

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 awhile," 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 the limitations, but I believe I should leave it to them to decide that."

Giuliani repeatedly 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

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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 bazar 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 Obaed 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 bazar with Tk 1 lakh in cash. Obaed Ullah, Hannan Shah's son Rezaul Hannan, Rubel Sarker, Jewel Rana and Selim were present with Saiful Islam Khan Dilu at that time.

Ruhul then 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 talk 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 Mokhelesur Rahman said Sub Inspector Abul Bashar is investigating the case.

Militants threaten

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knows what will happen".

District judge Md Safiuddin and judge Mainuddin refused to make any comment on the matter but said the law enforcement agencies have been informed about the letter.

Security was increased on the Barisal court compound following the incident.

Manpower

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inquire into it so that genuine workers are not harassed for "technical or bureaucratic faults".

Chowdhury said the UAE Labour Minister would arrive here on May 20 when Bangladesh and the Gulf country will sign agreement on sending more workers and protecting their interests over there. Presently five to 7 lakh Bangladeshi workers are employed in the United Arab Emirates.

Joynal Hazari

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in a Tk 50 lakh extortion case filed with Mohehskhali Police Station on April 15.

Former Chairman of Hoyaonok union in Mohehskhali Abdul Mabud Chowdhury filed the case against Alamgir and 18 others.

EX-MP ZAFAR SENT TO JAIL

Former BNP lawmaker Faridpur-1 constituency Shah Mohammad Abu Zafar was sent to jail yesterday when he appeared at a local court in a case filed in connection with misappropriation of relief materials.

District and Sessions Judge M Abdul Majid rejected his bail petition and ordered sending him to prison. Later, he was sent to Kashimpur jail, reports our Faridpur correspondent.

The case was filed against him following the recovery of 304 CI sheets of government relief fund from his village home by the joint forces on February 12.

Voter list

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have to do it carefully," said Huda, who was made the CEC on February 14 following the resignation of controversial CEC MA Aziz.

In the past, the EC has always prepared voter lists by sending its officials on door-to-door visits.

Earlier in July last year, the then EC led by Aziz initiated a procedure to update the voter list by asking people to visit offices of election officials and local government representatives and include or delete their names rather than by sending its officials on door-to-door visit.

However, the EC was compelled to change its stance amid lukewarm response from the people and severe criticism of the procedure. It then decided to send its staffs to visit door to door to update the voter roll.

YESTERDAY'S MEETING

The Bangladesh Army delegation and the EC consultants demonstrated three methodologies for preparing the voter list with photographs—fully digital, optical mark reader (OMR), and traditional, CEC Huda said.

Huda did not specify any time frame required for each option. "It is difficult to specify the time frames for the options as the time can be reduced by increasing the number of teams. If we increase the number to 9,000 instead of 8,000, it will speed up the task," he added.

"We are examining the options. Our main objective is to prepare the voter list with photographs within the 18-month time frame. If

Govt trying

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Tanvir Islam Joy, who is on the Bangladesh government announced list of 23 most-wanted criminals, was arrested from a clothing store at Rajarhat in Kolkata, India.

The Bangladesh foreign ministry on May 7 sent a letter to the Indian foreign ministry through Bangladesh's Deputy High Commission in Kolkata requesting to handover Joy.

Joy's name figured among the top five on the list of most wanted criminals which Bangladesh Rifles handed over to Indian Border Security Force at the beginning of the year.

During the discussion, police officials talked about their problems they face while performing duties. Officers-in-charge of 25 model police stations, set up across the country, also took part in the discussion.

Jalil for law to throw

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they had placed a 31-point reform proposal. "We had long been calling for an independent and strong Election Commission (EC)," he added.

The AL leader called on the interim government to lift the ban on political activities especially indoor politics so they could begin the work on reforms and help the EC carry out electoral reforms.

He also urged it to hand over power to an elected government after a free and fair election as soon as possible.

