

Democratic field to grow after Hillary throws hat into ring

AFP, Washington

The field of US Democratic presidential contenders was expected to grow even more yesterday after Senator Hillary Clinton dramatically reshaped the budding contest by entering the 2008 race.

New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson, a former US ambassador to the United Nations and energy secretary, is likely to announce that he is creating a presidential exploratory committee, according to people close to the Democratic Party.

Richardson, a prominent Hispanic leader, will appear on ABC's "This Week" program that airs at 9:00 am (1400 GMT) Sunday.

He said Friday he believed Congress needed to either put legal caps on the number of US troops in Iraq or to take other steps to stop the war.

"I have very firmly said the troops should be withdrawn this year, redeployed," Richardson told MSNBC television.

Still, his announcement was expected to be overshadowed by reverberations from a bombshell dropped Saturday by the former first lady, whose long-awaited entry into the race opened up what promises to be one of the most exciting and groundbreaking political contests in US history.

As it is shaping up, the race will be pitting Senator Clinton, determined to become the country's first female president, against fellow Senator Barack Obama, who aims to be the first African-American in the White House.

"I'm in. And I'm in to win," Clinton said in a video announcement on her website Saturday.

Four days before Obama signaled his own plan to fight for the nomination, saying he had formed a committee to test the waters and start raising money.

With their entry the field of confirmed Democratic hopefuls expanded to seven, still 12 months ahead of the first crucial state-based primary elections that will decide the Democratic and Republican party nominees who battle for the White House in November 2008.

Clinton, 59, the wife of former president Bill Clinton, ended years of speculation over her political ambitions with her announcement.

"The frontrunner has just stepped on the stage," said Washington's veteran political analyst Charlie Cook.

"This is the first woman in our history who will be taken seriously

by everyone," said political scientist Ruth Mandel of Rutgers University.

But while polls showed Clinton the odds-on favorite to capture the Democratic nomination next year, her continuing ability to divide voters meant that the race was still wide open with Obama, former senator John Edwards and others yet to commit to the race angling to demonstrate they have a better chance to defeat the Republican challenger.

In a Washington Post-ABC News poll released Saturday based on voters surveyed before her announcement, Clinton outpaced Obama 41 percent to 17 percent in the contest for the Democratic nomination.

Likewise, a Gallup poll taken a week ago put Clinton ahead with backing from 29 percent of Democratic voters, compared with 18 percent for Obama and Edwards at 13 percent.

But questions remain over whether Clinton, whose eight years as an untrifling first lady left a large swath of US voters cold, can defeat any politician the Republicans choose to fight for the White House.

A CBS News poll at the beginning of January pointed to her big weakness: 38 percent of all voters, and a whopping 78 percent of Republicans, have decidedly unfavorable feelings toward Clinton, suggesting that in a country closely divided between the two parties she might not have the ability to woo the Republicans necessary for a decisive victory in 2008.

Indeed, a Newsweek poll released Saturday suggested that Edwards, the vice presidential running mate of John Kerry in his ill-fated campaign for the White House in 2004, could be the Democrats' best bet.

Asking voters their preference in certain matchups, Newsweek reported that Clinton, if she runs against Republican Senator John McCain, would narrowly come out ahead, 48 percent to 47 percent.

In an Obama-versus-McCain scenario, the Democrat carried 46 percent against McCain's 44 percent. But Edwards trumped McCain 48 percent versus 43 percent.

Measured against current leading Republican contender Rudy Giuliani, a former New York mayor, Clinton came out one percentage point behind and Obama was two points behind. But Edwards held a 48-45 percent lead over Giuliani.

Ulfa leader's claim

FROM PAGE 1
he does not know the identity of those officials.

Bangladeshi newspapers and television channels carried the news with utmost significance.

A Bangla national daily reported that former National Security Intelligence (NSI) chief Maj Gen Rezakul Haider Chowdhury assisted the Ulfa in carrying out the attack on August 21 and Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) later in raising bomb attacks.

