

## National ID registration authority in offing

It has its job cut out

THE decision to form a statutory body styled National Identities Registration Authority (NIRA) through an ordinance signals a significant move to provide a durable institutional basis for the issuance of national ID card. Its importance also lies in that it will give the needed legal cover to national ID card and voter registration project already undertaken by the Election Commission (EC).

Under the proposed ordinance, EC would hand over information, data and biometric features of the citizens collected so far to the new authority; and the already distributed ID cards would also come under NIRA's jurisdiction. In effect, we believe this will bring the issue of national identity card under a bigger administrative, legal and security umbrella.

Understandably, the draft ordinance, prepared by the ministry of law, will have to be approved by the EC and the advisory council before it is sent to the president for promulgation. Its passing through different phases should ensure the delivery of a well-crafted law that will enable the statutory body to handle the big and complex task involved with the required amount of efficiency.

From collection and preservation of data through issuance of identity cards to all voting-age citizens to their multiple use in terms of access to facilities, the functions are formidable, especially when this is for the first time that we are going for it.

Just as the approach must be all-inclusive, leaving out no genuine citizen so also it should be impervious to wrongful entries. The system has to be foolproof with all data entered into computers and centrally preserved but it cannot be all too cast-iron as modifications in individual informational status may have to be catered for. The provision against wrongdoing is important when the ID cards will be used not only as a proof of identity and a right to vote but also to obtain access to some 18 facilities like TIN, driving licence, bank loan, passport, only to name a few.

We are hoping that NIRA would be manned by persons of appropriate expertise and standing to be able to perform the job efficiently. It will be worthwhile to make the statutory body accountable to some authority.

## Bringing women into mainstream

They are a reservoir of energy and talent

WHAT could be a more ringing endorsement of the International Women's Day theme 'Investing in women and girls' than the one reverberating from a discussion meet organised by ActionAid to mark the day on Wednesday. That women make better and more responsible use of money than their male counterparts and are proficient in jobs requiring attention to detail and finesse are established facts. Little wonder, therefore, that they are such success stories in two sectors -- microcredit and garment industry. Their efficient utilisation of microcredits, both in self-employed and group projects have led to a degree of poverty alleviation in a significant number of households. The replication of such projects on a larger scale is only desirable but that needs a greater allocation of resources.

On the garments front, the owners of factories are required to invest more in the welfare of women workers who are at the raw end of the deal, for all one knows.

There is a noticeable enthusiasm among upcoming women entrepreneurs to start SMEs of one kind or the other. They have a clear case to be given favourable equity terms by the banks and specialised financial institutions.

Investment in girls is vital for grooming up future women leaders. Gender equality in terms of educational access leaves much to be desired in the rural areas. Greater investment is necessary in that area together with awareness building among rural parents to send their daughters to schools and colleges. Widely dispersed vocational training institutes must be opened for them.

There is no doubt that women have come a long way in making their presence felt as doctors, lawyers, journalists, engineers, teachers, researchers and NGO leaders. But, of course, their representation in parliament and policy-making roles is still limited. Greater investment in women and girls can make their future brighter indeed.

## Trial of war criminals



A.N.M. NURUL HAQUE

A sort of national consensus has developed recently for bringing the war criminals of the liberation war to justice. The Election Commission (EC), responding to the demand of the political parties, has announced that it will recommend to the caretaker government (CTG) to initiate steps for the trial of the war criminals.

Most of the political parties that participated in talks with the EC have demanded disqualification of war criminals from contesting in elections. The EC has suggested to the parties to raise the issue strongly with the CTG during their proposed dialogue with it. The EC has already incorporated a provision in its draft electoral reform proposal to disqualify the war criminals from contesting in any election.

Apart from the political parties, veteran freedom fighters, family members of martyrs and a large number of conscious citizens have been urging the CTG to initiate the trial of war criminals. Former chief adviser Justice Habibur Rahman

has also criticised the present CTG for not taking up the issue of holding trial of war criminals.

Trials of war criminals have been held throughout the world. The first war crimes trial in modern times was held after World War II by the victorious Allied nations to prosecute German and Japanese war criminals.

Many nations that Germany occupied during World War II, or which collaborated with the Germans in the persecution of civilian populations, especially

The trials were held in the city of Nuremberg, Germany, from 1945 to 1949, at the Nuremberg Palace of Justice.

