

THE BATTLE FOR THE WHITE HOUSE

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



Vol. I, Issue 16
September 21, 2004

In this issue

- **Why India prefers Bush**
- **In Conversation with Prof. Stephen Cohen**
- **Lights, Camera, Election**
- **Poll Analysis: Health Matters**

Why India prefers Bush

By C. Raja Mohan

The stage has now been set for a successful first meeting between Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and U.S. President George W. Bush next Tuesday on the margins of the annual session of the United Nations General Assembly.

Senior officials from India and the United States finalised in Washington on Friday a deal on high technology transfers. This deal has been under negotiation for nearly six years since India's nuclear tests in May 2004.

Prime Minister Singh can take some credit for clinching a deal that eluded his predecessor, Atal Bihari Vajpayee. It was Mr. Vajpayee who initiated an intensive engagement with the United States, which reacted sharply against the nuclear tests and imposed wide-ranging sanctions against India in May 1998.

More fundamentally, the widespread belief that the advent of Congress Government in New Delhi would set back Indo-U.S. relations has now been thoroughly disproved.

There was speculation in both the capitals that given persistence of Cold War mindsets in the Congress Party and its dependence on the left for political survival the warmth between India and the U.S. that emerged under Mr. Vajpayee would soon evaporate.

But Manmohan Singh and his key advisers knew the importance of sustaining and expanding the relationship with the United States. Mr. Singh is believed to have ordered his senior officials that the unfinished negotiation with the United States on high technology transfers and an accommodation on non-proliferation be concluded at the earliest.

That precisely is what the Indian officials accomplished after a series of intense negotiations in recent weeks. What is the political significance of this deal?

The nuclear question had weighed heavily on the bilateral ties between India and the United States ever since India conducted its atomic test in 1974. A series of sanctions imposed by the U.S. since then limited bilateral cooperation across a wide spectrum of high technology areas. The nuclear differences became one of the biggest impediments in the effort to improve bilateral relations.

There is no doubt that last week's deal is only the first step towards resolving the nuclear differences between New Delhi and Washington. But it marks the beginning of a new phase in the bilateral relationship, which will no longer be constrained by the nuclear factor.

India is fully aware that the removal of the nuclear impediment has been entirely due to the personal political commitment of President Bush to transform bilateral relations. Despite the skepticism in many American quarters, President Bush persisted with the effort to elevate Indo-U.S. relations to a higher level.

And that is one of the reasons why India would like to see President Bush win his bid for election this November. While much of the influential opinion in Europe and Asia would like to see the back of the Bush Administration, the assessment in New Delhi is that President Bush is vastly preferable to the Democratic aspirant John Kerry.

On a whole range of issues of bilateral interest to India, President Bush scores over Senator Kerry. In India there is a strong belief that a potential Democratic Administration would be far tougher on nuclear issues with India.

The first six years of the Democratic Administration under President Bill Clinton were wasted by the arguments over the nuclear question. And when serious negotiations began after the nuclear tests in May 1998, the Clinton Administration was unwilling to lift all the sanctions imposed immediately after the nuclear tests.

President Clinton made India's signature on the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty a pre-condition for lifting of the key sanctions. The Bush Administration, in contrast, was opposed to the CTBT and had no problems lifting the sanctions.

Further President Bush expanded the nuclear agenda with India by looking beyond differences and focusing on the prospects for cooperation in the areas of civil nuclear energy, civilian space programmes, transfer of advanced technologies and on missile defence. In other words the nature of India's nuclear dialogue with the Bush Administration was significantly different from that with the Democrats.

In his campaign utterances in recent months, Senator Kerry was often asked on his attitude towards India's permanent membership of the UN Security Council. His response was that India's membership might have to be linked to New Delhi signature on the 1970 Non-Proliferation Treaty. The NPT does not recognise India's standing as a nuclear weapon power.

The Bush Administration has by no means given its support to India's permanent membership. But it has not insisted on India joining the NPT as a non-nuclear weapon state either. Unlike Senator Kerry who would want to impose the old non-proliferation agenda on India, President Bush is exploring the prospects for cooperation in the newly emerging global initiatives that relate to nuclear weapons and non-proliferation.

On the triangular relationship involving India, U.S. and Pakistan, New Delhi's preference will be to see the continuation of the Bush Administration. India certainly

recalls warmly the support delivered by President Clinton during the Kargil War with Pakistan.

President Bush's war on terrorism after 911 led to a renewed strategic relationship between Washington and Islamabad. But the Bush Administration did allow it to come in the way of improved relationship with India. Further, President Bush maintained continual pressure on Pakistan to stop cross-border terrorism against India.