Meanwhile, Ulfa Chairman Aravinda Rajkhowa yesterday denied his party's involvement in any attack in Bangladesh.

A CID official yesterday said they do not totally brush aside the possibility of Ulfa involvement in the attack and will try their best to verify the information.

Home Secretary Abdul Karim yesterday said he asked for information in this regard from the Bangladeshi intelligence agencies and the foreign ministry. "We will decide what to do after we get the information," he told reporters at his office.

Meanwhile, questions like who plotted the attack, what was the attack's motive, who supplied the grenades, how the same type of grenades were sneaked into Dhaka Central Jail, why the evidence was destroyed deliberately, and why two victims were buried hurriedly have remained unanswered although two years have passed since the grenade attack to assassinate AL chief Sheikh Hasina.

The government has not only shown lack of interest in bringing to justice those who carried out the grisly attack but is yet to clear why law enforcers totally failed to ensure security at the rally and arrest any of the attackers from the spot.

Although the government attempted to earn public acclamation by inviting the Interpol and US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), it has failed to make any credible revelation into the mystery.

The investigators attempted to submit the charge sheet of the case over a year ago basing on the confessional statement of Joz Mia, but the government held them back following media flak terming Joz

Mia's story very weakly-woven.

Twenty people were arrested after the attack but 17 of them were released as the allegation against them had "no merit". The rest three gave statements admitting their involvement in the attack.

The investigators are alleged not to have collected the pieces of evidence, including the unexploded grenades, which were vital to the investigation.

Army explosives experts detonated two unexploded grenades—one found near the spot and another at the adjacent Gulistan Hawkers' Market—in the dead of night without taking fingerprints on them. They carried out a similar detonation of another grenade recovered from the Dhaka Central Jail a day after the attack.

The mystery behind the quick burial of two unidentified victims on August 22 night has not been resolved.

The one-member government judicial inquiry commission of Justice Joydul Abedin linked a foreign enemy with the attack but his report was not made public. The government is yet to declare if there were any recommendations in that report and, if any, whether they were implemented.

The judicial inquiry commission claimed to have identified the perpetrators but its head declined to disclose their identity.

"The incident is a stark attack on the independence and sovereignty of the country," Justice Joydul Abedin had told reporters.

Judicial probe

FROM PAGE 16
hero for destruction in the power sector,' which was false, fabricated and concocted and it was done to dent Mamun's image.

However, according to the law, only the person, who loses reputation, name and fame for newspaper reports or anyone's personal behaviour, have to file defamation cases.

Earlier, an advocate filed a similar case with the CMM's court on behalf of BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Tarique Rahman against the same defendants for allegedly running a defamatory news item casting aspersion on Tarique's character.

DSE turnover

FROM PAGE 1
A senior official of a merchant bank said, "The DSE and SEC should strictly monitor the market so that no manipulation could take place in the market."

Along with the turnover, the stock prices also rallied on the DSE yesterday for the fourth consecutive day led by power and banking sector. The DSE All Share Price Index rose by 31.39 points or 2.25 percent to close at 1421.92 points while the DSE General Index went up by 43 points or 2.5 percent finishing at 1756.53 points.

Besides, DSE-20 Index, comprising blue chips, also shot up by 24.66 points, or 1.62 percent, to close at 1546.10 points.

UNB adds: Trading at Chittagong Stock Exchange (CSE) closed higher yesterday with the gainers strongly dominating the losers.

The CSE All Share Price Index increased by 2 percent to close at 3985.68 points.

The CSE-30 Index also rose by 1.71 percent to close at 3645.51 points.

A total of 98 issues were traded. Of them, 80 gained, 13 declined and five remained unchanged. Some 5,213,126 shares and debentures worth Tk 27.26 crore changed hands.

Ecneec recast

FROM PAGE 1
adviser will be the head of the committee on purchase and its members are advisers to the ministries of law, communications and LGRD. He will also chair the committee on economic affairs comprising advisers to the ministries of power and energy, education and health.

Law adviser has been made head of the committee on law and order with advisers to the ministries of communication and education as its members.

