

Bush's second 'opportunity'

USA

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THE world at large was closely watching the process of the US elections and waiting anxiously for its outcome. The security doctrine, economic priorities and ideological planks of the US policies affect developments all over the world. It would be pertinent, therefore, to examine the mandate received by President Bush and to assess its implications.

John Mitchell, Nixon's attorney-general, had stated as far back as 1970 that the "US would turn so far to the right as to be unrecognizable." Had Mitchell been alive today, he would have been amazed at his own prescience! The outcome of the recent elections is not only a Democratic defeat but the threatened demise of the traditionally moderate Republican party at the hands of its radical, extreme-right incarnation. In the words of Nancy Pelosi, Democratic leader in the House of Representatives, "Bush and the religious right have dangerously blurred the distinction between Church and state."

These apprehensions and fears are a consequence of a number of factors, including the electoral victory of a presidential incumbent, the nature of whose war against terrorism and occupation of Iraq had divided his country as never before since the American civil war. The mandate of a popular (and electoral) majority has gone to a candidate who had failed to carry the industrial heartland and the centres of education, culture and technology of the north-east, the Great lakes and the Pacific Coast, an incumbent who received a minority of the votes of the Americans with higher educational levels, of women

central part of his foreign policy."

It is hoped that the 'political capital' accumulated by President Bush with the support of the electorate will produce during his second term a more sensitive and broader vision. This would call for much needed flexibility on issues such as the early resolution of the Iraqi problem and urgently required even-handedness on the Middle East and Palestinian issues, the eschewing of threats to target states such as Iran and Syria, and a reining in of a pre-emptive, unilateral strategy.

The polls revealed that moral questions were the lead issue for most voters (22 per cent) with 20 per cent regarding economic issues as the most important. Nineteen per cent put terrorism at the top of the agenda while only 15 per cent saw Iraq as the issue of greatest concern. Of the 22 per cent who gave moral issues as their top concern, over 85 per cent voted for Bush. The influence of moral issues may be gauged from the fact that in spite of Kerry, unlike Bush, being a Catholic, 52 per cent of the Catholics voted for the latter because of Kerry's pro-choice stance on abortion which now is sought to be made a capital offence.

With expected nomination by the Bush administration of new judges for the US Supreme Court, a congressional fight would be on the cards over likely moves to undo part of the constitutional legislation over economic and social issues, some stemming from as far back as the New Deal. It is to be hoped that President Bush would realize the priority of healing the nation's divisions and not exacerbate them further by interpreting the electoral result as a mandate to implement bitterly divisive social and economic policies. In his victory speech, President Bush said that he would seek greater bipartisanship in his second term but quali-

and of the minorities with the African-Americans going 90 per cent for Kerry and the Hispanics 55 per cent.

The turn, in fact the lurch, to the extreme right is also reflected in the defeat of the domestic challenger whose platform on tax cuts, social spending, minimum wages, budget deficit and other economic issues was much more in tune with the interests of the middle classes which make up the bulk of the American electorate. Economic interests and class consciousness were overwhelmed by the strength of reaction to church-driven issues including abortion, gay rights, stem-cell research and the like.

A state like Ohio, which in the ultimate analysis became the final arbiter of the electoral results, went to Bush, in spite of having lost two hundred thousand jobs during Bush's first term. To an extent this was attributed to the issue of gay marriages having been put on the ballot, swaying the results towards the stridently anti-gay republicans.

A gut feeling of sensitive observers was the certainty that the trauma of 9/11 would sway the vote, over and above all other issues, in favour of the fiery leader whose commitment to the hounding and crushing of suspected enemies overrode considerations of international legality, alliance solidarity, collective security and wider humanity. The obsession with terrorism and the evangelical fervour of the religious right combined to put terrorism and moral issues at the top of the electoral agenda.

The electoral outcome sadly demonstrated the insensitivity of a majority of the electorate to the unprecedented tragedy of the Iraqi occupation, justified by none of the considerations advanced by its protagonists. The bulk of the electorate ignored the world-wide impact of US policies over Iraq; the further fuelling of terrorist activities, the inflaming of Islamic sentiments, the estrangement with traditional European allies and the damage to American image and standing abroad.

President Bush proclaimed in his victory speech that he had "earned political capital from 59 million Americans", who voted for him and that he would use the political capital to advance a broad agenda. Giving no hint of a softer line on Iraq or related issues, he said that "spreading freedom around the world would be a

fied this conciliatory remark by declaring that "he would reach out to every one who shares our goals." It is encouraging that in his radio speech

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he described a second term 'as a second opportunity' hinting perhaps at a more accommodating stance over bitterly divisive issues.

While Pakistan's relevance in regional and global affairs rests on its geopolitical importance and other related factors, the opportunity of dealing with a known Bush administration is a positive element. The US administration has a stake in Pakistan's economic viability and security in view of latter's instrumental role in the war against terror. The Bush presidency is committed to the agreements for economic and military support concluded during President Musharraf's visit to Camp David.

It is hoped the US leadership will realize the price paid by Pakistan by virtue of its role in the US sponsored alliances during the cold war, Pakistan's frontline role in the anti-Soviet war in Afghanistan and its lead role in the current war against terror. This should be kept in view by the US government while formulating its programmes of economic and security support for Pakistan and in helping to achieve in the foreseeable future a just resolution of the Kashmir dispute.

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