More important, while a Kerry Administration may continue to see India through the regional prism of South Asia with an emphasis on nuclear and Kashmir issues, President Bush has declared the commitment to view India as a rising power with a potential global role.

On other issues like outsourcing, Senator Kerry with the dependence on labour vote has tended to be more protectionist than the Bush Administration that is in favour free trade as a matter of ideological conviction.

Given the substantive improvement in Indo-U.S. relations in the last few years and the prospects for more, Manmohan Singh would not want his first meeting with President Bush to be the last.

* * *

In Conversation with Prof. Stephen Cohen

Researchers of the US Studies Programme had the opportunity to have a brief interaction with Prof. Stephen P. Cohen, Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution, Washington. Given below are excerpts from the discussion with Prof. Cohen on a variety of issues.

On the US elections

American politics is quite complex and difficult to follow unless you incorporate a bit political archaeology into your research. Issues rise and fall in importance and relevance but they all leave some residue behind. First, there were the issues of industrialization versus non-industrialization, then, there were the Northerners versus Southerners, then came the issue of Vietnam, and now you have abortion as a major issue. So, in effect you have layers upon layers of issues. This again is played out in different ways. In some states, for instance, some issues have more emotional content than other issues. The strategy of both parties is the same: you begin at the extreme to rally your base and you move towards the center to rally the middle, but in the process, America becomes more polarized and old divisions like Vietnam re-emerge. Even the Civil War is a live issue in some places and played out in different ways.

On Kerry's chances

The Democrats may have a strategy of starting slow and peaking right before the elections. But, the other possibility is that Kerry was badly advised, and that is why his campaign has sputtered along upto now. Either way, it might turn out for the best since it is important for an election campaign to peak at the right time.

Vice President Cheney hasn't been tested too much so far. A question that John Edwards could legitimately ask him in the Vice-Presidential Debates is why he didn't serve in the Vietnam War now that he's sending thousands of youngsters off to war in Iraq.

On whether Americans feel safer after the War on Terror

To call it a War on Terror is a misnomer. Terrorism is like bad breath, it will always be with us. You just can't get rid of it because it is a tactic, not an ideology. Everybody has used terrorism. We have supported terrorism at one time or another, the Indian government has supported terrorism. It's a political tactic and now the radical Islamists are using it. We are much better prepared now, so it is unlikely that another 9/11 will take place...the terrorists just got lucky, so, yes Americans do feel safer.

On lobbying groups

Though the Caucus on India and Indian Americans in the House or its equivalent Friends of India in the Senate have many members, there are not more than four or five Congressmen who actually have an interest in India or can be counted upon to work on India related issues. American companies cannot be counted upon either since they are entering the Pakistani market and are anxious not to rock the boat given the testy relationship between the two countries..

Most lobby groups, whether Jewish, or Indian, or any other community exist mainly for the photo-ops. But you also have to consider the cumulative effect of these groups working together. Most Congressmen look at such lobby groups and see only dollar signs.

As a minority group, Indian Americans have the most potential since they are such a high-income group. But, they have to make the effort when they stand for election to go out and do grass-roots work...ring door bells...ask for votes...

Minority groups also have to interact more with each other... do more networking... learn more about the other groups that make up America. Indian Americans are still caught between two countries, two communities and two cultures and that partly examines their lack of success in elections. Unlike most other immigrant communities, Indian Americans came in with the advantage of a good education, and they are better able to take advantage of the many opportunities that America has to offer new immigrants. So, they are resented by other immigrant communities and older minorities. That is something they have to work on.

^ ^ ^

Other News from the US Studies Programme

ORF- Brookings Institution Joint Partnership to be inaugurated

Mr. Strobe Talbott, President of the Brookings Institution, Washington, is in Delhi at the invitation of the ORF to inaugurate the ORF-Brookings Partnership Programme. Among the joint activities planned are an expansion of the American studies programme and as well as collaborative studies in the areas of macro-economic and energy policies in India.

Observer Research Foundation (ORF)-Pacific Council on International Policy (PCIP) Joint Task Force on Indo-US Relations

The second meeting of the ORF-PCIP Task Force on India-US Relations was held at Los Angeles on September 13-14, 2004. The first such joint Task Force between an American and an Indian think tank, it is a Track II initiative between Observer Research Foundation, India's first multi-disciplinary think tank and the Pacific Council, a leadership forum based at Los Angeles and rooted in the American West.

The task force is jointly chaired by Amb. Abid Hussain, former Indian ambassador to the US and Amb. Richard Celeste, former US ambassador to India and comprises eminent Indian and American experts and scholars.