Meanwhile, the advisers to the industries and agriculture ministries will comprise the national award committee headed by the communication adviser.

The previous caretaker government, headed by President Iajuddin Ahmed, had made the law adviser the head of the purchase committee though usually the finance ministry chairs it.

SC asks govt

FROM PAGE 1
forgiveness as the proceedings began at 9:42am. After a while, they were however asked to sit down.

Attorney General (AG) AJ Mohammad Ali said the rules for the judicial services have already been submitted to the court in affidavit.

In reply, the bench said it has detected some errors in the rules and those need to be corrected.

Mohammad Ali said the rules were promulgated in line with the court order.

"One or two errors may be there, but there is no deviation from the court directives," Ali said.

The bench then asked him to minutely re-examine the rules, get rid of the flaws and issue a gazette notification on the amended CrPC.

It also wanted to know when the ordinance of the CrPC would be issued.

At that point, Mohammad Ali asked for two weeks' time to complete the amendments to the CrPC.

But unsatisfied with the answer, the court reminded the AG that he had earlier sought 10 days for the work to be done. It said it couldn't wait for ages.

President Iajuddin Ahmed approved the four rules of the judicial services on January 16. The following day, the AG explained the rules to the Appellate Division that after a hearing ordered the government to submit all rules before it by January 21.

Nine secretaries

FROM PAGE 1
Youth and sport secretary Mohammad Aminul Islam Bhuiyan was made Economic Relations Division secretary and secretary of Internal Resources Division and chairman of NBR Sheikh AK Motahar was transferred to IMED as secretary.

Expatriates welfare and overseas employment secretary Didarul Anwar was made information secretary.

Director General of Bangladesh Television Mohammad Aftab Hasan was attached with the establishment ministry for next posting and chairman of Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation Mohammad Wajed Ali Khan was appointed as director general of BTV.

Five joint secretaries from different departments have been attached with the establishment ministry.

The interim government is also contemplating further changes in the top as well as field levels of civil administration and police, sources said, adding, "The government will not go for massive reshuffle in the field levels of police and administration, but changes will be made where necessary."

The government yesterday formed the advisers' committee on administration with the chief adviser as its head. "This committee will assess the situation and bring changes if necessary," the source said.

Aziz finally resigns

FROM PAGE 1
The biggest allegations against Aziz were that he failed to prepare a correct voter list and violated a High Court directive by creating a fresh voter list, which cost the taxpayer at least Tk 60 crore.

Aziz assumed the office of CEC on May 23, 2005, during BNP-led alliance government's regime, and got mired in controversy by preparing a fresh voter list ignoring the High Court directive.

Along with major political parties, election experts, different professional organisations and civil society personalities also demanded reconstitution of the EC for holding a free and fair election. Foreign diplomats also started speaking against the Aziz-led EC saying the people had lost confidence in the commission.

AL-led alliance had been asking for Aziz's resignation since late 2005, while election experts for several months had been saying that the people had lost confidence in Aziz-led EC and the only way to hold a free and fair poll and avert a major political crisis and violence was to reconstitute the EC.

But, President Iajuddin opted not to reconstitute the EC and instead he sent two commissioners on leave and appointed two new, even more controversial, commissioners compounding an already complex crisis.

Justice Sultan Hossain Khan and Justice AKM Sadeque, two former CECs, had resigned from the post in 1991 and 1996 respectively in the face of similar popular movements demanding their ouster.

EC SCRAPS TODAY'S POLL

An EC Secretariat notification released yesterday under section 21 of the General Clauses Act 1897, cancelled all its previous notifications in relation to the election that was scheduled for today.

It said the election will not take place as the president believed it could not take place on schedule, and added, "In light of internal disturbances that might endanger the economic life the president promulgated a state of emergency under Article 141A(1) of the constitution."

The notification further said all activities and measures taken under proscribed notifications will be considered legally null and void.

Meanwhile, in an immediate reaction AL termed Aziz's resignation as 'victory of the people's movement'. Talking to The Daily Star AL Joint General Secretary Obaidul Quader said if the 'completely failed CEC' had resigned much earlier, many untoward incidents could have been averted.