The first and best known of these trials was of the major war criminals before the International Military Tribunal (IMT). The IMT tried 22 major war criminals between October 18, 1945, and October 1, 1946, and twelve of those convicted were sentenced to death.

In 1993 and 1994, the United Nations (UN) established war

International Criminal Court (ICC) to try people accused of genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and crimes of aggression. The ICC was designed to replace ad hoc tribunals of limited jurisdiction, such as those created to address the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia and in Rwanda. The ICC, with its headquarters in The Hague, officially came into being on July 1, 2002.

All such instances clearly demonstrate that no one, even a head of state, is immune. The case of

crimes committed by the local collaborators of Pakistani occupation forces, such as Razakars, Al-Badr, Al-Shams, and Peace Committee members charged with specific allegations of war atrocities. But the tribunals were abolished during the post-Mujib regimes on the plea of national unity.

Of late, these elements have been raising their heads to snap at the ideals and values of our liberation war. It is ironical, indeed, that a university teacher informs us that

despite repeated efforts by the civil society over the past decades. The negligence of the previous political governments was mostly responsible for it.

The CTG, though bound by a time frame, can take the first crucial step towards processing the trial of war criminals, paving the way for the next elected government to complete the trials. The people are quite unwilling to forget and forgive what had been done to them by some of their own compatriots.

Sector Commanders' Forum (SCF), a platform of sector commanders of the liberation war, has launched a movement to bring the war criminals to trail through forming a legal committee. Hundreds of students and teachers of Dhaka University have expressed their solidarity with the SCF, demanding trial of war criminals. They have also expressed their commitment to work with SCF and build opinion against the war criminals.

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Leaders of Ghatik Dal Nirmul Committee have called for boycotting war criminals in the next parliamentary election. The conscious citizens of the country must raise their voices louder in demanding the trial of war criminals. Our failure this time may be failure forever.

A.N.M. Nurul Haque is a columnist of The Daily Star.

## BY THE NUMBERS

**Sector Commanders' Forum (SCF), a platform of sector commanders of the liberation war, has launched a movement to bring the war criminals to trail through forming a legal committee. Hundreds of students and teachers of Dhaka University have expressed their solidarity with the SCF, demanding trial of war criminals. They have also expressed their commitment to work with SCF and build opinion against the war criminals.**

Jews, held national trials in the years following World War II.

Poland, the former Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union, Hungary, Romania, and France, among others, tried thousands of defendants, both Germans and indigenous collaborators, in the decades since 1945. The Soviet Union held its first trial, the Krasnodar Trial, against local collaborators in 1943, long before World War II had ended.

The Nuremberg Trials were a series of trials, most notable for the prosecution of prominent persons of the political, military and economic leadership of Nazi Germany.

crimes tribunals to prosecute those who committed crimes during the civil wars in the former Yugoslavia and in Rwanda. In 2002, the UN and the government of Sierra Leone established a jointly administered war crimes tribunal to prosecute atrocities committed during Sierra Leone's civil war.

A similar court has been constituted to prosecute war criminals from Cambodia. The Khmer Rouge leaders are now being tried by a tribunal formed under UN assistance, after more than 28 years of killing around two million people.

The UN approved a statute in July 1998, creating a permanent

Cambodia can be of great help for us as it shows that lapse of time and inaction in the past do not really hinder holding of war criminals' trial. The International Crimes (Tribunals) Act 1973, promulgated on July 20, 1973, provides the CTG with power to try the war criminals of our liberation war by constituting tribunals.

The government announced general amnesty on November 30, 1973, for those who were not charged with specific allegations of war atrocities. The amnesty came alongside a collaborator law setting up 75 tribunals throughout the country for trying serious war

there are no war criminals in Bangladesh as the war in 1971 was between India and Pakistan, and a senior leader of Jamaat-e-Islami says there was no genocide in 1971.

The UN's declaration of Universal Human Rights 1981 says: "Among the genocides of human history, the highest number of people killed in lower span of time was in Bangladesh in 1971. On an average 6,000 to 12,000 people were killed every single day."

The most disgraceful thing for the nation is that the collaborators who were largely responsible for the biggest genocide of human history were never brought to trail,

## Writing a new chapter in the US dream



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

SENATOR Obama and Senator Clinton have provided the US electorate in general, and those professing the democratic persuasion in particular, with drama of most interesting proportions. Their close contest has been carefully watched within the United States and analysed by others in the rest of the world. That has been so because in any US Presidential election, the electorate consists not only of US citizens but also those in other countries who might be directly or indirectly affected by the outcome.