In four sessions over two days the task force discussed ongoing issues of importance between the two countries, with special reference to the Asia Pacific region and the measures necessary to further enhance the scope and level of the India-US strategic partnership. The deliberations began with a keynote address by Mr. Warren Christopher, former US Secretary of State. He highlighted the importance of engaging India and the synergies in a mutually beneficial relationship.

The discussions focused on the current bilateral environment, the influence of “soft power” and included the emerging trends in external policies, bilateral interests in economy, trade and commerce issues and cooperation in the health, culture and entertainment sectors. Science and technology issues, with special reference to cooperation in defence and dual-use technology, and the contribution of the Indian Diaspora were also discussed. The discussions were broad-based and led to a deeper understanding of mutual strengths and concerns.

The task force will now work on jointly drafting a Task Force Report which will be submitted for consideration by the two governments and the private sector in both countries. The report will identify areas of further cooperation and make specific recommendations in each area for mutual benefit. The joint report is expected to be released simultaneously in Los Angeles and New Delhi by end-January 2005.

[List of Participants](#)

* * *

ORF Seminar on the status Of India Studies in the United States

A seminar on the status of India studies in the United States, co-sponsored by Observer Research Foundation and the India Studies Program of Indiana University, took place on September 15 and 16, 2004 at Indiana Memorial Union Hotel, Indiana University, Bloomington.

Concept Note

India has long been studied in the US universities and research institutions with different motives and motivations. A closer scrutiny of the various academic programmes currently underway in various universities in the US reveal three broad trends: First, the western narrative of India has been, and is, circumscribed by traditional scepticism in the US academia, largely populated by American scholars deeply sceptical of India’s geopolitical aspirations and, ironically, democratic credentials, and a sheer intellectual ennui to question past theses and claims. Second, the tendency to reflect more on the “historical” aspects of an India that remained most part of the past three centuries under foreign rules rather than a contemporary view of a nation that is valiantly struggling to rise against the tide. Third, the woeful absence of a parallel narrative that tests the current notions of India in the US academia.

Undoubtedly, such a prejudiced view of India, perpetuated by venerable academic institutions, has the power to influence policies and opinions in Washington, often known as the Capital of the World.

With this objective in mind, we have launched the India Studies Project as part of the ORF US Studies Programme with the primary objective of studying and analysing why the US academia continues to retain, often knowingly, an antiquated view of India which is so distant from the dreams and aspirations of a billion people; to explore ways and means to neutralise the impact of such negative portrayals; and create an intellectual climate for a more vigorous and objective assessment of India in the US universities and research organisations.

Lights, Camera, Election: Hollywood in Action

By Stuti Banerjee.

Hollywood personalities, whether they be actors, directors or producers, are much sought after during election campaigns, either to bring glamour to the campaign or as rich pickings insofar as money goes. Unlike in other parts of the world, though, the actors themselves have strong political convictions, with the large majority gravitating towards the Democratic Party.

In fact, Hollywood's connection with politics goes back to the early part of this century when the rise of the fascist powers in Europe and the influx of political migrants from the continent raised the industry's political consciousness. The 'Hollywood Anti-Nazi League (HANL)', established in 1939 came to be the first prototype for 'glamour activism.' In the 1940s, HANL was reorganized as the Hollywood Democratic Committee, which mobilized a small group of stars like Humphrey Bogart, Judy Garland and Frank Sinatra, to support the fourth term campaign of President F.D. Roosevelt. John Wayne and Ronald Reagan represented a new form of celebrity politics - outspoken anti-communism - around the late 1940s. During the McCarthy years, Reagan testified at congressional hearings investigating allegations of Communist influence and helped create a blacklist of actors, directors, producers, writers and others suspected of communist leanings in Hollywood. (However, for much of that time, he was a Democrat, switching parties only in 1962). The 1960s saw the first President truly enamoured by tinseltown, John F. Kennedy accept the nomination at the Democratic National Convention in Los Angeles, California, to applause from friends Marilyn Monroe and Frank Sinatra.

In the 1990s, Bill Clinton started a mutual admiration society with Hollywood, raising the interaction between Hollywood and the Presidency to new heights. Hollywood celebrities, in turn flattered by his attentions, went all out to raise money for the Presidential election campaign, contributing out of their own pockets as well as taking part in fund-raisers. *Variety* magazine calculated that the political contributions made from the fabulous 90210 zip code went to the Democrats by more than two to one.

Ironically, politically successful movie stars have all been Republicans: George Murphy who was the senator from California from 1964-70, Ronald Reagan who was Governor of California (1967-75), and later completed two terms as President from 1981-89, and more recently, the "Governator" of California, Arnold Schwarzenegger .

