

Iraq core group to hold more talks on govt formation

AFP, Baghdad

The US civilian running post-war Iraq, Jay Garner, headed back to Baghdad on yesterday ahead of more talks with opposition leaders he says will form the core of an initial Iraqi government.

Several prominent figures, who have been meeting with US officials, are likely to form a makeshift political leadership as Iraq prepares for a national conference to select an interim government, the retired general said Monday.

"The five opposition leaders have begun having meetings and they are going to bring in leaders from inside Iraq and see if we can't form a nucleus of leadership as we enter into June," he said on a trip to Basra in the south.

They were expected to hold an internal meeting later Tuesday and hold talks with US officials on Wednesday.

But no date has yet been set for the national conference, which will bring together hundreds of delegates from Iraq's mix of religious, ethnic and tribal groups.

Massoud Barzani and Jalal Talabani, heads of the two main Kurdish factions, as well as Abdul Aziz al-Hakim from the Supreme Assembly for Islamic Revolution in Iraq, a Shiite Muslim group, Ahmad Chalabi of the Iraqi National Congress and Iyad Allawi of the Iraqi National Accord were the men named by Garner.

He said that group could expand to include perhaps four others. US officials have said they are looking for a leadership to emerge that can form a government following the ouster of Saddam Hussein.

Garner ended his Basra visit Monday by meeting Sheikh Muzahim al-Tamimi, a local businessman and tribal chieftain who has established a 30-member council as a temporary ruling body in the city.

In the northern city of Mosul the same day, an assembly of more than 200 Iraqis meeting under US auspices elected a mayor and city council that reflects the city's complex ethnic makeup.

"Not one group was excluded from this process," said the new mayor, retired army general Ghanim al-Basso. "We all joined

hands together."

Many Iraqis are angry over the deterioration in security and basic services since Saddam was toppled. There are dire shortages of food, water and electricity, and a flood of weapons has made much of the country unsafe.

"More has to be done for security," the president of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Jakob Kellenberger, said in Baghdad on Tuesday.

He told reporters that as the occupying power in Iraq, the United States had "very clear duties" which include "to impose public law and order, to secure the well-being of the population and protect essential infrastructures."

The UN nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), said it had requested permission to send a team to investigate looting at an Iraqi nuclear site.

"We don't consider it necessarily a problem of nuclear proliferation but it could be a problem of health and safety and environmental contamination," IAEA spokesman Mark Gwozdecky told AFP.

Washington had not decided whether to allow the team.

US State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said: "There is no decision at this point about what role they may or may not play in terms of evaluating and monitoring."

Garner is responsible for the rebuilding process and his team have appointed several Iraqis to top posts in recent days, including Thamiir Ghadhban as the country's new chief of executive.

Ghadhban said in Tuesday's edition of the International Oil Daily that a plan to fix oil production targets for the next two or three months would be presented next week.

"Once the plan is ready and approved, we will function according to it but it will only be limited to the domestic market," he said.

"I did not discuss oil exports with staff or with US officials, and I don't expect to be discussing it in the near future... We're talking about a detailed plan with precise production targets and precise target dates," he said.

Amitabh among greatest 100 all-time stars

PTI, London

Bollywood superstar Amitabh Bachchan has been voted as one of the greatest 100 film stars of all time.

The vote, conducted by Britain's Channel 4 television and aired last night includes Al Pacino, Tom Hanks, Harrison Ford, Anthony Hopkins and Sean Connery.

Amitabh Bachchan, who was voted as the star of the millennium in a poll conducted by the BBC online earlier, is listed as 92nd among the 100 top stars of all time.

Considered in popular parlance as the King of Indian Cinema, Amitabh Bachchan made his first appearance in the movie 'Saat Hindustani' did not do particularly well at the box office.

But he made a mark in his films Zanjeer and Deewar and introduced the role of the "angry young man" to Indian cinema.

Amitabh has acted in all over 70 films, many of them, particularly those from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s, resounding successes.

Lord Lawrence Olivier, Sir Alec Guinness and Sir John Gielgud are among the missing in the star list while the vote found a strong preference for living actors, led by Al Pacino at No 1.

The rest of the top 10 included Robert De Niro, Tom Hanks, Kevin Spacey, Harrison Ford, Jack Nicholson, Anthony Hopkins, Sean Connery, Ewan McGregor and Cary Grant.

Jane Fonda (98), and Michael Douglas (100), made the list, but their fathers didn't.