This year, the world attention has gravitated more towards the process of finding a Democratic nominee because many think that Democrats have more than an even chance in the upcoming US Presidential election. There is also a growing belief that there will be consolidation of the Democratic presence in the US Congress. There is also another factor -- fascination about the possibility that for the first time an African-American or a woman might be a Presidential candidate from a major political party. This would be a historical breaking of new ground.

The latest round of Primaries that finished on 4 March has seen Senator John McCain anointed as the sole Republican nominee for the election. He has already secured the minimum number of delegates required for the nomination. In a manner of speaking, this will be a boon for the hard-pressed Republicans. They can now concentrate on future strategy while the Democratic nominees con-

tinue to feud amongst themselves and carry on a bitter, negative and divisive campaign till their Convention in June.

The already tense dead-heat situation within the Democratic electoral process has also been further compounded with the recent announcement that Mr. Ralph Nader has decided to run as an independent in the Presidential election. Mr. Nader has played some sort of role in every race for the White House since 1992 and has been an influential figure in American public life for 40 years.

Presidential election in 1992. They believe that this enabled Democrat Bill Clinton to triumph narrowly over George Bush Senior. These past experiences have demonstrated that third-party candidates can have a real impact.

This time round, the Democrats are again becoming worried that Nader might cast a long shadow on any Democratic nominee who might emerge after a protracted bitter and negative struggle. They might just be right.

The electoral process in the USA is complex and interesting because

There are the Primaries, the Caucuses, the pledged delegates and also the super delegates. Democracy can be confusing in the United States, particularly so, when you have a situation where a candidate might have secured higher number of pledged delegates in the Primaries and also a higher popular vote and yet lose the nomination because of independent super-delegates.

The role of these special delegates has gained significance with prospects of a deadlock looming large after the latest round of

states and the most pledged delegates from the most voters in the country, then it would be problematic for the political insiders to overturn the judgment of the voters. That is true, but Mrs. Clinton's supporters are now hinting that she should be treated as the right candidate to oppose McCain (despite a possible shortfall in pledged delegates) because she has shown her promise by winning big States like California, New York, Texas and Ohio -- all of which will matter greatly during the Presidential election in November. They have

This has captured my attention and of many others in Bangladesh because we are also going to have a general election in this country by the end of the year. The only difference is that in the USA everyone is involved, and in the participatory mode, with full freedom of expression. Over here it is significantly different with many expected areas of activity (associated with any free, fair and credible election) being held back because of restraints that are in place due to a state of emergency.

It will now be interesting to see what transpires over the next few weeks. The Clinton campaign, after their recent success, is upbeat about their chances. They are also cautious about playing down expectations. They understand that they might have gained in Ohio and Texas playing on themes like Obama not being clear about his stand on NAFTA (which is a four letter word to blue collar manufacturing workers), being connected with controversial financiers or being experienced in matters of national security. They also realize that their recent aggressive streak, more likely than not will meet with stiffer opposition from Obama in the near future.

It will be an interesting Spring in the US political landscape. Obama has lost some of his 'momentum' to Hillary. It will however be important to find out whether Hillary can translate her immediate advantage into self-perpetuating action. The last week has seen grace, respect and dignity thrown out of the window within the Democratic Party and its rival contenders. It has been like offering a bowl of cream to their rivals in the Republican camp.

The Democrats will have to remember that a cocktail of bitter brawl and shrill accusations mixed with a tilted selection through special delegates might do more harm than good. It might be Walter Mondale all over again.

Muhammad Zamir is a former Secretary and Ambassador.

## POST BREAKFAST

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He has also been the scourge of corporate greed and wasteful defence spending and champion of consumer rights and the need to protect the environment. His public life as measured through the ballot box has not perhaps been very successful -- he achieved 2.74 percent of the popular vote in 2000.

However, he is best remembered for the central role that he played in the dramas of the 2000 contest between George W Bush and Al Gore that still rangles many Democrats to this day. That contest, a virtual dead-heat between the two main candidates in the state of Florida ended up for Bush by a few hundred votes, thanks to the loss of nearly 100,000 votes cast for Nader. Since then, Democrats have blamed Nader for handing the presidency to George W Bush.

