

## Obama-McCain Fight Takes Shape

A general election contest between Democrat Barack Obama and Republican John McCain took shape on Monday, even though Hillary Clinton showed no inclination of abandoning the Democratic presidential nomination race.

"If Barack Obama wants Hillary Clinton out of this race, beat her," Clinton spokesman Howard Wolfson said Sunday. "Beat her in West Virginia, beat her in Puerto Rico, beat her in Kentucky."

The New York senator is heavily favored to win in all of these primaries. West Virginia will hold its contest on Tuesday, AFP said.

But Democratic Party leaders clearly coalesced behind Obama, who is now eager to take on McCain.

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, who has remained neutral in the nominating epic, gave a pithy outline of the Democrats' three main thrusts of attack against the Arizona senator.



## German FM Visiting Russia

German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier arrived in Russia on Monday on a five-day official visit, RIA Novosti quoted the Russian foreign ministry as saying.

During his visit, Steinmeier will visit Moscow, St. Petersburg and meet with acting Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in Yekaterinburg on May 13-14.

The German foreign minister will also hold talks on finding a settlement to the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict, as well as discussing Russia's role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The visit comes shortly after Dmitry Medvedev's inauguration as president and Vladimir Putin's appointment as prime minister.

"Germany, Europe and Russia still remain important partners for each other, the interests of which are closely interlaced owing to their multifaceted contacts in the political, economic, social, and cultural spheres," Jaeger said.

One should continue understanding the fact, that the West will be linked with Russia in the settlement of numerous international conflicts, for instance in the Middle East or around the Iranian nuclear program, he said.

## Arroyo Pardons Coup Plotters

Filipino President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo pardoned nine military officers who apologized after being convicted of a 2003 coup plot, saying Monday that "the Philippines yearns for stability—not shenanigans."

According to AP, Arroyo made the announcement during a nationally televised ceremony marking the oath-taking of new military chief Gen. Alexander Yano. He replaced a general known for fiercely defending Arroyo against coup plotters and other threats.

The government has struggled in recent years to head off unrest in the 120,000-strong military by fighting corruption, introducing reforms and modernizing equipment as it battles communist and Muslim rebels and Al-Qaeda-linked militants. The underfunded military is one of Asia's weakest.

"The dismal failure of destabilization attempts underscored just how out-of-touch the plotters are with the mood of the nation," Arroyo said.



## Kashmir Death Toll Rises

The death toll in a weekend gunfight between rebels and troops in Indian-administered Kashmir has risen to eight, AFP quoted a senior military officer as saying Monday.

The prolonged shootout that erupted on Sunday in the Himalayan region's Samba area, 70 kilometers (44 miles) south of Kashmir's winter capital Jammu, came after a sharp drop in violence in recent months.

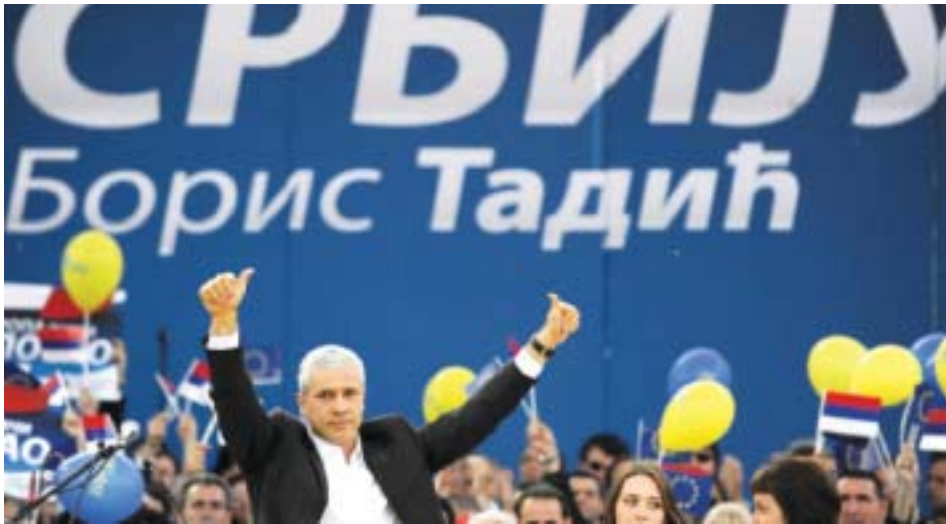
Three civilians, a photojournalist, two soldiers and two militants died, said Lieutenant General Vinay Sharma, who oversaw the counter-insurgency operation.

The pro-Pakistan Al-Mansoorian group in a telephone call to a local media organization said its militants carried out the raid during which the rebels took at least five people hostage.

One of the hostages was among the dead but the others were rescued at the end of the operation on Sunday.

Al-Mansoorian Spokesman Amir Mir refused to take responsibility for the civilian deaths, saying the group was targeting the Indian Army which has been battling the insurgency in the region since 1989.

# Pro-Europe Bloc Wins Serbia Poll



Serbian president and Democratic Party leader, Boris Tadic, gives the thumbs up during a pre-election rally in Belgrade on May 7.

A pro-western coalition determined to bring Serbia into the European Union made a surprisingly strong showing in parliamentary elections, but faced the specter of a protracted power struggle after nationalist rivals vowed to join forces and form a government.

According to AP, the challenge cast a shadow over President Boris Tadic's claim of victory in Sunday's vote, and triggered fresh political turmoil in a country divided over whether it should join the EU or shift toward Russia and revert to its nationalist past.