Audrey Hepburn was 13th and Marilyn Monroe 39th while Bruce Lee and Sidney Poitier are listed as 49th and 52nd respectively. Elizabeth Taylor is 77th in the list.

"Although all the classic greats are there, the final top five demonstrates that there are now modern greats who are established and are recognised up there alongside those classic movie stars," said John Piper, who produced the Channel 4 programme.



A woman and her child sit on the debris of their house flattened by a twister that lashed two villages in Brahmanbaria on Sunday.

PHOTO: STAR

'Finding Iraq's WMD not a top priority for US'

AFP, Washington

US troops in Iraq say finding Saddam Hussein's alleged weapons of mass destruction (WMD) is not yet a top priority despite mounting pressure on Washington to justify the war with hard evidence.

Officers with the 4th Infantry Division in northern Iraq said security and force protection were still their main focus as ground troops fanned out and as work on a new government began in Baghdad.

"The NBC (nuclear, biological, chemical) operations are being looked at as more important than (in other wars) but they're not the main priority, which is establishing security," said Captain Bobbie Jackson, chemicals officer for the division's 2nd Brigade.

"Once all the pockets of resistance are cleared up I think the search will intensify."

In a major coup for US investigators, an official said Monday top Iraqi scientist Huda Salih Mahdi Ammash, involved in Iraq's weapons of mass destruction program, had been taken into custody.

Described as a "weapons of mass destruction scientist," she was number 53 on the US list of wanted Iraqi officials.

The US and British governments have consistently said evidence from such scientists could be more valuable than inspections in the search for the truth about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction programme.

"Assembling an accurate picture of Saddam's programmes will take time," pleaded Britain's Foreign Secretary Jack Straw last week.

"Until we are able to question the scientists and experts who worked on these programmes -- and the UN has a list of 5,000 names -- progress will inevitably be

slow."

The United States and Britain used accusations of a hidden weapons of mass destruction program as the primary justification for invading Iraq. But so far no chemical, biological or nuclear weapons have been officially reported.

Hans Blix, the chief UN weapons inspector, has suggested sending back UN inspectors to lend credibility to the US-led search.

The White House, however, has said it is not yet time to discuss the return of UN inspectors and has instead set up its own 1,000-strong survey team to scour the country.

But as troops on the ground continue to test suspected sights without success, Washington is coming under growing pressure to prove its allegations, which the ousted regime strenuously denied.

A group of former intelligence specialists has called on President George W. Bush to investigate the CIA and other spy agencies for their failure to uncover weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

The failure, said the Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS), constituted a "policy and intelligence fiasco of monstrous proportions."

Bush "has been backed into the untenable position of assuming the former role of Saddam Hussein in refusing to cooperate with UN inspectors," it said in a statement Thursday.

"The refusal feeds suspicions that the Bush administration wishes to avoid independent verification and preserve the option of planting evidence."

Troops with the 4th Division in northern Iraq have inspected several suspected sites since they began moving into the area two weeks ago. Despite a number of false alarms, no chemical or biological weapons had been found, Jackson said.

In one operation last week, US troops in full protective clothing tested a suspected site in Baqubah, 40 kilometres north of Baghdad, which turned out to be a flour mill.

"Look at the size of this place. I don't have the resources to dig up everything... It's going to take a long time," Jackson said.

She said she would be happy if no weapons of mass destruction were found, although their discovery would "validate our reasons for being over here."

Hasina

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"The Awami League brought revolutionary changes to the power sector during its five-year rule," she said.

She said widespread politicisation and nepotism in all sectors including the administration and the judiciary have ruined the country.

Mymensingh Bar Association President Mahmud Al Noor Tareq and its General Secretary Sheikh Abul Hashem also spoke on the occasion. The AL-backed forum of lawyers bagged 14 out of 15 posts at the Mymensingh Bar Association elections held recently.

Private airlines

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India and Thailand where Bangladesh can operate more than one airlines under agreements. Now only Biman is flying to these destinations.

On the other hand, Biman has many idle slots to destinations where it flies fewer times than its limit. For example, 40 per cent of the slots with India now lies unutilised. Doha is another destination with idle slots for Biman. These can be allocated to private airlines.

A Bangladeshi or a joint venture company having at least 51 per cent local ownership can apply for international operation licence. It has to have at least Tk 5 crore in paid up capital.