Asked about reform of the political parties, he said the AL has grown to be the largest political party through reforms since its founding. "If further reforms are necessary to keep pace with the changing times, we will of course discuss the issue at the party forum once the ban on indoor politics is gone," he observed.

"But there would be no reforms without Sheikh Hasina," Jalil said adding, "The party leaders and workers are emotionally attached to her as they see in her the reflection of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. No one in the party could think of a leadership minusher."

"Hasina never wanted to be the Awami League president. It was rather the leaders of the organisation

possible, we will prepare it before the expiration of the timeframe," said the CEC.

Once the option and methodology is decided, the EC will start procuring a huge number of laptops, cameras and other necessary equipment to start the task.

Meanwhile, about amending the electoral ordinance and rules for preparing the voter list with photographs, Election Commissioner Sahul Hossain said they will be amended in time. Asked if the EC will consider the voter list prepared in 2000 in accordance with a High Court verdict, he said the EC will not consider the existing voter list as a completely new list will be prepared.

At a press conference on April 5, the CEC announced the 18-month time frame for preparing the voter list with photographs for holding the ninth parliamentary election.

On April 12, Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed declared in an address to the nation that the ninth parliamentary election will be held before the expiration of 2008.

HC's first rule

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countrywide operation against crime and corruption.

Exercising the power yesterday, a High Court division bench comprising Justice MA Matin and Justice MA Hye issued a couple of rules upon the government to explain why the two petitioners "should not be granted bail."

The court rules came on separate applications filed by Sabera Aman, wife of former state minister for labour and employment Amanullah Aman, and industrialist and Awami League leader Salman F Rahman.

The rule in Sabera's case is returnable in a week while Salman's in two weeks.

Sabera, facing a corruption case, was denied bail and sent to jail on May 9 when she appeared in the special graft court at the Jatuya Sangsad Bhaban complex.

Sabera, along with her detained husband, has been charged with non-submission of statement of their wealth—which they acquired beyond their known sources of income—within the stipulated timeframe set by the Anti-Corruption Commission.

Salman is facing a corruption case filed with New Market police station in April.

Minimum capital

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problem for the banking sector, rather it will increase the financial strength of the banks. "It will also increase depositors' confidence in the banks," Ibrahim, a veteran banker who had held the top positions of different state-owned and private banks, said.

He also said the central bank made a commitment to international agencies such as the Basel Committee to bring international standard in the banking sector and for that it is necessary to increase the amount of the required minimum capital up to 12 percent of the banks' risk-weighted assets.

As a signatory, Bangladesh will start implementing the Basel Accord 2 in 2009, the BB's financial sector review of December 2006 says. The review also says the banks will have to mitigate their various risks to implement the accord.

The second Basel Accord was finalised in 2004 and it referred to capital adequacy, ensuring that financial institutions retain enough capital to protect themselves against unexpected losses.

Supporting the necessity for increasing the amount of the required minimum capital for banks, the BB review says international businesses are playing an active role in the domestic economy due to globalisation and the banks are increasingly being exposed to this process. It also states that since a bank's capital represents its risk status, international banks like to see a local bank's capital adequacy before engaging in any business with it.

Muggers

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muggers pointed a small firearm and tried to snatch a bag containing Tk 4 lakh from Shohag.

"As Shohag tried to resist, they fired three shots two of which penetrated his chest and left arm," Nazmul said quoting a witness.

The muggers fled with the bag. However, they could not take Tk 1 lakh that Shohag had in his pocket.

In another incident, four criminals stormed the office of Omar Faruq on the second floor of West Inn around 7:45am and demanded toll from him.

As Faruq refused to pay, two of the criminals fired eight shots, two in his two legs and the rest at a wall, Faruq told reporters at DMCH.

ACC boss

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Chaired by Deputy Commissioner Mohammed Aminul Islam, the meeting was also addressed by Police Super Banaj Kumar Majumdar, Begum Zahanara Islam, General Secretary of Rakhain Welfare Association Monghola Rakhain and Rezaul Karim, a student.