In similar fashion, Republicans have also never failed to express their dislike for independent conservative candidate Ross Perot for having taken away 19 per cent of the popular votes during the US

of the various facets associated with selection of the nominee. Each factor impacts in its own way. They also create dimensions that affect not only perceptions about the candidate but also the issues under debate. Each factor is important by itself, but they all interact with each other and then generate a separate paradigm. One can in this regard highlight some of the following -- white votes (broken up into white men and women), African-American vote bank, middle-class voters, blue-collar workers, cross-over voters, Hispanic vote bank, Roman Catholic vote bank, rural and urban voters and voters who are senior citizens and younger voters. These apparently, are only some of the intricate divisions that influence decision-making.

Then comes the process of selection itself. I have been listening to analysts on several TV news channels and have like most others learnt something new every week. The electoral dynamics is intricate.

Primaries in Texas, Ohio, Rhode Island and Vermont. Pundits are busy predicting that the super-delegates will be the deciders. There are 796 of these "insiders", as they're called. They include members of congress, governors, former presidents and office holders as well as unelected officials. Their increased prominence has led to speculation of a return to the smoke-filled rooms that dominated politics before the party electoral procedures were reformed after 1968. Both the Clinton and Obama campaigns are pushing hard to secure pledges of support from these key figures.

The last time the Democratic super-delegates played a decisive role was in 1984 when they backed Walter Mondale over Gary Hart. This year the competition is closer. Barack Obama's supporters, especially after the re-vitalized performance of Hillary Clinton on 4 March, recognize their added importance. They are pointing out that if they end up with the most

also stressed that, in recent memory no Democrat has won the White House without having won Ohio.

In any case, it is interesting to see how the entire USA has become involved in the selection process. This has included endorsements that in their own way are impacting on the elective progression. The classical case has been the division within the Kennedy family itself in their support for the rival Democratic candidates. Robert Kennedy Jr. and Kathleen Kennedy have sided with Hillary and Caroline Kennedy (daughter of President Kennedy), Ethel Kennedy and Maria Shriver have endorsed Obama. This endorsement procedure has been applicable for all candidates from both the Republican and the Democratic parties. It has included politicians, musicians, representatives from the entertainment industry and newspapers. It has added talk-time to talkshows.

## Hillary works the refs and wins a close call

FAKHURUDDIN AHMED

DEMOCRATIC presidential candidate Senator Hillary Clinton made the American media turn on a dime. In their last debate in Ohio on February 26, from the outset an aggressive Clinton employed the "kitchen sink" strategy of throwing everything at Obama. She complained that she always gets the first question, lending credence to the skit on NBC's Saturday Night Live comedy on February 23 that made fun of media's fawning over Obama. She asked sarcastically: "Perhaps we should ask Barack whether he needs another pillow!"

Instead of dismissing her whining -- she was on an 11-primaries and caucuses losing streak -- the media went into introspection, concluded that they were indeed anti-Clinton and turned on Obama. Instead of giving Obama equal time, on March 1 Saturday Night Live ran another skit that purported to show media's pro-Obama bias. Additionally, they invited Hillary Clinton to make a cameo appearance on the program and to pitch to the voters of the four states -- Ohio, Vermont, Rhode Island

and Texas -- that held primaries on March 4.

Then suddenly a picture of Barack Obama appeared on the Drudge Report website, showing Obama trying on the local garb, including a turban, tunic and walking stick during his visit to Kenya in 2006. The Drudge Report said that a Hillary Clinton campaign staffer submitted the photo, complaining of a pro-Obama media bias. In its March 10 issue, Time magazine published photographs of George W. Bush (China), Bill Clinton (Indonesia) and Hillary Clinton (Eritrea) wearing traditional garb on visits to those nations. Of course, Bush, Bill and Hillary Clinton's "American-ness" are beyond question; Obama's is not. Hillary Clinton and the Republicans are trying to make the point that Barack Hussein Obama's name and the man himself sound and look "foreign."

Politics is a game of perceptions. Appearances do influence the uninformed. The golden maxim of politics is: if you cannot nail your opponent with the truth, try dirty tricks and rumours. Candidates who believed that the public is too intelligent to be fooled by dirty tricks (Dukakis, 1988, Kerry 2004), lost. As

someone relatively new in politics, Barack Obama is especially vulnerable to lies and suspicions about his background. Most voters do not read up on the candidates. Obama's two best selling books and his website explain all about him. Voters are swayed by a candidate's portrayal in the media. Hillary Clinton and the Republicans have recently successfully painted a suspicious and negative picture of Obama. Consequently, Hillary Clinton is surging in the polls.

