

BATTLE FOR WHITE HOUSE



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As Indo-U.S. engagement deepens, it is also increasingly sensitive to the political developments within the United States. Understanding the internal dynamics in the U.S. from an Indian perspective has become an urgent necessity for the Indian policy and business community. The United States Studies Programme of the Observer Research Foundation hopes to meet this requirement. The *ORF Monitor* aims to provide a fortnightly assessment on the November elections to the White House. We welcome comments and suggestions on the Monitor.

An Indian Preference for Continuity

C. Raja Mohan

For the reasons of both process and substance, India would prefer to see President George W. Bush re-elected. This preference is unlikely to be stated officially, for Governments are not in the business of endorsing candidates in the U.S. Presidential elections. But undoubtedly, political continuity in the White House would help India consolidate the rapid improvement of relations with the U.S. under the Bush Administration.

But first the process. Most governments prefer dealing with the known devil rather than the unknown. This is particularly true of the United States, where change of guard is time consuming. Movement on policy issues in Washington comes to a near grinding halt

not just during the elections when the U.S. government becomes lame duck, but also as a new President takes time to assemble his team and settle down.

For this reason alone, India, like many other nations, would be quite content to see President George W. Bush return to power in the November elections. A victory by John F. Kerry in the race to White House would mean no practical business with Washington is possible until the summer of 2005 at the earliest.

Changes in senior levels are quite common in the United States. In the U.S. system, the permanent bureaucracy does not run the higher reaches of the government, which are filled with political appointees. Senior positions in the Government are then vacated every time the President changes. It is particularly frustrating when the

White House changes hands not just from one President to another but also from Party to another.

On issues of substance, it is clear that there has been more forward movement in Indo-U.S. relations in the last three years than in the previous three decades. President Bush has demonstrated a personal commitment to transform relations with India, and this has been a valuable asset.

It was Bill Clinton, a Democrat and also the first President to visit India in more than two decades. His visit created a new atmosphere for the improvement of bilateral relations. But the real forward movement has taken place under President Bush. A new level of political comfort has emerged between New Delhi and Washington during the Bush years.

As Indian government and the business community monitor the progress of Mr. Kerry, it is not easy to miss some early signs of trouble. The Democrats in general, Candidate Kerry is no exception, tend to take a harder line on non-proliferation issues. Their emphasis on multilateralism and rule of law could lead to a greater stress on universalising the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

There is no way India can sign this treaty as a non-nuclear weapon state. Besides it has just unveiled a broad framework with President Bush in which the U.S. has

agreed to live with the reality of India's nuclear weapons. India has promised to address American concerns on proliferation and in return the U.S. has offered an improved access for the Indian entities in the American high technology market. Implementing this framework

JOHN KERRY



Iraq

Voted for the war but has since changed his stand. Did not vote for the follow up Bill to support troops in Iraq. Wants a gradual withdrawal.

Jobs/Economy

Opposes tax cuts introduced by President Bush. Wants to roll back the tax benefits. Want more manufacturing jobs. On outsourcing-- all government contracts for US firms; withdraw tax saving schemes adopted by companies which move jobs abroad to tax havens.

Civil Rights

Opposes gay marriage but does not approve of a constitutional amendment to ban it.

National Security

Favours the expiry of the US Patriot Act while favouring engagement with other nations. Locates national security threats in global poverty and HIV/AIDS. Calls for greater energy independence.

Death Penalty

Opposes the death penalty in general but supports it in the case of terror suspects.

under Democrats could be far more difficult than under a Second Bush Administration.

On the trade front, the Democrats are always more protectionist than the Republicans. Their traditional base among the working class makes this natural. As the issue of outsourcing gets amplified in a negative manner during an election year, New Delhi must expect some tough rhetoric from Mr. Kerry on "saving American jobs" from "predatory" Indian firms.

It is not necessary that Mr. Kerry will necessarily implement all that he says during the elections. In democracies, governance is always very different from campaigning. It is not that India has not dealt with the Democrats in the past on issues relating to nuclear non-proliferation and trade. China, which has faced the music from the Democrats for years on issues relating to loss of American manufacturing jobs, has found ways to handle these pressures.

