

Obama downplays campaign's racial factor

AP, Washington

Democrat Barack Obama said yesterday he was reluctant to ask for Secret Service protection this early in the 2008 presidential race.

"I'm not an entourage guy. You know, up until recently, I was still taking my wife Michelle's grocery list and going to the grocery store once in a while," the Illinois senator said.

Obama, who is black, acknowledged that some of the threats against him were racially motivated.

"You know, I don't spend a lot of time thinking about it or considering the details of this, but just to broaden the issue, are there people who would be troubled with an African-American president? Yes," he said. "Are there folks who might not vote for me because I'm African-American? No doubt."

But Obama said that if he doesn't win, it will not be because of the color of his skin.

"It's going to be because I didn't project a vision of leadership that gave people confidence. It's going to be because of something I didn't do as opposed to because I'm African-American," he said.

On affirmative action, Obama, a Harvard Law School graduate, said he thinks that someday when his two young daughters apply to college, they "should probably be treated by any admissions officer as folks who are pretty advantaged" and there is nothing wrong with that.

"I think that we should take into account white kids who have been disadvantaged and been brought up in poverty and shown themselves to have what it takes to succeed," he added. "There are a lot of African-American kids who are still struggling."

Obama said that "if we have done what needs to be done to ensure that kids who are qualified to go to college can afford it, that affirmative action becomes a diminishing tool for us to achieve racial equality in this society."

His comments came in an interview broadcast Sunday on "This Week" on ABC.

On the other hand, Republican presidential candidate Rudy Giuliani reaffirmed his "passionate" support for abortion rights and argued against picking Supreme Court nominees based on their view of the ruling that legalized abortion.

"My view is that there shouldn't be a litmus test on Roe against Wade," the former New York City mayor said. "I'm going to select strict constructionist judges. They're free to take a look at Roe against Wade, take a look at Roe against Wade, but I believe I should leave it to them to decide that."

Giuliani repeatedly has defended his positions, which have been criticized as contradictory, on late-term abortion, public funding for abortions and the Roe v. Wade decision.

"I'm very, very passionate about the issue of abortion," he said. "I oppose it. That's a principle I've held forever, and I'll hold it forever. That's not going to change. But I also believe that in a society like ours, where people have very, very consciences about this, it's best to respect each others' differences and allow for choice."

Iran 'agrees' to hold talks

an official request to Iran through the Swiss embassy in Tehran and also following mediation efforts by Iraqi officials, local media reported.

The United States did not confirm fixed plans for talks but a spokeswoman travelling with US Vice President Dick Cheney on his latest tour of the Middle East said Washington was ready for such dialogue.

Lea Anne McBride said the United States had shown "willingness to have that conversation, limited to Iraq issues, at the ambassador level."

Hosseini's comments come just over a week after hopes were dashed that Iran and the United States would hold substantive contacts at the conference on Iraq's security in the Egyptian resort of Sharm el-Sheikh.

At that meeting, Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki barely exchanged pleasantries with US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice while a lower-level encounter on May 4 between high-ranking diplomats lasted just minutes.

Attempts by the Egyptian hosts to bring Rice and Mottaki together over dinner were stymied when the Iranian minister walked out of the gathering in protest at the secretary of state's revealing dress.

The United States cut ties in 1980 during the 444-day siege of the US embassy in Tehran by radical students and ties have remained frozen ever since. Its interests in Tehran are now looked after by the Swiss embassy.

Hannan Shah

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constituency with BNP-led alliance's ticket, was defeated in 2001 parliamentary elections. Hannan's vengeful activists made attempts to kill the complainant on several dates in October, 2001.

He was attacked by Hannan's goons on October 3, 4, 7, 8 and 9 near Kapashia Degree College campus on his way to the college.

After the attacks, Ruhul filed a general diary with Kapashia PS and complained to the college principal, but the authorities did not take any action against the assailants. Ruhul Amin had to stop attending the college since then in fear of further assault by Hannan Shah's thugs.

Saiful Islam Khan Dilu, the then member of board of directors of Kapashia Degree College, on March 11 in 2004 met the complainant at Kapashia bazaar and demanded Tk 2 lakh on behalf of Hannan Shah in exchange for reinstating Ruhul to the post of lecturer.

"Dilu said Hannan Shah, chairman of the board of directors of the college, will reinstate me to the job at the college if I gave Hannan Shah Tk 2 lakh," Ruhul mentioned in the case statement.

When he said that he was incapable of arranging such a large amount of money, Dilu proposed Ruhul that he could initially pay Tk 1 lakh in cash and the rest of the money after being reinstated to the job, added the complainant.

Ruhul Amin agreed to Dilu's proposal and wanted to speak with Hannan Shah directly. Dilu then called Hannan Shah on his cell phone and let him speak to Hannan.

Hannan Shah told Ruhul that he should entertain the demands of Dilu and Obaid Ullah, another member of the board of directors of the college and a local BNP leader, Ruhul noted.

The complainant said on March 29, 2004, he went to Dilu's business establishment at Kapashia bazaar with Tk 1 lakh in cash. Obaid Ullah, Hannan Shah's son Rezaul Hannan, Rubel Sarker, Jewel Rana and Selim were present with Saiful Islam Khan Dilu at that time.

Ruhul told Dilu that he would not hand over the money to him unless he lets him talk to Hannan Shah on the cell phone. As Dilu called Hannan from his cell phone and let him speak to Hannan, Ruhul handed the money over to Dilu.

"Dilu Khan received Tk 1 lakh on Hannan Shah's behalf. Rezaul Hannan then threatened to kill me if I informed anyone of the matter," Ruhul claimed.

The complainant further said that he was not reinstated to the job despite the payment and the money was not given back to him either. When he tried to file an extortion case against Hannan and his men, police at that time did not accept the case.

Officer in Charge of Kapashia PS Mokhlesur Rahman said Sub Inspector Abdul Bashar is investigating the case.

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