"Through his [Aziz's] resignation, the move to reconstitute the Election Commission will be expedited, and the main barrier to creating an accurate voter list and holding of a free and fair election has been removed," Quader said.

Govt cancels

FROM PAGE 1
The rotation system was introduced during the previous four-party alliance government period that created monopoly in the business and commotion among the passengers.

Bishwa litema

FROM PGAE 1
litema ground.

Reviewing the utility and security arrangements, an inter-ministerial meeting held at the home ministry yesterday hoped that the preparations will be completed in due time.

"We have taken all necessary steps to ensure foolproof security during the litema," Home Secretary Abdul Karim, who chaired the meeting, told reporters.

Attended by inspector general of police, Bangladesh Ansar chief and officials of home, foreign and communication ministries, the meeting discussed arrangements of accommodation, supplies of water, electricity, gas, first aid and telephone and other communication services.

The law enforcers have worked out separate security arrangements for three days from February 2 and before and after it.

Every individual will have to go through checking at the entrance to the Khitta (a block of the litema ground). Watchtowers will be set up and there will be a number of control rooms to coordinate security and service.

The whole area will be brought under surveillance. Bomb disposal units and fire fighters will also work round the clock.

Primary textbook crisis

FROM PAGE 16
The Daily Star.

For 2007, the NCTB published 5,20,94,675 textbooks for free distribution at the primary level and twenty lakh orange coloured books for sale at the same level, he added.

While visiting Bangla Bazar book market in the capital and different libraries in Savar, The Daily Star correspondent found open sale of the free textbooks.

Different libraries are also secretly selling NTCB-published free books for 2007 academic session at different rates.

Admitting the allegations of sale of the free textbooks in the markets, the NCTB chairman said he has formed six teams that arrested four people from Bangla Bazar and Nilkhet book markets.

Introducing themselves as buyers, The Daily Star correspondents approached sellers in the bookstores in and around the capital and found different market prices of the books.

It also became evident that a network is manipulating the whole process.

"Wholesale price of each set of class V books stands at Tk 140 while books of class IV and III cost Tk 145 and 140. A set of books of both class II and I are being sold at Tk 40 in the wholesale market," said Md Ali, owner of Mousumi Book House at Bangla Bazar. Retail prices of each set of class V, IV, III, II and I vary from Tk 200-250, Tk 180-200, Tk 170-180 and Tk 60-70 at Bangla Bazar. Outside the capital, each set of class III, IV and V books cost Tk 120 while a set of class I and II books are selling at Tk 60.

Most of the government, non-government and private primary schools started classes for this academic year in the first week of January but free textbooks are yet to reach the students.

Amid utter uncertainty about getting the free books, the school authorities find no way but to suggest the anxious guardians to buy

Syria helps save Hamas-Abbas meeting

AFP, Damascus, Syria

Syrian officials stepped into the increasingly bitter dispute among the Palestinian leadership, successfully negotiating a crucial meeting on Sunday between Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and Hamas' exiled chief.

The meeting, originally scheduled for Saturday and abruptly canceled, had raised expectations that Abbas and Khaled Mashaal could make headway in forming a national unity government and end months of deadly Palestinian infighting that has claimed at least 62 lives.

Moussa Abu Marzouk, deputy head of Hamas' politburo, said that 'active and serious mediation' by Syria succeeded in convincing Abbas and Mashaal to hold the long-negotiated meeting after all, later Sunday.

Abbas and Mashaal met separately with Syria's vice president, Farouk al-Sharaa, after the original talks were postponed.

Hamas swept to power in elections last year and controls the Palestinian parliament and Cabinet, but it is labeled by the U.S. as a terrorist group and its refusal to recognize Israel's right to exist led to a Western sanctions that have paralyzed the Palestinian economy.

Abbas, who leads the Fatah party and is widely seen as a moderate, was elected president separately.

Mob kills

FROM PAGE 16
Shyampur when the gang held a pedestrian and tried to mug him.

