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## Bremer Suggests U.S. May Block Islamic Law in Iraq

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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BAGHDAD, Iraq (AP) -- Iraq's U.S. administrator suggested Monday he would block any move by Iraqi leaders to make Islamic law the backbone of an interim constitution, which women's groups fear could threaten their rights. Roadside bombs killed two more American soldiers.

The U.S. military also said Monday that gunmen killed an American Baptist minister from Rhode Island and wounded three other pastors in a weekend ambush south of the capital.

A grenade exploded Monday in an elementary school playground in Baghdad, killing one child and wounding four others. The children apparently triggered the explosive while they were playing, Iraqi police said.

During a visit to a women's center in Karbala, administrator L. Paul Bremer said the current draft of the interim constitution, due to take effect at the end of this month, would make Islam the state religion and "a source of inspiration for the law" -- but not the main source for that law.

However, Mohsen Abdel-Hamid, the current president of the Iraqi Governing Council and a Sunni Muslim hard-liner, has proposed making Islamic law the "principal basis" of legislation.

Iraqi women's groups fear that could cost them the rights they hold under Iraq's longtime secular system, especially in such areas as divorce, child support and inheritance.

Bremer was asked what would happen if Iraqi leaders wrote into the interim charter that Islamic sharia law is the principal basis of legislation. "Our position is clear," Bremer replied. "It can't be law until I sign it."

Bremer must sign all measures passed by the 25-member council before they can become law. Iraq's powerful Shiite clergy, however, wants the interim constitution to be approved by an elected legislature. Under U.S. plans, a permanent constitution would not be drawn up and voted on by the Iraqi people until 2005.

Under most interpretations of Islamic law, women's rights to seek divorce are strictly limited and they only receive half the inheritance of men. Islamic law also allows for polygamy and often permits marriage of girls at a younger age than does secular law.

Earlier this month, 45 members of the House of Representatives signed a letter to President Bush urging him to preserve women's rights in Iraq.

U.S. leverage with the Iraqis will decline, however, after the U.S.-led coalition returns sovereignty to an Iraqi administration at the end of June.

The United States also hopes to hand over more responsibility for internal security to U.S.-trained Iraqi forces, which could reduce American casualties as the U.S. presidential election approaches.

In the latest attacks, an American soldier from Task Force Iron Horse was killed and four were wounded in a roadside bombing Monday in Baqouba, 35 miles northeast of Baghdad. One of the wounded was critically injured and the other three were in guarded condition, the military said.

Two Iraqis were arrested, one with a cell phone that may have been used to detonate the bomb, said Master Sgt. Robert Cargie, a spokesman in Tikrit.

The other fatal bombing occurred in the center of Baghdad, killing one soldier from the 1st Armored Division and wounding another, the military said.

The latest deaths bring to 540 the number of U.S. service members who have died since the United States launched the Iraq war in March. Most have died since President Bush declared an end to active combat May 1.

In the ambush Saturday, gunmen in a sedan opened fire on a taxi carrying Americans from a Baptist religious group from the site of the ancient city of Babylon to Baghdad, the U.S. command said.

The Rev. John Kelley, 48, of Rhode Island, was killed and three Baptist ministers -- from Connecticut, Massachusetts and New York -- were wounded, according to a spokesman for Kelley's family.

The spokesman, Roland Vukic, said Kelley and about 10 other pastors from the New England area left Feb. 6 to help start a church in Baghdad.

Police, meanwhile, arrested five Iraqis suspected in the assassination of Aquila al-Hashimi, a member of the Governing Council who was gunned down Sept. 20 as she left her Baghdad home, the Interior Ministry said.

The men were arrested 10 days ago in the city of Amarah, 180 miles southeast of the capital, Deputy Interior Minister Ahmed Kadhum Ibrahim told The Associated Press. They were arrested for using drugs but police uncovered "indications" they may have been involved in the al-Hashimi slaying, he said. Police were still investigating.

Al-Hashimi was the highest official in the post-Saddam Hussein administration to be killed in the persistent violence in Iraq since Saddam's fall.

Attacks against the U.S.-led occupation force have continued unabated despite the capture of Saddam Hussein on Dec. 13 and the arrest of numerous figures whom the American military has identified as key figures behind the insurgency.

U.S. officials are divided about whether Iraqis or foreign fighters are responsible for recent attacks, including last weekend's bold daylight assault against police and civil defense compounds in Fallujah in which at least 25 people were killed.

But on Monday, Brig. Gen. Mark Kimmitt, deputy operations chief, said it appeared all the attackers wounded or killed in Fallujah were Iraqis, despite initial reports that foreigners, including Lebanese and Iranians, were involved.

He said a number of Iraqis were being questioned in the attack, including the mayor of Fallujah who had submitted his resignation a few days before the Saturday assault.

The general said there were indications the attack may have been staged to free four Iraqis held for firing at an Iraqi civil defense bus.

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Associated Press correspondents Jim Krane in Karbala and Chris Brummitt in Tikrit contributed to this report.