

## Republicans Train Sights on Obama

As the Democratic primary contest heads to its climax, the Republicans are firing the opening shots of an election barrage to come against their probable White House opponent, Barack Obama.

Republican John McCain and his colleagues already see Hillary Clinton's campaign as mortally wounded, and are busy shaping their anti-Obama offensive in terms of national security, taxes and experience.

Mitt Romney, who was beaten by McCain in the Republican nominating race, said that for all his soaring oratory, Obama could not be trusted with the world's most powerful job.

"He has not accomplished anything during his life, in terms of legislation or leading an enterprise or making a business work or a city work or a state work," the former Massachusetts governor told CNN.



## "Massive Turnout" In Myanmar Referendum

Myanmar's ruling generals said on Sunday there was "massive turnout" in their national referendum, held despite pleas to devote their resources to saving more than a million victims of a devastating cyclone, AFP said.

Even as aid groups warned that the official toll of 60,000 dead or missing could rise unless the neediest survivors get help immediately, the regime went ahead with Saturday's vote to ratify a new constitution.

Polling stations were set up close to makeshift camps for the homeless, while much of the international community urged the generals to focus on a relief effort stalled by their refusal to allow in most foreign aid workers.

Meanwhile, food and water reached cyclone victims in greater amounts Sunday after many roads were cleared, but there was no sign Myanmar's military rulers would allow foreign experts to handle the distribution, AP quoted international aid groups as saying.

The junta says it only wants international relief material and money but not the people to manage it.

## Ally Blames Blair

Tony Blair repeatedly broke promises on making way for Gordon Brown as Britain's premier, leaving a "furious" Brown exploding like a "volcano", Blair's former deputy said in comments published Sunday.

John Prescott blew the lid on the long-running feud at the top of British politics in his autobiography, serialized in The Sunday Times newspaper, AFP reported.

The broadside piles further pressure on Brown, who at the start of the month was battered by the worst local election results for Labor since the 1960s and is facing rising discontent among backbench lawmakers.

The self-confessed "old bruiser", 69, was Blair's deputy while Brown was finance minister for 10 years until Blair resigned in June 2007.

Brown stood aside for Blair when he successfully ran for the Labor Party leadership in 1994 -- long rumored to be on the understanding that Blair would step aside for Brown to take over during a second term in office.

But Blair repeatedly reneged on promises to make way, Prescott said.

"He was definitely going in six months, perhaps a year, certainly before the next election. When it never happened, Gordon was furious and the whole cycle began again," he said.

## Zimbabwe Violence Claims 32 Lives

Zimbabwe's main opposition party said on Sunday that 32 of its supporters had been killed in post-election violence in the country and another 30 were still missing.

"Thirty-two are concerned (dead), but there are still more people that we need to verify and check," the spokesman for Movement for Democratic Change leader Morgan Tsvangirai, George Sibotshiwe, told AFP in Johannesburg.

"There are another 30 that we are unable to account for," he said. The MDC had previously put the death toll at 30.

Zimbabwe's opposition has met with Angola's president to urge him to send regional peacekeepers for Zimbabwe's upcoming presidential runoff, an opposition spokesman said Sunday.

President Jose Eduardo dos Santos is the head of the security committee of the 14-member Southern African Development Community (SADC) which has the ability to deploy peacekeepers in the region. The meeting was held late Saturday.

# Serbia Holds Key Election



A pedestrian walks past pre-election posters reading "Support Serbia!" of Prime Minister Kostunica's Democratic Party of Serbia in Belgrade on May 6.

Serbia voted on Sunday in general elections that give its people the stark choice of entering or abandoning the European Union in a rebuff to the West after the trauma of losing Kosovo, their historical heartland, according to AFP.

The latest surveys gave the ultra-nationalist Radical Party voter support of 34 percent, one point ahead of a pro-European alliance gathered around President Boris Tadic.

The elections are seen as the most important in the eight years since democratic forces overthrew late autocratic president Slobodan Milosevic, whose regime the Radicals supported.

More than 6.7 million voters—including more than 115,000 Serbs in Kosovo, the tense Albanian-majority province which broke away from Serbia in February—will elect 250 parliamentary deputies, as well as local councilors.

Polling stations throughout Serbia opened at 7:00 am (0500 GMT) and remain open until 8:00 pm (1800 GMT). Early result estimates are expected two hours later.

The vote was called in March after the year-old government of conservative nationalist Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica collapsed in a rift over ties with the European Union after most EU nations recognized Kosovo's independence.

"The May 11 elections are a form of referendum in which citizens will decide on whether or not Serbia ... will be a member of the European Union," Tadic said in a pitch to voters at the end of a spiteful campaign.