Technical details of the aircraft to be registered in Bangladesh have to be submitted to the CAAB. The licence fee has been fixed at Tk 50,000 while renewal fee has been set at Tk 2 lakh.

Political overdose

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Star yesterday. "We tried to accommodate good books. But we could not always ensure quality. We live in a sickening society..." He declined to comment on the selection of 14 books on Ziaur Rahman and four on Khaleda.

Writers like Satyajit Ray and Mohammad Zafar Iqbal and national poet Kazi Nazrul Islam were not included. Only one book each of Rabindranath Tagore, Shamsur Rahman and Jasimuddin was enlisted.

The sources say the committee selected the books of a few others like the three only to cover up its political bias.

The city's bookshops do not sell most of these books. "The books are not available, as they are project-oriented," says a publisher. "Those books are not meant for all," he said requesting anonymity.

Eight hundred books were submitted to the NCTB when it invited samples and proposals. But not all were selected on merit, another publisher alleged.

The committee enlisted at least a dozen biographical books on Ziaur Rahman, including Chhotoder Shaheed Zia, Shaheed President Ziaur Rahman, Chhotoder Priyo Zia, Sabar Priyo Shaheed Zia, Chhotoder Zia, Chhotoder Ziaur Rahman Jibon Karma Rajniti, Zia Chhotoder

Bhalobashar Banshibadok, Tomar Amar Ziaur Rahman and Hridoy Jure Ekti Nam Ziaur Rahman.

The books on Khaleda include Chhotoder Begum Khaleda Zia, Chhotoder Bandhu Begum Khaleda Zia and Priyodeshonetri Khaleda Zia.

A book on Genghis Khan was also included in the list.

Earlier, a committee selected as many as 52 books on Ziaur Rahman and Khaleda Zia for public and college libraries.

In the past, the Awami League also enlisted books for libraries on political considerations. During its rule, the AL selected as many as 34 books on Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, seven on AL President Sheikh Hasina and 13 written by pro-AL intellectuals.

BCL protesters

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barricade, police swung into action.

Later, the BCL workers held a rally at the Batala of the High Court intersection and demanded adequate supply of electricity, gas and water.

They claimed that corruption of the ruling BNP-backed employees was responsible for the shortage.

Leader of the Opposition and Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina condemned the police attack.

Researchers race to patent SARS virus

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patent competition related to the virus that causes severe acute respiratory syndrome. SARS has infected more than 6,000 people worldwide, killing more than 460.

The World Health Organisation, which has been lauded for its quick response and deftly coordinating an international response, said none of the patent applicants had contacted it regarding their intellectual property intentions.

"What we care about is the international collaboration continues to function," WHO spokesman Dick Thompson said. "Patents, they don't really concern us."

In Hong Kong, University of Hong Kong microbiologist Malik Peiris said Monday that the school's intellectual property arm had filed for a patent on the SARS virus. Peiris referred queries on the patent application to the intellectual property unit, Versitech Ltd., but no one answered the phone there Monday or Tuesday.

Peiris said that after his team discovered the virus, it sent samples to other scientists but no patent was immediately sought. When it became clear others were seeking patents, the Hong Kong team then sought one, Peiris said.

If others had not been doing so, the Hong Kong team probably would not have done so, either, Peiris said.

The British Columbia Cancer Agency, which first sequenced the virus genome at its Genome Sciences Centre, has also filed for a patent.

While the patent could lead to royalties in the future, the goal for now is to keep the information available to all needing it, the agency said.

"Patents are in and of themselves not a good or bad thing," the agency's Dr. Samuel Abraham told a Toronto news conference. "The thing that makes a patent leave a nasty taste... is when they seem to cut people out from access they should have."

Last week, biotechnology company Combimatrix filed patent applications claiming ownership of key components of two SARS genes thought to control reproduction of the virus once it invades people. Combimatrix, a subsidiary of Acacia Research Corp., hopes to create a drug that will jam the SARS reproduction system by targeting those two genes.

"If we didn't have patent protection, we wouldn't invest in the research," said Combimatrix president and chief executive Amit Kumar, whose company is based in Mukilteo, Wash.

Regardless of motive, the race to patent aspects of the SARS virus has rekindled criticism of laws that allow living things to be patented.

"These are discoveries of nature and it's baloney that we allow patents on living things," said Jeremy Rifkin, a prominent anti-biotechnology author. "We didn't allow chemists to patent the periodic table -- there's no patent on hydrogen and I don't see why they can patent discoveries of nature."