Tadic proclaimed after projections by an independent monitoring group and partial results from the state electoral commission gave his Coalition for a European Serbia a 10-percent lead over the ultranationalist Radical Party.

"The citizens of Serbia have confirmed Serbia's European path," he said.

But Radical leader Tomislav Nikolic urged his allies to pull together.

Nikolic said he would meet Monday with Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica's conservative coalition and former Serbian strongman Slobodan Milosevic's Socialists to form a government.

Any alliance that can muster a simple 126-seat majority in the 250-seat parliament can govern. Although Tadic's coalition appeared assured of 103 seats, the Radicals were poised to get 76 seats. If they joined forces with

Kostunica's bloc, with 30 seats, and the Socialists, with 21, the combined strength would

be 127 seats.

The European Union called the success of Tadic's coalition a "clear victory" by pro-European forces.

Official results were not expected until Monday, but the state electoral commission issued partial results that corresponded to the projections of the Center for Free Elections and Democracy and the tabulations of the main parties.

The respected center, whose representatives observed vote tallying at polling stations across Serbia, said Tadic's bloc had 39 percent. It said the Radicals were running a distant second with 28.6 percent, and that Kostunica's bloc had about 11.6 percent. The Socialists had about 8.2 percent—their best result since Milosevic's ouster in 2000.

The pro-Western coalition's surprisingly strong showing came just three months after protesters outraged by Kosovo's Feb. 17 independence declaration set fire to part of the US Embassy in Belgrade.

### >A Clear Victory

Meanwhile, the Slovenian presidency of the European Union has hailed what it called "a clear victory" by pro-European forces in Serbia's general elections, reported AFP.

"The EU presidency warmly welcomes the clear victory of pro-European forces at the Serbian general elections," it said in a statement on its website that underlined "the peaceful and orderly conduct" of the polls.

It added, "It hopes that a new government will soon be composed with a clear European agenda."

Earlier in the evening, initial counts by the electoral commission, poll monitors and various parties showed Tadic's "For a European Serbia" alliance was on course for a surprise victory. In its statement, the Slovenian EU presidency said that, so long as "necessary conditions are met", the outcome of the election "should enable Serbia to advance further on its EU path, including candidate status".

It added, "The EU looks forward to the new government to engage constructively in regional cooperation."

### >UN Reaction

In the meantime the United Nations mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) said that Serbian local elections conducted Sunday together with parliamentary ones were illegal and without effect in Kosovo, AFP said.

"Illegal elections cannot have legal consequences. Their outcome will not be recognized."

UN and Kosovo Albanian leaders are concerned Belgrade may use the polls to strengthen a parallel Serbian administration at the local level, which remained since the 1999 war thanks to Belgrade's political and financial assistance. In April, Rucker twice warned Belgrade against organizing the local polls, which he said went against UN Security Council Resolution 1244.

## In Case You Missed



### Chavez Links Merkel to Hitler

Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez on Sunday almost told German Chancellor Angela Merkel to go to hell, but stopped short of insulting the woman leader on Mother's Day.

Instead he called her a political descendant of Adolf Hitler and German fascism, reported Reuters.

"Ms. Chancellor, you can go to ...," he said, pausing for effect and eliciting giggles from the audience, a group of military officers, cabinet ministers and government officials. "Because she's a woman I won't say anything else."

The leftist leader, who famously called US President George W. Bush "the devil" at a United Nations assembly, slammed Merkel for calling on Latin American leaders to distance themselves from Chavez.

"She is from the German right, the same that supported Hitler, that supported fascism, that's the chancellor of Germany today," he said.

Chavez said he could confront her about the statements if he attends an upcoming summit of heads of state from Europe and Latin America in Peru.

Meanwhile, Chavez will buy military equipment worth nearly \$2 billion during a visit to Russia at the end of the month, AFP quoted Russian newspaper 'Kommersant' as reporting Monday.

"Hugo Chavez will arrive in Moscow at the end of May to sign new Russian-Venezuelan agreements on military and technical cooperation," said the paper.

Chavez and new Russian President Dmitry Medvedev agreed in March, during a telephone conversation, to visit each other.

"The accords with Venezuela will obviously be the first big arms contracts signed under the presidency of Dmitry Medvedev," the paper said, adding that his predecessor Vladimir Putin had paid special attention to military and technical cooperation in international relations.



### Parts of Myanmar Still Cut Off

Parts of Myanmar were still cut off on Monday 10 days after Cyclone Nargis hit, an official said in state media, reiterating that foreign aid workers would not be allowed to direct relief operations.

According to AFP, the minister for economic development, Soe Tha, told diplomats late Sunday that government officials had visited most of the areas devastated by Cyclone Nargis, but that some were still out of reach.

"There are few storm-hit areas where officials concerned do not visit. The supplies were dropped in flooded areas where the helicopters could not land," he said, according to the official New Light of Myanmar newspaper.

He also thanked the United Nations and world governments for donating aid to cyclone victims, but repeated that local organizations—rather than foreign aid workers—would supervise the relief effort.

"Aid from any nations (is) accepted, and delivery of relief goods can be handled by local organizations," the minister said.

Myanmar's government has already spent more than 20 billion kyats (\$18.1 million) on the aid effort and 21 relief camps have been set up for cyclone survivors, he said. International relief has been trickling into Myanmar, but aid groups say it falls far short of what is needed.

Agencies have been wrestling with limits imposed by the military government, which has granted only a handful of visas to foreign aid workers, in addition to the difficulties of transporting supplies into the remote Irrawaddy Delta.