But Radicals' leader Tomislav Nikolic insisted that the EU "must recognize that Kosovo is Serbia."

"Tell us that Kosovo belongs to Serbia and you will have a friend here, otherwise, there are no friends for you here," Nikolic told the final campaign rally.

The parliamentary and local elections will also be held in Kosovo despite opposition from the United Nations and Kosovo Albanians, who see the local polls as an illegal attempt by Serbia to partition the breakaway territory.

The parliament of Kosovo, whose ethnic Albanians make up around 90 percent of its 1.8 million population, unilaterally declared independence on February 17.

Since then, about 40 countries led by the United States, Australia, Canada, Japan and most of the 27-nation European Union have recognized Kosovo, fuelling anti-western anger, protests and violence in Serbia.

That anger has bolstered hardliners who want stronger ties with Russia, China, Arab and African nations instead of countries that have helped to carve off what most Serbs consider their medieval heartland.

Besides the issue of Kosovo, politicians have also promised better living standards, a key concern in Serbia which is still impoverished after years of economic sanctions for its policies during the Balkan wars in the 1990s.

"I just want to live a normal life, to make plans for future, not to survive from day to day," said Ljubinka Jovic, a 34-year-old teach-

er whose salary of 300 euros (\$460) barely meets her monthly needs.

For years the strongest single force in Serbia's 250-seat parliament, the Radicals are counting on people's dissatisfaction with the painful economic transition.

They are again likely to remain short of an outright majority following Sunday's elections.

However this time they appear set to form a coalition government with Kostunica's nationalist Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS), which has fiercely opposed the independence of Kosovo.

The pro-Europeans headed by Tadic's Democratic Party (DS) may have gained a few popularity points after signing a pre-membership accord—the Stabilisation and Association Agreement—with the European Union in late April.

"People are eager for changes and our victory will be impressive," Rasim Ljajic, a Muslim leader aligned with the DS, said after casting his ballot in southern Serbia.

Whichever party wins the race, it will need to form a coalition with at least one other party, including the Socialists founded by Milosevic and the Liberal Democrats whose leader Cedomir Jovanovic negotiated his arrest in 2001.

The vote will be monitored by more than 2,000 local observers, as well as several international delegations, including representatives of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

## In Focus

### Chavez Accuses US of Politicizing Olympics

Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez is accusing the US government of trying to politicize the upcoming Olympic Games and of aiding protests focused on Tibet, reported AP.

He also condemned pro-Tibet protests and backed China ahead of the Olympics in Beijing.

Chavez said he will back China against what he sees as a 'secessionist' attempt in Tibet.

The US considers Tibet a part of China and says it is concerned about violence in Tibet but will refrain from meddling in China's internal affairs.

Chavez spoke after meeting with Chinese Vice Premier Hui Liangyu. Venezuelan and Chinese officials also signed cooperative accords.

Chavez met with visiting Chinese Vice Premier Hui Liangyu and the two leaders vowed to broaden cooperation in economy, trade, energy, agriculture and the fight against poverty.

During the meeting, Hui conveyed to Chavez greetings from Chinese President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao.

Hui said under the joint efforts of the two countries, the Sino-Venezuela strategic partnership has ushered in a stage of full development, featuring close high-level contacts and deepened mutual trust; growing bilateral trade and optimized trade structure; remarkable progress in cooperation in energy, agriculture, infrastructure and science and technology; and close cooperation and mutual support in international and regional affairs.

Hui also said the Chinese government has attached great importance to the consolidation and development of the strategic partnership.

Venezuela is the second leg of Hui's Latin America tour, which had taken him to Costa Rica. He will go on to visit Uruguay and Argentina.

### Lankan Gov't Claims Poll Victory

Sri Lanka's government on Sunday claimed victory in key provincial elections in the ethnically-mixed east of the island, saying the win is a major boost for its war against the Tamil Tigers, AFP reported.

Election officials confirmed the government and its allies were on track to win control over a 35-member provincial council in the east coastal region, a part of which was under rebel control before an offensive last year.

"The government victory at the eastern polls has shattered the wild dreams of the West-backed Eelamists (Tamil Tigers)," said Sri Lanka's environment minister, Patali Champika Ranawaka.

He said the results had proved "not only Sinhalese but even Tamils have placed their faith in the government."

The elections on Saturday were part of plans by President Mahinda Rajapakse to boost the war effort against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), who still control a swathe of jungle in the north.

The president wants to partially devolve power from his ethnic Sinhalese-dominated government to ethnic Tamil allies in the Tamil People's Liberation Tigers (TMVP), a party of rebel defectors based in the east.

The government, which pulled out of a truce with the LTTE in January, says this will undermine rebel demands for a separate ethnic state and could provoke further splits in guerrilla ranks.