

US elections

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The Presidential elections in the US on 2 November 2004 are crucial for that country as well as for the outside world. The contest is between President George W. Bush of the Republican Party, who is seeking reelection for a second term, and Senator John Kerry of the Democratic Party, fighting for a fresh mandate.

President Bush and John F. Kerry battled sharply over US policy on Iraq, Afghanistan and domestic issues in three debates; whereas Bush insisted that he was fighting for the security of the US, Kerry charged Bush for have misplaced priorities, in that he left Al-Qaida and Osama in between and instead attacked Iraq, which did not have WMD and had not attacked the US. Internally, the Democratic nominee charged that the president has compiled a record of failure on the economy and health care, and Bush attacked Kerry's Senate record. "Mr Kerry now casts Mr Bush as a tool of rich and powerful 'special interests,' and he has sharpened his critique of Mr Bush's handling of Iraq", was the comment of the *New York Times* on 15 October 2004. According to Bush, Mr Kerry would not make a good president anyway.

Although Kerry has done well in the debates, the outcome of the election is uncertain. Both candidates are getting support from electorates who are ideologically different in their thinking. Democrats are traditionally liberal in their thought processes, while the Republicans are generally conservative. The neo-cons are whole-

heartedly supporting Bush, while others may have a soft corner of Kerry. The Patriot Act, which imposes limits on personal liberty and permits interference in the personal life of an individual may find support amongst conservatives but not amongst liberal elements. Tax cuts for the wealthier section of the population by the Republicans may not find favour with the majority, who are not so rich. The bulk of the middle and lower middle class would welcome welfare measures being promised by the Democrats.

Whosoever wins the elections, he will pursue policies that he thinks are in the best interests of the country. Both consider nuclear proliferation as the greatest threat to the US; both want victory in their war against Al-Qaeda, international terrorism and in Iraq. Both stand for nonproliferation. Both want to safeguard and ensure the security of their country. Both insist on improving the economy and welfare of their people. Both claim to support freedom and liberty not only for their own citizens but for the whole world.

It is being assessed that generally ethnic minorities in the US are attracted by the liberal attitude and domestic policy issues of the Democrats and would like to support Kerry.

BY DR NOORUL HAQ

Kerry cannot ignore the importance of Pakistan to the US.

Another significant development is that the Muslim minority, which, by and large, was indifferent to elections held in the past, seems to have realised that, like other minorities, they should actively participate in the politics of the country. They now wish to be integrated in the American culture and society. They have started taking keen interest in local, country and state affairs. For instance, a Muslim has recently been elected as a member of the city Education Board in Little Rock (Arkansas) the home of former President Clinton. Another Muslim has been elected as a City Councillor in Houston, the fourth largest city of the US. Similarly, it is learnt that a Muslim has been elected in New Hampshire as a State Representative, and so on. Their tilt in the election will be more or less in line with other minorities of the US because of their common preceptions. The bulk of the electorates are likely to focus on economic and domestic policy issues, as the outcome of the elections is likely to affect their daily

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Generally, it is felt in the US that Kerry will manage socio-economic matters better, improving health care, education and providing more jobs. In foreign affairs, Kerry's doctrine of "global test" is being interpreted as subordinating US interests to outsiders. Bush is exploiting the security concern of the people by saying that all his actions are aimed at the security of America so that 9/11 does not recur and is not repeated. All neo-cons and others would like that Bush be allowed to handle Iraq till victory is achieved so that America may feel more secure.

The outside world will not remain unaffected if there is a change in government. Although both candidates would like to pursue a foreign policy that is in the best interests of the US, the seems to be a major difference in their approach to the main issues. For instance, in case of Iraq, John Kerry feels that George Bush has made a colossal error of judgement. Kerry would like to have a summit meeting with his allies to formulate a strong coalition to act in unison. This would alter the present situation where Americans are suffering ninety per cent casualties besides tremendous financial loss to the US exchequer. He would like to involve the United Na-

tions, expand the coalition and gradually extricate the US by minimizing its contribution in finance and forces.

Kerry is likely to give top priority to non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. In his thinking, North Korea and Iran should have received priority over Iraq, which did not apparently have WMD and was not a threat to the US in any immediate future.

Bush would support countries that toed American policy, irrespective of any ideological consideration. Kerry is likely to give weightage to democratic governments in comparison to those states where there is dictatorship. In case of South Asia, Kerry cannot ignore the importance of Pakistan to the US, but the strategic partnership with India initiated by the Clinton administration is likely to be further strengthened.

Before the Presidential debate between Bush and Kerry, the former had a significant edge over the latter. The performance of Kerry in the debates has changed the situation. Bush's popularity ratings have slid from 52 per cent to 49 per cent while that of Kerry have gone up from 45 per cent to 49 per cent. There seems to be a neck-to-neck fight. Unexpected events, if any, like the capture of Osama, may also have a significant impact. In any case, some states would traditionally support Bush and others Kerry. It is the undecided voters and swing states like Florida, Ohio, etc, which are going to decide the final outcome of the election.