As the pedestrian cried out for help, locals rushed to his rescue and got hold of Mamun and Masud and beat them up severely. However, the other members of the gang managed to flee the public wrath.

Police later recovered the two and rushed them to Dhaka Medical College Hospital where on-duty doctors declared Mamun dead.

Dhaka not aware

FROM PAGE 1
the northeastern Indian insurgent outfit inside Bangladesh. "But we did not find any truth behind these allegations after inquiry."

If India conveys the matter officially, he said, Bangladesh would look into it.

Anti-crime drive

FROM PAGE 1
including two Awami League (AL) leaders for alleged involvement in terrorist activities.

BARISAL

The army-led joint forces arrested Nayan from Bazar Road area under Swarupkathi upazila at about 8:00pm Saturday, reports our Barisal correspondent.

"He fell sick during interrogation at about 1:00am yesterday," said Nesar Ali, officer-in-charge (OC) of Swarupkathi Police Station. He was rushed to the upazila health complex but there he died an hour later.

Nayan's family claimed that he died due to torture in custody.

Brother of BNP municipal unit joint secretary Firoz Kazi, Nayan was a listed criminal and stood accused of extortion, tortures and attacks on journalists, said the OC.

An UD case has been filed in this connection.

Besides, the joint forces nabbed a Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) leader and a Jubo Dal leader and recovered a stolen motorcycle from their possession at Agoljhora upazila in the District early yesterday.

TANGAIL

Plain-clothes army men picked up Rubel from his house at Ghatail upazila Saturday evening, reports our correspondent from Tangail.

As his relatives went to the nearest army camp for him, the locals told them that Rubel had been taken to Ghatail hospital.

But the family found his body at Tangail General Hospital the following morning.

The hospital records said Rubel was brought to the hospital at 9:27am, and he died within the next 20 minutes.

The police inquest and the post-mortem reports did not mention any major bruises that could lead to death.

No criminal record was found against him in the concerned police stations.

City clean-up

FROM PAGE 16
slope in front of the Meena Bazar building to revive the walkway.

The owner of Meena Bazar or anyone representing him refused to talk to The Daily Star in this regard.

Engineer Md Nurul Islam, one of the Rajuk authorised officers, said they have prepared a "long" list of violators of the Rajuk rules. "The [eviction] drive will continue on a regular basis," he said.

Our correspondent in Gazipur meanwhile reported that army men conducted their eviction drive around Joydevpur Chowrasta and Tongi Station road, removing bus and tempo stoppages. This has significantly improved the traffic situation in the area.

The army also demolished the 1,250-foot long demarcation wall of Aventis Pharmaceuticals and hoardings of different business organisations along the east side of the Dhaka-Gazipur Highway.

They asked other small businesses to take away their illegal units and knocked down a few establishments, including an Awami League office.

CA vows to transfer

FROM PAGE 1
government is to hold a free, fair, peaceful and neutral election with participation of all parties in accordance with the constitution and people's aspiration.

He, however, noted that any general election turns meaningless if not held following the essential rules and regulations of elections and creating a cherished atmosphere. Therefore, the main objective of this government is to create a congenial environment for holding transparent, peaceful and truly democratic elections.

Promising to reconstitute the EC, the chief adviser said it is unpleasant but true that the activities of past Election Commissions did not keep them above questions and doubts. And the incumbent Election Commission has also landed into controversies. "Therefore, reconstitution of the Election Commission has become imperative," he said.

About debates on the voters' list, he said it is equally urgent to prepare and publish a flawless electoral roll for holding such credible elections. "This presupposes formulation of a specific work plan and its implementation. Our efforts will have to be all-out to implement it—and we must succeed in accomplishing these tasks."

Regarding demands for voter ID cards and transparent ballot boxes, he said necessary steps would be taken in this respect after examining the matters.

"The nation does not want to backslide once again and go fall back into past instability and intolerable situation," he said in an apparent emotion-charged address to the nation, against the backdrop of nagging disturbances in the country over the issues of election.