At the meeting, the local people expressed their keen interest to be involved in the anti-corruption drive.

Later, the ACC chairman also visited Bandarban, Rangamati and Khagrachhari.

BSF kills 1

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Sources said the BSF fired five rounds of bullet on Kalu and two others while they were trying to cross the border. The BDR answered with 10 rounds of bullet.

Kalu died on the spot, sources added. However, fate of the two others could not be known.

Migration

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first. We'll not do anything that destroys our labour market."

Meanwhile, sources concerned said that the law enforcement agencies recently sought permission from the expatriates' ministry for raiding the manpower agency offices, but opted not to go for it immediately as per the ministry advice that there might be a negative impact on the manpower business.

Ashrafal

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"It is nothing serious but he has been admitted to the hospital only as a precautionary measure," informed Mahmudur Rahman, chief executive officer of Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB).

Ashrafal underwent some regulation tests and the prognosis was that he has been suffering from a viral fever.

It was however learnt that his temperature increased Saturday night but it came down slightly again yesterday. There is pain in his body and he has complained of feeling weak.

UP member

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therest of the money.

The UP member and her husband threatened him with serious consequences as he asked for the return of Tk 5,000 recently, the complainant added.

It may be mentioned that Angura Begum on May 11 filed an extortion case against Ilyas Ali and four others with a Sylhet court.

Hillary promotes affordable tuition

AP, Orangeburg

Hillary Rodham Clinton used a commencement address yesterday at a historically black university to single out racial progress, from her rival Barack Obama candidacy to the achievements of South Carolina's first black chief justice.

She spoke of making college more affordable and gave a nod to Obama, her Senate colleague and Democratic primary opponent, while drawing on the university's 1960s-era demonstrations.

"Think about the students from this university who braved tear gas and water hoses and beatings and bullets to protest the injustice of segregation and usher in a new era of equality and never lived to see the day of an African-American man running for president," Clinton told the crowd of around 4,000 gathered for Claflin University's commencement.

Claflin students and those at neighboring South Carolina State University know well the civil rights history and battles in South Carolina. In 1968, three demonstrators were killed and 27 wounded when white South Carolina Highway Patrol officers fired into a crowd.

Clinton stopped at a memorial to the dead on the S.C. State campus three weeks ago when she attended the Democratic Party's first presidential debate.

During her speech, Clinton called the class of 320 graduating students a minority who are able to afford and complete the

college degrees they began pursuing.

"But what I'm finding is that so many students and their hardworking parents and families are balking at the cost of higher education," Clinton said. "When they see the price tag their hearts sink."

With fewer than half of the nation's students completing the degrees they start, government must have a larger role to play, Clinton said.

"We need to begin by making college more affordable and accessible," she said. "I think we need to take on the student loan industry and send a clear message they will be held accountable for the way they treat and mistreat students and families."

She is pushing a "student borrower bill of rights" that locks payments at a percentage of income and keeps fees and interest rates reasonable. "I don't believe that you should be subjected to bait-and-switch programs where they tell you what it's going to be and then they change it on you," she said.

Clinton also singled out Ernest Finney, the first black chief justice of South Carolina's Supreme Court. The 1952 Claflin graduate built his legal career defending more than 6,000 civil rights protesters and served on the state's highest court from 1985 to 2000.

"Believe it or not, he actually attended his first meeting of the South Carolina Bar as a waiter serving the members because membership was not open to African Americans at the time," Clinton said.

Musharraf rules out

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angry protesters beat up four policemen. Police used tear gas to clear the roadblock on the main highway.

Amid heavy gunfire nearby, a mob set ablaze around eight bamboo shops of rival groups after prayers at the funeral of a violence victim in Karachi's Federal-B area, but paramilitary troops and firefighters stopped the fire.

