections appear to be stabilising. Singapore and Taiwan reported one new SARS death each on Sunday, bringing their respective death tolls to 26 and eight, though Singaporean officials said they had included one non-SARS related fatality in its toll.

Jute mill workers block road over non-payment

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Nearly 3,000 workers of the Amin Jute Mills demonstrated yesterday blockading the roads and rail lines in front of the mills in Panchlaish over non-payment of weekly wages.

The workers demanded immediate payment of their wages pending for the last five weeks. Otherwise, they warned the authorities of greater agitation.

Sources said the workers put up barricades on the roads in front of the mills and the rail lines of the Chittagong to Chittagong University section at around 2:00pm. The barricades continued for around three hours before the police removed them.

Vehicles along Chittagong to Hathazari road from Muradpur to Oxygen intersection remained stranded for three hours. The shuttle train service of Chittagong University was also disrupted.

US soldier

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anti-American demonstrations, according to the command.

Soldiers from the convoy returned fire and proceeded on their route. No US personnel were injured, the command said.

On the same day, two Iraqis, who were later detained, fired at a marine patrol near the town of As Samawah without hitting anyone.

"Despite the danger, coalition forces remain dedicated to setting the conditions throughout Iraq so that the delivery of humanitarian aid and infrastructure repair can continue," the command said in a statement.

Addressing the nation from the aircraft carrier Abraham Lincoln on Thursday, Bush said major combat operations in Iraq had ended.

But he warned that "difficult work" still lied ahead as the United States forged ahead with the war on terror.

Chalabi

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though failed to provide further details.

Chalabi built and lost a banking empire in Jordan in the 1980s. After he was forced to flee the country, he was convicted in absentia of fraud and embezzlement.

Senior Jordanian officials have repeatedly expressed their distaste for Chalabi, who in turn claims that he and his brother were the victims of a conspiracy between deposed Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein and the Jordanian royal family.

Chalabi's latest claims in Newsweek are just the latest salvo in a series of mutual recriminations.

JS committees

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an anti-corruption commission and provision for reserved seats for women in the parliament.

The opposition would raise the recent ferry accidents, law and order situation and spiralling essential prices, among other things.

Allocation of time for the session would be decided at the Business Advisory Committee meeting on May 8.