Since a pivotal US Supreme Court ruling in 1980, the US Patent and Trademark Office has awarded patents for living things, most notably individual human genes.

Entire humans can't be patented, but genes or parts of genes can if they prove to be new, useful and isolated by somebody using sophisticated scientific techniques.

"It must have a real world utility and there has to be the hand of man involved," said John Doll, director of biotechnology for the US Patent and Trademark Office. "You can't just turn over a rock and scrape something off the bottom of it and apply for a patent."

Even with those restrictions, the number of "patents on life" have exploded in recent years causing a backlog at the patent office.

More than 500,000 patents have been applied for on genes or gene sequences worldwide, according to the activist group GeneWatch UK. The US Patent and Trademark Office alone has issued approximately 20,000 patents on genes or

gene-related molecules and 25,000 more applications are pending.

It will be months, and probably years, before the patent office begins to rule on the various patent applications. It takes about two years for the average patent application to be granted.

5 get life term for murder in Mymensingh

UNB, Mymensingh

The district court yesterday sentenced ten people to life imprisonment for killing a man near Goutipur railway station in December 1998.

The convicts are Abdur Rashid, Abul Kashem, Chanu, Army Kashem, Alamgir, Nazrul Islam, Suruj Ali, Abdul Kadir, Abdul Halim and Shahid. Of them, Alamgir, Abdul Halim and Shahid were tried in absentia.

The court acquitted five other accused in the case.

Additional District and Sessions Judge Begum Jasmin Anwar pronounced the verdict after examining the prosecution witnesses and records.

'Saddam's son took \$1 b from Iraqi vaults hours before war began'

REUTERS, New York

A son of Saddam Hussein and a close adviser carried off nearly \$1 billion in cash from Iraq's central bank hours before the US-led war on the country began, the New York Times reported on its Web site late on Monday.

The amount of cash was so large -- \$900 million in American bills and \$100 million worth of euros -- that three tractor trailers were needed to carry it, the newspaper reported, citing an Iraqi official.

The alleged removal was said to have been ordered by Saddam himself. Qusay, the deposed leader's second son, and one of the president's personal assistants, Abid al-Hamid Mahmood, carried a letter from Saddam authorizing the removal of the money, the newspaper reported.

"When you get an order from Saddam Hussein, you do not discuss it," an unnamed Iraqi official who held a senior position in a bank told The Times. The unnamed official was told about the removal of the cash by the people who turned it over to Qusay and the adviser, the newspaper reported.

The New York Times said Iraqi officials were uncertain what effect the disappearance of the cash, which amounted to about one quarter of the central bank's hard currency reserves, would have on

the Iraqi economy.

American officials and Iraqis interviewed by The Times said they did not know where the money went, but some Americans said they suspect it was transported to Syria, the newspaper reported. The money was reportedly stolen at 4 a.m. on March 18.

Five outlaws held in Khulna

UNB, Bagerhat

Five activists of outlawed Purbo Banglar Communist Party have been taken into custody from Gobarchaka in Khulna city.

Police said the outlaws, including an ex-army sepoy, were arrested from a secret meeting Monday evening. They were shown arrested in Fakirhat cops killing and arms loot case.

The arrestees are Badiuzzaman Litu, ex-army sepoy Rafiqul Islam Tipu, Delwar Hossain, Mohammad Feroq and Anwar Hossain.

Betar to air JS proceedings

BSS, Dhaka

Bangladesh Betar will broadcast live the proceedings of the Jatiya Sangsad from Saigsad Bhaban from May 8, a press release said yesterday.

The proceedings will be broadcast from the Dhaka centre of Bangladesh Betar at 1000 KW on the Medium Wave of 693 kilohertz.

Pressmen

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demonstrated at the upazila headquarters and submitted a memorandum to the local Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO).

They came under attack by some known criminals while returning from the UNO office in the afternoon.

The criminals reportedly led by one Baitiyya Rafiq and Ashraf beat up a journalist and tore down a banner the journalists were carrying.

Local govt

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ter Rahmat Ali MP, economist Dr Atiur Rahman, Prof. Ahmed Kamal of Dhaka University, Director General of Palli Karma Shahayak Foundation Salehuddin, BRAC Director and Trustee of Bangladesh Rice Foundation Prof. Moazzem Hossain, Saidul Haq of the National Institute of Local Government and several UP chairmen were present.