The funerals of two other casualties went ahead peacefully near the tomb of Pakistan's founder Muhammad Ali Jinnah.

Opposition parties observed a "black day" on Sunday over the Karachi killings and held protests in several Pakistani cities.

Activists burnt an effigy of Musharraf in central Multan city with calls that he should resign.

Musharraf, who addressed a pro-government rally attended by some 35,000 people in capital Islamabad late Saturday, condemned the unrest but laid the blame on Chaudhry and also on the opposition for impeding his supporters in Karachi.

"The main reason for what happened today in Karachi is that a judicial matter was politicised," said Musharraf, who suspended the judge for alleged abuse of office on March 9, triggering a wave of protests.

"People are with me," he asserted.

However, he said the situation did not warrant imposition of emergency. The opposition parties disagreed, saying the president was in fact working towards it.

On Saturday, Chaudhry was set to address a rally in Karachi but workers of the pro-government party Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) exchanged fire with opposition activists. MQM's rally in Karachi had been planned on the same day.

Mobs armed with assault rifles and shotguns fought pitched battles in the streets and torched at least 40 buses and cars. The government and opposition blamed each other for the violence, the Daily Times said Sunday.

Justice Chaudhry remained stranded at Karachi airport after flying in because government supporters had used trucks with deflated tyres to shut down all main roads. He returned to Islamabad later.

In Karachi, the vast Shakra-e-Faisal area from Baloch Colony Bridge to Malir 15 turned into a war zone even though rangers and police were present.

"They (police) did not interfere," the newspaper said. It quoted a low-ranking policeman at Shakra-e-Faisal, carrying only a baton. "There were some orders and our weapons were taken from us. It was as if we were put here just to watch."

Despite the deployment of 15,000 police and paramilitary troops, shooting continued through the day and city hospitals struggled to cope with the flow of dead and wounded, health officials said.

Gunmen also attacked the Aaj TV building forcing the staff to remain indoors. Firing started shortly after the station aired footage of fighting between the MQM supporters and Baloch and Pashtun groups opposing them.

'We are under attack,' Aaj TV Director of News Talat Hussain said on air as he sheltered behind a wall. 'No one has come to help us,' he said.

Journalists were also beaten up at Karachi airport. Security personnel broke camera equipment belonging to six media persons.

The rally of MQM, a party dominated by migrants from India who went to Pakistan after partition in 1947, was "thinly attended," media reports said. Its chief Alraf Hussain, who is exiled in London, addressed it over telephone.

Hussain claimed that his supporters' rally had been peaceful and the situation had deteriorated only when Chaudhry arrived in Karachi.

He held Chaudhry responsible for the deaths that had been caused and demanded that he apologise to the nation 'for taking judicial matters onto the streets'.

35 killed

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The local offices of the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Kurdish leader Massud Barzani and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan of Iraqi President Jalal Talabani were hit, and many local officials were among the wounded, police said.

Kurdish parties and security forces have become a target of choice for Sunni Arab extremists, who accuse the minority population of collaborating with the US forces fighting the country's insurgency.

Another powerful bomb blast killed at least 10 Iraqis in a central Baghdad market on Sunday, hitting a district targeted by several insurgent attacks this year that have left hundreds dead.

Defence and security officials put the casualty toll from the blast at 10 dead and 45 wounded. Three police were among those killed and five more were wounded.

A single loud detonation sent a cloud of dust and smoke billowing over the skyline of the Iraqi capital above the Sadiyiah market, a popular commercial centre for east Baghdad's mainly Shia population.

Two US army Apache helicopter gunships arrived shortly after the blast and began circling over the scene.

At street level, dozens of bystanders gathered around a large crater in Wathba Square, which lies at the entrance to the market.

Last month, about 140 people were killed by a car bombing in Sadiyiah, and 130 others were slain in a near identical attack in February. These were the two bloodiest single attacks on civilians since the March 2003 US-led invasion.