

Massis Weekly

Volume 28, No. 20

Saturday, JUNE 7, 2008

Popular Movement Schedules First Rally Since Crackdown

YEREVAN -- Former President Levon Ter-Petrosian and his opposition allies reaffirmed on Tuesday their intention to defy a possible government ban and hold on June 20 their first major rally since the post-election clashes in Yerevan.

In a written statement, Armenia's Popular Movement, an umbrella structure uniting more than two dozen opposition groups, offered to cooperate with the municipal authorities and the Armenian police in maintaining public order during the planned rally.

A top aide to Ter-Petrosian, Levon Zurabian, said that the organizers will formally ask the Yerevan mayor's office to authorize the gathering. But he made it clear they will urge supporters to converge on the city's Liberty Square even if the application is rejected by the authorities.

The planned demonstration will come just three days before the start of the June session of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) that will discuss Yerevan's compliance with its recent resolution on the political situation in Armenia. One of the key demands of the resolution is a repeal of controversial legal amendments that enable the authorities to ban anti-government street protests practically at will.

The authorities have been keen to thwart such protests since the March 1 deadly clashes between security

Continued on page 3

Barack Obama Clinches Democratic Party Nomination For President

Senator Barack Obama claimed the Democratic presidential nomination on Tuesday evening, prevailing through an epic battle with Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton in a primary campaign that inspired millions of voters from every corner of America to demand change in Washington.

A last-minute rush of Democratic superdelegates, as well as the results from the final primaries, in Montana and South Dakota, pushed Obama over the threshold of winning the 2,118 delegates needed to be nominated at the party's convention in August. The victory for Obama, the son of a black Kenyan father and a white Kansan mother, broke racial barriers and represented a remarkable rise for a man who just four years ago served in the Illinois Senate.

"Tonight, we mark the end of one historic journey with the beginning of another — a journey that will bring a new and better day to America," Mr. Obama told supporters at a rally in St. Paul. "Because of you, tonight I can stand here and say that I will be the

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe toned down its initial, largely positive, assessment of Armenia's recent presidential election on Friday, citing serious irregularities that were witnessed by its observers after the closure of the polls.

In its final election report, the OSCE observer mission in Armenia said the freedom and fairness of the February 19 vote was "devalued" by fraud registered during the vote count and recount.

"While the 2008 presidential election mostly met OSCE commitments and international standards in the pre-election period and during voting hours, serious challenges to some commitments did emerge, especially after election day," concluded the report.

"This displayed an insufficient regard for standards essential to democratic elections and devalued the overall election process. In particular, the vote count demonstrated deficiencies of accountability and transparency, and complaints and appeals procedures were not fully effective."

The report said observers saw busloads of people outside some polling stations and tried to clarify whether they were bribed to vote for a particular candidate. "In the vicinity of a polling station in Shengavit (Yerevan), IEOM observers saw voters receiving money from a man who was ticking entries from a list of names," it said.

The mission stood by its earlier assertion that the vote count was "bad"

Democratic nominee for president of the United States of America."

Obama's triumph closed a 16-month primary campaign that broke records on several fronts: the number of voters who participated, the amount of money raised and spent and the sheer length of the fight. The campaign, infused by tensions over race and gender, provided unexpected twists to the end as Mr. Obama ultimately prevailed over Mrs. Clinton, who just a year ago appeared headed toward becoming the first female presidential nominee of a major party.

The race drew to its final hours with a burst of announcements — delegate by delegate — of Democrats stepping forward to declare their support for Obama. The Democratic establishment, from former President Jimmy Carter to rank-and-file local officials who make up the party's superdelegates, rallied behind Mr. Obama as the day wore on.

The General Election between Obama and Republican candidate John McCain will be held first Tuesday of November.

OSCE Issues Final Election Report The February 19 Vote Was "Devalued" By Fraud During The Vote Count And Recount

or "very bad" in 16 percent of precincts observed. "Observers witnessed inconsistencies in determining valid votes, unwillingness to show marked ballots, attributing votes for one candidate to another, signing protocols before completing the vote count, signing blank protocols, changing data entered in protocols, and failure to display protocols publicly as required by law," it explained.

According to the OSCE/ODIHR, further evidence of serious fraud came to light during vote recounts that covered about 7 percent of Armenia's 1,900 or so electoral precincts. "The majority of recounts observed showed discrepancies and mistakes in the original count, some of them significant, or other serious problems occurred during the recount," said the report.

The report also criticized the government-controlled Central Election Commission (CEC) for its handling of complaints filed by candidates. "The CEC considered them mostly in informal meetings to which proxies, observers and the media were not invited, and dismissed them without adequate investigation," it said. "Consequently, candidates were not granted an effective means of redress."

Another problem reported by the OSCE observers was Armenian broadcast media's "negative" coverage of Ter-Petrosian that contrasted with their heavy promotion of Sarkisian's presidential bid. The observers also said many local government officials ac-

tively campaigned for the establishment candidate while performing official duties. "There were accounts of local government employees and public-sector workers being obligated to attend Prime Minister Sarkisian's campaign events," read their report.

On the positive side, the report noted the fact that Ter-Petrosian and other opposition candidates were generally free to hold campaign rallies across the country. "The authorities made efforts to provide a permissive campaign environment," it said.

The report also contains a long list of recommendations which the OSCE/ODIHR believes would improve the conduct of future Armenian elections.

In a separate statement, Christian Strohal, director of the ODIHR, said further legislative changes alone would not address chronic electoral fraud in Armenia. "There is a sound legal basis for holding democratic elections in Armenia — the deficiencies noted in our report resulted primarily from a lack of determination to apply existing laws and rules effectively and impartially," he said.

In a related development, the Popular Movement praised Western observers on Friday for significantly revising their initial, largely positive, assessment of the Armenian government's conduct of the February 19 election. The final election re-

Continued on page 3

Court Refuses To Reinstate Fired Diplomats

A court in Yerevan refused on last week to declare illegal the controversial dismissal of former Foreign Ministry officials who publicly condemned the Armenian government's conduct of the recent presidential election.

The four ex-officials had asked the Administrative Court to reinstate them in their positions, saying that they did not violate Armenia's law on diplomatic service that bans diplomats from engaging in political activities.

The plaintiffs were among six Foreign Ministry employees who signed a joint statement on February 24 expressing "outrage" at serious fraud which they said prevented the election from being "civilized, free and fair." A similar statement was also issued by Deputy Foreign Minister Armen Bayburtian, Armenia's ambassadors to Italy and Kazakhstan as well as an envoy at the Armenian embassy in Ukraine. All ten diplomats were swiftly relieved of their duties for breaching the law in question.

The plaintiffs, among them the ministry's former spokesman Vladimir



Karapetian and the former heads of its NATO and North America desks, insisted during court hearings that they did not voice support for opposition leader Levon Ter-Petrosian who rejected official vote results as fraudulent. They argued that their statement did not mention Ter-Petrosian or any political force.

The court dismissed these arguments, however. "The Court believes that the statement circulated by the plaintiffs amounts to political activity because it is directed at issues relating to political processes. Namely, making political evaluations of electoral and

Continued on page 3