Scores of NGO and development activists, representatives from international agencies and newsmen also participated in the discussion.

The participants included Khushi Kabir, Shaheen Anam, Shirin Banu, Salma Ali, Yasmin Ahmed, Mita Chakravarty, Aminur Rahman, Taleya Rahman, Mozammel Haq, Sohel Iqbal, Lenin Azad, Begum Rokeya, Badiul Alam, Khandakar Shakhwat Ali and Muhammad Jahangir.

Some UP chairmen told the meeting that most of the time, they are not at liberty to choose their programmes. The lawmakers selected all projects at will, they complained.

The discussants felt that the lawmakers should limit themselves to law making and policy planning and let the local representatives work unhindered at the grassroots level.

Childhood

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did not even provide them with a food allocation. And it is still inadequate.

They share their mothers' meal and often starve.

And the women's ward brings together a full range of motley characters -- general convicts, prostitutes, drug addicts, vagabonds and what not.

"The children who live with them will never get away from the dark shadow of their jail mates," a senior jail official said.

"Since birth, they are the direct victims of corruption by the jail authorities, and subject of indifference, neglect and exploitation. They are even sexually harassed," said a source.

A three-year old girl in her mother's lap broke down in tears and virtually threw a tantrum to get rid of the fettered upbringing.

Her shell-shocked mother cast around for words of promise to take her out soon.

"Who wants to stay in this hell. Even my three-year-old daughter understands life is continually a curse in this caged life," the woman told The Daily Star.

A senior jail official expressed sympathy for the victims and said work on a daycare centre was on.

(The names of the children have been changed to protect privacy.)

Pak goodwill gesture

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In Washington, US Secretary of State Colin Powell on Monday hailed a "moment of opportunity" in the standoff between India and Pakistan, as he dispatched his deputy to nurture emerging hopes of dialogue between the two rivals.

"We are pleased at some of the developments that have taken place over the last 10 days or so with positive statements coming from both sides," Powell told reporters after meeting NATO Secretary General Lord Robertson.

"This is a moment of opportunity where both sides seem to be reaching out."

Powell's number two Richard Armitage will visit India, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

"Deputy Secretary Armitage will encourage this process of reaching out and the United States will be ready to assist both sides as they move forward," said Powell.

Powell, who has kept up intense telephone diplomacy on South Asia and made several visits to the region over the last year, said he spoke over the last few days to Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf and Prime Minister Zafarullah Jamali.

He said he also spoke to Indian Foreign Minister Yashwant Sinha.

There has been progress in India-Pakistan ties but a lot still

needs to be done to lower temperatures between them, Armitage said yesterday.

Armitage told CNN that all credit went to the leaders of the countries for recent moves to ease tensions which have kept the nuclear-ready subcontinent on a knife-edge for 17 months.

Pakistan's offer Monday to get rid of its nuclear arsenal if rival India agreed to do likewise was a "good gesture and that would be a great sign of enormous progress... but I think we have to keep our appetites under control."

"I think we have got a lot of work to do to continue to lower the temperatures of two great countries India and Pakistan to be able to live in peace and stability with each other."

Armitage and Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia Christina Rocca are due to arrive in Islamabad today.

They are to meet top Pakistani leaders tomorrow, US and Pakistani officials said.

Armitage will also visit Kabul where he said his aim was "to make dramatically the point that the United States can do two things at once. We can be involved in Iraq and we will continue to be involved in Afghanistan."

DHAKA TODAY

Francois Truffaut Retrospective
Zahir Raihan Film Society in association with Alliance Francaise organises a three-day long retrospective of six films by the French New Wave filmmaker Francois Truffaut. On the third and last day, two films will be screened: 'Fahrenheit 451' (1967) and 'Day for Night' (1973). Venue: Alliance Francaise, Dhanmondi. Time: 5:00pm and 7:00pm.

Film show
Academy Film Society will screen a film titled 'Sex and Lucia'. Venue: 21/C, Jigatola. Time: 6:30pm.

Roundtable
Development of the Rural Poor (DORP) organises a roundtable on 'PRSP and Health Budget-How people look at'. Venue: National Press Club. Time: 9:30am.

Seminar
Engineers' Institution, Bangladesh, (EIB) organises a seminar on 'Bangladesh and challenges of globalisation'. Venue: EIB seminar room, Ramna. Time: 4:00pm.

Discussion
A discussion on 'The Anglo-American Imperialism, World under