Campaign 2004 has again seen the stars come out along with stars from the music and television industries. Ben Affleck, Glenn Close and P. Diddy are just a few of the high voltage Hollywood megastars who are campaigning like never before while Bruce Springsteen, REM and the Dixie Chicks are the big names from the music industry who are participating in the 'Vote for Change' tours. All these stars along with other big names like Alec Baldwin and John Cusack are all part of the Kerry camp. According to Prof. Darrell West, author of 'Celebrity Politics', "The Democrats have all the A-level stars and the Republicans have b or C-level people." He points out that the artists feel a closer affinity to the liberals than to the conservatives because the Democrats are libertarian on entertainment issues, the Republicans on the other hand are willing to raise government regulation. But it is not just the effect of the regulations on films and filmmaking. They are also worried about the loss of civil liberties and freedom of speech under the guise of the PATRIOT Act.

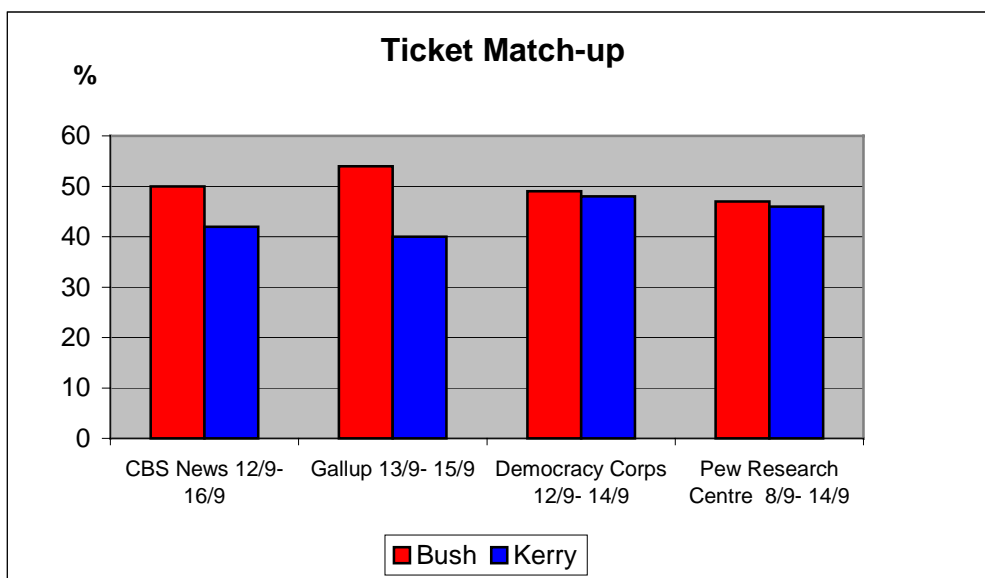
This is not say that the Republicans have no star power at hand to help them out. After all Arnold Schwarzenegger is the Republican governor of California and there are other conservative artists as well like Bo Derek and Charlton Heston. One of the key note speakers at this year's Republican Convention was actor Ron Silver, who, though a registered Republican, had become a staunch supporter of the President following 9/11. This hasn't particularly endeared him to his fellow actors, leading to "distinctly frosty receptions at several dinner parties". He responded to their criticisms in his speech at the Republican National Convention: "Even though I am a well-recognized liberal on many issues confronting our society today, I find it ironic that many human rights advocates and outspoken members of my own entertainment community are often on the front lines to protest repression, for which I applaud them but they are usually the first ones to oppose any use of force to take care of these horrors that they catalogue repeatedly."

However, Ron Silver is in a minority; not since the Vietnam War have so many artistes come together –in a politically charged atmosphere-with a majority of them against one candidate.