Fakhruddin however stopped short of mentioning any timeframe for the parliamentary elections -- earlier set for January 22, and just cancelled yesterday.

19 GIs killed

FROM PAGE 16
centre where Iraqi security forces, civilian officials and coalition forces were meeting to discuss security for the Ashura ceremony.

"The provincial joint coordination centre in Karbala was attacked with grenades, small arms and indirect fire by an illegal armed militia group on January 20," the statement said.

Ashura, which commemorates the seventh-century slaying of the Prophet Mohammed's grandson Imam Hussein in Karbala, has been marred in recent years by attacks by Sunni extremists that have killed scores of people.

Another US soldier was killed by roadside bomb in northern Iraq Saturday, a statement said, correcting an earlier US report that two soldiers had died.

The latest fatalities brought the US military's losses since the invasion to 3,044, according to an AFP count based on Pentagon figures.

As the death toll surged, a Newsweek poll found that more than two-thirds of Americans had opposed sending 21,500 more troops to Iraq, the cornerstone of Bush's policy shift for the war-torn nation.

About 68 percent said Washington should not send additional troops, while 26 percent support the increase.

Iran president vows

FROM PAGE 16
whereas the Zezal is reported to have a range of 100 to 400 kilometres (60 to 250 miles).

Iran, Opec's second largest oil exporter, says its nuclear programme is solely aimed at meeting civilian energy needs.

But the United States, the European Union and Israel fear it could lead to Iran developing its own nuclear arsenal -- dramatically changing the balance of power in the Middle East and Central Asia.

The United States has also blamed Iran, together with Syria, for fomenting unrest in Iraq.

On Saturday, Tehran's chief nuclear negotiator Ali Larjani said Iran's armed forces were ready for any threat to its nuclear installations, amid speculation that the United States and Israel are planning a military strike.

Echoing those sentiments, Ahmadinejad said Sunday: "They say war is coming. What war? It is all propaganda."

"The Iranian nation, the government, the parliament and the supreme leader are standing firm and we are ready for any circumstances."

Asked what he thought of an imminent move by the European Union for full and rapid implementation of UN sanctions, Ahmadinejad replied: "I find it highly unlikely for anything to happen."

"Using sanctions as a weapon is a rusty one and it will not be effective."

About the influence of black money and muscle power on election, he said the present caretaker government is determined to free the election from corruption and terrorism. He assured that tough measures would be taken to reform the overall election process and system so black money and muscle power cannot obstruct a fair election as well as true reflection of people's will.

Fakhruddin said appropriate steps would be taken to ensure the statement of assets and sources of income of intending election candidates and prove the authenticity of their statements.

"We want banishment of muscle power and illegal money from the election arena," he said, expressing the hope that political parties will extend all-out cooperation in this respect by way of reflecting it in the political culture, including nomination process.

Govt to ensure

FROM PAGE 16
officials of different ministries were present at the meeting among others.

Safiya, the industries adviser, told the journalists that the crisis is not that much severe as it is said by different quarters. "We may seek assistance from the armed forces in this regard as they're already helping the civil administration."

Asked whether there is any organised cartel that created the fertiliser crisis, Safia shrugged off the idea and categorically said stern actions would be taken against those who would try to stockpile the agri-input.

She also emphasised the need for a long-term plan to avoid fertiliser crisis in the future.

Dr CS Karim, the agriculture adviser, said, "We must ensure the farmers that there is a certain amount of fertiliser in the dealer's shop for them. So, it's a jihad for us to reach fertiliser to the doorsteps of the farmers in time."

The US paratroopers in Baghdad make up the first of five US brigades due to deploy alongside nine Iraqi brigades in the capital.

Part of their mission is to take on militias accused of fuelling the sectarian conflict that left tens of thousands of Iraqis dead last year.

On Sunday, the violence continued unabated.

In the southern city of Basra, a roadside bomb killed a British soldier and wounded three others, a British military spokesman said.

Six Iraqis died and 15 were wounded when a bomb exploded in a bus in Baghdad, and another Iraqi was killed in a separate blast east of the capital.