Despite Obama's assertion that he is a devout Christian, one rumour that has been circulated by supporters of Israel and other Obama detractors for months is that Obama is a "secret Muslim." On March 2, on the hugely popular CBS show "60 Minutes," Steve Kroft asked Hillary

## LETTER FROM AMERICA

**Obama is expected to win primaries in Wyoming on March 8 and Mississippi on March 11. Expect the Obama campaign to go negative, asking Clinton to release her tax returns, and question her "experience" in her White House days when she did not have the security clearance to attend national security meetings.**

Clinton whether she believed Obama is a Muslim. Instead of categorically saying "no," Hillary added caveats "I take his word for it," and "As far as I know." The next day NBC's Andrea Mitchell asked Hillary the same question and she gave a similar answer. So, Barack Obama's assertion that he is a Christian is not good enough; the supposedly "pro-Obama" media wants it to be validated by his rival, Clinton!

Hillary is asked about something false but potentially damaging to her opponent, and while she knows it is false and cannot say otherwise, she still does not want that negative to disappear completely, so she leaves some plausibility that it is true! If Muslim relatives are a disqualification for high office in the US, then Senator McCain, who won the

Republican nomination on March 4 and was endorsed by President Bush the next day, is in trouble, because he has Muslim relatives through his adopted daughter from Bangladesh, Bridget. What if Obama was a Muslim? What if his first two names "Barack and Hussein" (blessed and beautiful) are Arabic? What if he took his oath of office by placing his hands on the Qur'an (he did so on the Bible)? Are these sins? It is astonishing how many people in the US are apparently still bigots!

Under incessant attack from Hillary and the Republicans regarding his faith, I cringed as I watched Obama grovel on March 3: "I am a devout Christian. I have been attending the same church for 20 years. I pray to Jesus every night." Obama has been brought up a

Christian by his white Christian American mother, Ann Dunham of Wichita, Kansas, who died of ovarian cancer in 1995. She must be turning in her grave watching Obama's Democratic rival and the Republicans refusing to accept his Christianity.

**Hillary wins Texas and Ohio**  
After losing eleven primaries and caucuses in a row in February, Hillary Clinton went on the offensive and ran negative ads against Barack Obama. On campaign stumps and in television commercials, Clinton trivialised and ridiculed Obama's experiences. Obama's campaign is based on just one anti-Iraq war "speech" he gave in 2002, the Clinton campaign asserted.

In Ohio, Clinton blasted Obama

for one of his aides supposedly telling the Canadian officials (denied by the Canadians) that his opposition to North American Free Trade Agreement (Nafta) was because of political expediency. In Texas, Clinton ran the "It is 3 a.m. ad," purporting to show that if a crisis call came to the White House that late at night, Hillary would be the one to keep America safe.

Every political pundit knows that negative ads work. Flush with eleven victories in a row, the Obama campaign was far too complacent and far too late in responding to Hillary's deadly attacks. Consequently, Hillary won 54% to 44% in Ohio (winning 10 more pledged delegates than Obama), 51% to 48% in Texas (netting 6 more primary delegates than Obama) and 58% to 40% in Rhode Island (winning 9 more pledged delegates than Obama). Obama beat Clinton 59% to 39% in Vermont, netting 5 more pledged delegates than Clinton.

Texas awards 126 delegates in the primaries and 67 delegates in the caucuses, where Obama currently leads 56% to 44%. Overall, MSNBC estimates that Obama will win 5 more delegates than Clinton in

Texas, and that Hillary will win only 8 more delegates than Obama from the March 4 primaries and caucuses. As of this writing, Obama has 1,321 pledged delegates to Clinton's 1,186, a lead of 135. In the unelected superdelegates count, Hillary leads Obama 238 to 199. A total of 2,025 delegates are needed to win the nomination.

Obama is expected to win primaries in Wyoming on March 8 and Mississippi on March 11. Expect the Obama campaign to go negative, asking Clinton to release her tax returns, and question her "experience" in her White House days when she did not have the security clearance to attend national security meetings.

It still appears a daunting task for Clinton to close the pledged delegate gap. Superdelegates will be loath to overrule the will of the voters expressed through pledged delegates. As the Democratic contest intensifies, the Republican nominee, Senator John McCain, will enjoy watching the two Democratic candidates bloody each other!

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