^ ^ ^

Poll Analysis: Health Matters

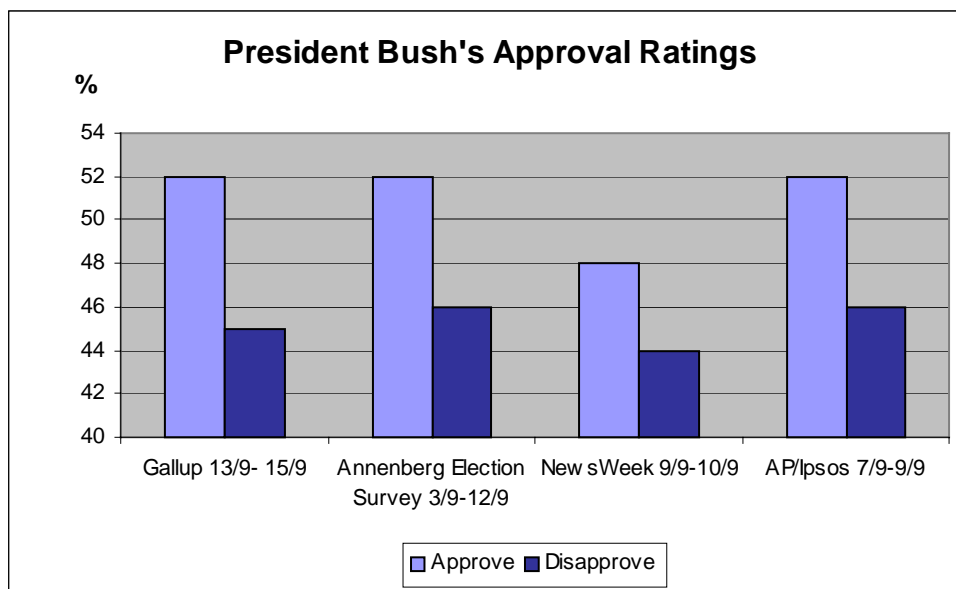
The recent months in the campaign to win the White House have been dominated by the War on Terror and the one being fought in Iraq and of late the military records of the two candidates. However, the issue that seems to have caught the attention of the voters and the candidates is the troubles of the United States (US) health care system. For many years the politicians claimed that America had the best healthcare system in the world, but Americans are finding this hard to believe in the face of rising costs and the lack of access to good clinics. According to the World Health Organizations- 'World Health Report 2000' and other health systems data- the United States "is the only developed country (except south Africa) that does not provide health care to all of its citizens." And it has the most expensive health care system in the world. This has become a real crisis for the people. According to two polls conducted by Fox News and CBS News between September 7-9 2004 health care is the third most important issue, after the economy and homeland security/terrorism/ war in Iraq, which will on the minds of the electorate when they go to vote in November. Thus it comes as no surprise that the candidates are paying such a lot of attention to the issue.



Both candidates want to reform health care along with the health care experts but have entirely different views on how to change the system. While Kerry would like to “expand the existing system of employer-provided insurance and federal health programs for those who slip through...Bush wants to rely on the market oriented alternatives to government programs.” The President has claimed that his plan is to benefit the small businesses obtain insurance for their employees who are unable to afford it while the Kerry plan is a big –government plan that will incur huge expenses that will be mounded on the small businesses as taxes.

For Bush the idea is to make health care a part of his idea of “ownership society” which would give the individual more responsibility and control over his life. But for Kerry the rising cost of health is a big burden on the US middle class a traditional democratic support base. Many Democrats feel that the issue can give their candidate the edge, which has been eluding him, over Bush. A Time magazine survey has showed that Kerry has a led over Bush among the voters on the question of who can best solve the nation’s health care problems (48% to 42% respectively). Kerry is also mindful of the fact that the people want to hear more about the domestic problems that are affecting America and has begun to connect his criticism of war in Iraq to the domestic priorities of the administration. He has argued that the money spent on the war could have been put to better use in the health care of the American people. Thus he is able to address both the constituencies of domestic and foreign policy.

Medicare has also become the focus of interest as it effect the elderly people who are considered the most reliable voters by both the parties. There has been a lot of concern expressed with it becoming clearer to the people that the Medicare premiums are to increase steadily.



How the proposed healthcare programs of either of the two candidates plays out on their respective campaigns only the coming weeks shall tell. There is going to be discernable shift from centrist issues of foreign policy and national security to more centrist domestic aspects as both candidates would want to stump on their strengths in these fields. Healthcare however would be more of a challenge for the incumbent, than for Senator Kerry as mentioned above. Under the Bush administration healthcare fiascos have included burgeoning cost of Medicare and its effect on the nation’s fiscal deficit and controversy over the actual amount that Medicare has cost American taxpayers. The one success that the administration can publicize is the

prescription card introduced for seniors in the United States. But even this policy is not going to be implemented until 2006 and has as yet received a moderate lukewarm response.

Thus, as an issue, Medicare and indeed healthcare can prove to be decisive for each candidate in the coming weeks before the elections.

EDITORIAL TEAM: Dr C. Raja Mohan, Cherian Samuel, Stuti Banerjee, Ashok Sharma and Avanti Bhati

Readers Comments: ORF would like to thank the recipients of the US Election Monitor for the number of encouraging responses that they have sent to the past fifteen issues. We value our readers and their opinions and we invite them to write in on issues and arguments, carried in the Monitor, or simply send us their comments.

Disclaimer: If you do not wish to receive this newsletter in the future, please do let us know by writing to cherians@orfonline.org.

We appreciate your support and your patience in our endeavours.