Like all other governments India too will engage who ever wins the White House. A Democratic victory would imply expenditure of valuable time and energy in finding working relationships with the new policy managers in Washington. Stability, in contrast, will allow India to move quickly forward with the new Bush Administration.

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BUILD UP

Nine Democratic hopefuls entered the fray for their Party nominations as early as 2002. Vermont **Governor Howard Dean** was an early favourite and began with a high spirited campaign but stumbled badly. **Gen. Wesley Clark** (retd.) had the endorsement of many of former President Bill Clinton's advisors. He, however, could never regain from a late start and bowed out. **Rep. Dennis Kucinich**, Ohio Congressman opposed to the Iraq war, is doggedly pursuing what he insists is a realistic campaign for the White House. Democratic Senator from Connecticut, **Joseph Lieberman**, quit the race early February. **John Edwards**, a first term Senator from North Carolina, ran fast a little too early and bowed out a day after the Super Tuesday primary results. He might become Kerry's Running Mate. Others who fell by the side include **Carol Moseley Braun**, former Senator of Illinois and the first black woman in US history to win a Senate seat, **Al Sharpton**, an African American who enlivened debates with his hilarious lampooning of George W Bush Jr., **Rep. Richard Gephardt**, a favourite of labour unions



Nader's challenge

The decision by Ralph Nader to join the race for the Presidential elections 2004 came as an uncomfortable surprise for many Democrats. A nominee of the Green Party in 2000, Nader won 3% of the national vote in 2000, with almost a 100,000 being won in the key state of Florida. The disconcerting aspect for most Democrats was the fact that had it not been for Nader and his 100,000 votes in Florida, Gore was the predicted winner in the state which eventually went to George Bush, along with the Presidency by a mere 537 votes. Thus despite the fact that Nader is an independent candidate in 2004, having no specific or broad regional appeal, his mere presence in the run up to the November elections is of discomfort to the Democrats, primarily because it was their "liberal" base that he had divided the last time round. However his impact, this time round is expected to be reduced by the overriding desire of the left leaning voters to remove Bush from the White House.

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ANALYSIS

The latest poll taken for the Associated Press by **Ipsos-Public Affairs** finds that Senator John Kerry and President George W. Bush remain tied with each other in their respective bid to win the electorate and the White House in 2004. President Bush polled in the support of 46 percent of the people while Senator Kerry mustered the support of 45 percent. However the poll results also showed

Ralph Nader garnering a *substantial* 6 percent of the votes. The 'Nader factor', as his Presidential bid can be called, has to be assessed and factored in by analysts, especially after the divisive impact his participation had for the Democratic base in the 2000 elections. Meanwhile President Bush's job approval ratings remained below the halfway mark showing only a marginal improvement.

But the news was equally bad for the Kerry camp as the polls showed that they had not received any substantial momentum after the wins of Super Tuesday. State wide exit polls, also conducted by the Associated Press, on Super Tuesday, revealed that Democratic voters were most pre-occupied by economy and foreign trade issues other than wanting to take the White House back. The last poll conducted by CNN/USA Today/Gallup on February 18, showed that the then Democratic Presidential nomination contenders, Senators Edwards and Kerry, separately led President Bush by ten points or more in a hypothetical match – up. An analysis of the poll results thus indicates that for the Democrats and the Republicans, two distinct strategies are needed. For the Democrats there is a need to urgently move from the center of left positions of the primaries and to the center, before this momentum is overtaken by Nader and before the terms of the debate is set by the advertising blitz of President Bush. This they have to achieve while consolidating their support base and raising significant campaign funds for the November elections. For the Republicans on the other hand, there is a need to prevent the Democratic shift from the left

to the center. This they must achieve by painting Kerry and his arguments of the primaries as decidedly liberal or by highlighting Kerry's policy shifts during his two decade Senate career. Secondly the ratings of President Bush must also be firmed up in the opinion polls vis-à-vis those of Senator Kerry by emphasizing the stewardship of the economy and the strong leadership in the aftermath of Sept 11.

Eventually which of the two camps succeeds in achieving the required, as stated above, only time and their campaigns will tell.

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

BUSH MEDIA BLITZZZ.....

An analysis of the media blitz launched by President Bush, its impact and Senator Kerry's response.

Plus

A fortnightly round up of news and analysis of the **BATTLE FOR WHITE HOUSE 2004.**

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