

Pakistani-Americans' stance on polls

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THE presidential debates have given disconcerting messages to that segment of American population which has suffered major after-shocks of the 9/11 tragedy. There is little hope that the Patriot Act would be repealed or drastically altered to guarantee the rights provided to them under the constitution.

During the second debate President Bush stoutly defended the Act: "As a matter of fact, the tools now given to the terrorist fighters are the same tools that we've been using against drug dealers and white-collar criminals. So I really don't think so. I hope you don't think that. I mean, I — because I think whoever is the president must guard your liberties, must not erode your rights in America. I don't think the Patriot Act abridges your rights at all..."

John Kerry struck a different note: "A whole bunch of folks in America are concerned about the way the Patriot Act has been applied. In fact, the inspector-general of the Justice Department found that John Ashcroft had twice applied it in ways that were inappropriate. We need to be stronger on terrorism. But you know what we also need to do as Americans is never let the terrorists change the constitution of the United States in a way that disadvantages our rights."

His choice of words and diffident approach made the inference too obvious for Muslim Americans: they will remain precari-

er issue that has dominated the political scene and is likely to figure in the dialogue. As time passes, the focus might shift from Iran and North Korea with a plea to other countries to abdicate their nuclear power status.

How does the Pakistani-American community respond to the present situation? For an answer, let's start on an optimistic note. The formation of the Pakistan Congressional Caucus is a timely initiative, thanks to the enterprise of some embassy officials and prominent community activists. But a lot more needs to be done. Is the Pakistani-American community fully seized of this responsibility? It is the nature of the task, truly challenging, that warrants a reiteration of some earlier observations.

First, the complexion of the Pakistani community in the United States. There are those who make it to the new world in search of a better life — those

the Muslim identity.

English did not suffer in that great seat of culture and learning, where the quintessence of both testifies to the richness of the past and a commitment to the future.

And if individual vision is to be cited, the name of Dr. I H. Usmani spontaneously comes to mind. As early as the 1960s he drew the blueprints of a nuclear power programme for Pakistan. Thanks to his foresight and the establishment of centres of excellence like the Pakistan Institute of Nuclear Science and Technology (Pinstech) — described as 'best of both the worlds' by *TIME* magazine — Pakistan succeeded in joining the exclusive nuclear club, and, more recently, in warding off Indian military adventurism.

Another visionary who deserves to be mentioned is Professor Abdus Salam who not only won the coveted Nobel Prize but, more important, set up the UN International Centre of Theoretical Physics in Trieste, Italy, to act as a one-man multinational corporation busily transferring intellectual technology to the less developed countries of the world. "Salam's strength is that he believes that miracles are possible provided one goes out and helps them on their way," Nigel Calder said of the eminent Pakistani in 1967. It is a pity we don't have someone quite like him in the community of Pakistani Americans though there are many who are many times richer than him. The inference is obvious: richness of imagination and vision impacts the social scene rather than the opu-

ously perched as the Act is likely to remain in force whoever wins the forthcoming election. For the present, their political clout hardly matters. Meanwhile, the American

Muslim Task force on Civil Rights and Elections — Political Action Committee (AMT-PAC), in a statement issued on October 21, called on "Muslims nationwide to cast a protest vote for Sen. John Kerry."

AMT-PAC said: "We acknowledge the considerable outreach to our community by Sen. Kerry's campaign, particularly by his campaign co-chair Sen. Edward Kennedy. We also appreciate the ongoing dialogue with Muslim leaders about problems posed by the ... Patriot Act. While the Kerry campaign has critiqued a number of Bush administration policies, it has so far failed to explicitly affirm support for due process, equal justice and other constitutional norms."

It said, the American Muslims were also disappointed that Kerry's campaign has shied away from expressing unambiguous support for principles enshrined in the US constitution that prohibit use of ex-post facto laws, secret proceedings and secret evidence. "Because pluralism is based on partial agreements, support for Sen. Kerry is premised on our overall effort to help restore liberty and justice for all. Mindful of disagreements with Sen. Kerry on some domestic and international issues, including the war in Iraq, we are willing to work with him to help restore due process and equal justice in accordance with the US constitution."

The muffled tone of the statement is significant. That the priorities of the Muslim world are seriously misplaced was also subtly brought home by a remark of the Democratic candidate during the course of the second debate — the US must match the trained manpower of China and India. One should not begrudge the tribute to Pakistan's immediate neighbours but one must ungrudgingly bemoan the low priority accorded to education and science in the Muslim countries.

Nuclear proliferation is another

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who work in dingy factories or corporate ventures at a low rung and are content with sputtering a few incoherent words of American English, a sub-standard, pedestrian form of language in such workplaces with funny usages, and worse, funnier accents and pronunciations, to qualify for a scholarship for higher learning.

One must unreservedly thank the US academic and high-tech advances and their corporate spin-offs that make up for the misplaced stress on syllables which is jarring in one's ears. Such Pakistanis, or 'Pakistani Americans' as they pride on being called, have two obsessions: to loathe everything that is Pakistani and to praise anything that is American.

The razzle-dazzle of posh malls impresses them, rather than the inspirational vision of America's founding fathers which finds a vivid manifestation in the dynamic of Cornell, Yale, Princeton, Pennsylvania, Brown, Dartmouth, Woodworth, Columbia and Harvard. They miss the finer values and essential features of this great country, features that accord the United States of America the enviable status of being the world's only superpower deserving the best superlatives for sustained strivings in challenging fields.

Then, there are those Pakistani Americans who have obtained higher education and struck gold in an entrepreneurial undertaking or wealth quite disproportionate to their academic or personal attainments and who have generously contributed to community causes. Yet their corporate-tinged outlook lacks the perspicacity of the visionaries of Aligarh where the two-nation theory was enunciated and which led to the creation of Pakistan, or the bright minds of Hyderabad where Urdu, a cultural bond of pre and post-independence Muslims, was accorded the status of medium of instruction to strengthen

And that explains why the singular obligation of the affluent business class of Pakistani Americans to the community is restricted to the construction of buildings. But do bricks

and mortar create institutions pulsating with the creative impulse? And can schools established by the rich for the children of the rich be anything other than a self-defeating exercise? How many Pakistanis can afford to send their children to the schools set up by the community's so-called 'philanthropists'?

One may also ponder the serious question: Are the more affluent among us conscious of the obligation thrust upon the community in the post-9/11 period? The Muslims took, and continue to take, a terrible bashing at the hands of the media because their own press is too fragile to respond. Has anyone done anything to support the fledgling Pakistani and Muslim media? Barring exceptions, our papers continue to be mere rags and TV programmes a theatrical portrayal of our strivings. A sorry spectacle resulting from the indifference of the community's well-to-do ignoramuses.

Finally, there is the younger generation. The more extrovert among them dote on Jennifer Lopez and Jay Leno or fancy the characters of 'Practice and Charm'. Earning grades and counting units, they seem to drift listlessly while yearning for an intellectually stimulating environment that could lend meaning to the newly found Pakistani-American identity with a wholesome Pakistani input.

Prominent Pakistani Americans have to seriously attend to the social and cultural issues touching on the lives of the Pakistanis in the United States. They should make an earnest effort to blend values that could be truly representative of the best of both the worlds.

Arriving in the US is not an achievement; honourable survival is. And in the ensuing process the 'melting pot' experience does not have to be a wholly one-sided affair. Will the Pakistani community rise to the occasion?

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