

LETTER FROM AMERICA

"Unpresidential" Election Divides America down the Middle

A TIME bomb is embedded within the American Presidential electoral process. Every century the bomb goes off throwing the presidential election into turmoil. In keeping with its confusing nature, the process is called Electoral College, although it has nothing to do with an educational institution. If the popular vote determined the winner, right now Vice President Albert Gore would be the new President-elect. Since the Electoral College determines the Presidency, currently George W. Bush has more claims to the Presidency. The last time America faced this dilemma was in 1888, when Benjamin Harrison defeated Grover Cleveland, although Cleveland had won the popular vote.

America's founding fathers did not have much confidence in the wisdom of the masses. They wanted the people to vote for the President indirectly. The masses vote for the President within their state. Whoever wins the maximum popular votes within that state wins not a portion of, but all of the state's electoral votes. (Electoral votes are apportioned according to the population of the state, with 3 being the minimum.) There are 538 electoral votes to be won. If a candidate wins 270, he is the new President regardless of the nationwide popular vote. If it's a tie with each candidate winning 269, the Congress, not the popular vote, determines the winner. If one candidate wins the big population states such as California (54 electoral votes) and New York (33 electoral votes) as Al Gore has done, and the other candidate wins most of the smaller states as George Bush has done, it is possible to have two claims of victory one moral and one legal as is the case now.

This year's election has been complicated by the extremely close vote in Florida. As of this writing, after a recount of nearly six million votes cast in Florida, unofficially George Bush is ahead by only 327. A few thousand absentee ballots are not going to change the tally that much. The official result will not be known before November 17. Currently Al Gore has 260 electoral votes, and George Bush has 246, with Ore-

This election has truly divided the nation. Whoever is elected the next President of the United States, will have a tough time governing the nation. The Northeast and the Pacific West voted for Gore while the South and the Midwest voted for Bush. Most men preferred Bush, most women voted for Gore. Overall, liberal whites, African-Americans and other minorities voted for a Gore Presidency, while the conservative whites and the religious right, the gun, tobacco and business lobby worked tirelessly to get Bush elected.

Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed writes from Princeton

Next to their names on the right side was a column of small levers. Voters were instructed to turn the lever for one candidate, which put an "X" next to that candidate's name as the voter's choice.

The next two columns had names and levers for the Democrats: Al Gore/Joe Lieberman for President, Jon Corzine for Senator and Rush Holt for Congressman. The last two columns and levers had the remaining names, such as for Green Party Presidential Candidate Ralph Nader and Reform Party candidate Pat Buchanan. Upon turning the appropriate small levers (of course I am not going to tell you who I voted for) as I turned the master lever to the right, the screen opened, all the small levers went back to neutral positions and my vote was automatically recorded. (For the record, Al Gore won the 15 Electoral votes in New Jersey, Jon Corzine won the race for Senator and the Congressional race between Zimmer and Holt is too close to call, with both claiming victory!)

Al Gore and his campaign have thrown their weights behind a few citizens of the heavily Democratic Palm Beach County in Florida who have gone to court to challenge voting irregularities in their County. Their main beef is that the ballot was confusing. Unlike the very simple New Jersey ballot I have just described, the ballot in Palm Beach County listed two columns of Presidential candidates, and asked the voters to punch their choice in a very narrow column in-between containing black balls indicating candidates. George Bush's name was first on the left-hand column (his brother Jeb Bush is the Governor of Florida) followed by Al Gore.

Between them on the right hand side was the name of Pat Buchanan. Many elderly and African-American voters thought that if they punched the second ball from top they would be voting for Gore. Wrong! They voted for Pat Buchanan. Buchanan himself admitted publicly that his disproportionately high votes in Palm Beach belonged to Gore.

Sensing their mistake, some voters punched the ballot twice, for Buchanan and Gore, which disqualified their ballot. In all over 19,000 ballots were disqualified in Palm Beach alone; most of it would have gone to Gore. The will of the people was not reflected because of the faulty construction of the ballot, the Gore people argue. They also want a hand recount so that imperfectly punched ballots can also be counted. The Democratic voters of the county want a "revote" (another massacre of Queen's English by the Americans.) First Lady turned US Senator from New York, Hillary Rodham Clinton says that she will sponsor legislation to abolish the Electoral College and allow direct election of the President.

The reason why ballots differ from state to state is that the holding of an election is the state's responsibility and is subject to state, not federal laws. It is hard to imagine any judge in Florida ordering a "revote" in any county. That will essentially ensure the election of Al Gore. If the will of the people were truly reflected, Gore would win Florida and be the next President. In the imperfect world we live in, unless the absentee ballots and hand counting drastically alter the vote count, George Bush will win Florida and the Presidency.

Republicans are exerting enormous pressure on Gore to concede defeat (for the sake of the nation," reminding him that Richard Nixon had conceded the 1960 election to John F. Kennedy even though he lost by only 100,000 popular votes and about 30 electoral votes. (Gore leads Bush by 200,000 popular votes at the moment).

This election has truly divided the nation. Whoever is elected the next President of the United States, will have a tough time governing the nation. With one seat yet to be decided, Senate has a chance of literally splitting 50:50. Republicans have only seven more seats than the Democrats do in the House. The Northeast and the Pacific West voted for Gore while the South and the Midwest voted for Bush. Gore won the populous states whereas because of the overwhelming land area of the states Bush won, he can claim a "landslide!" Most men preferred Bush, most women voted for Gore. Environmentalists and gays gave the nod to Gore, while the businesses and more straights sided with Bush. People who have guns and oppose abortion backed Bush, whereas households that are pro-choice and are without a gun chose Gore. Overall, liberal whites, African-Americans and other minorities voted for a Gore Presidency, while the conservative whites and the religious right, the gun, tobacco and business lobby worked tirelessly to get Bush elected.

America's diversity is astonishing. It is said that the northern state of Pennsylvania is Pittsburgh in the West and Philadelphia in the East (both heavily Democratic and minority-dominated) with Alabama in the middle (upstate Pennsylvania is predominantly white and Republican like the state of Alabama, with very little minority population). Fortunately, America is the most affluent nation on earth. Were poverty to descend on America, as this presidential election has demonstrated, the divisions with its social fabric could tear the nation apart.

CAMPAIGN FOR THE WHITE HOUSE

Where will it End?

by A H Jaffor Ullah

AN extraordinary event is now taking place in the history of the United States as I write this article (November). Considering the events that are unfolding right before our eyes, I hasten to add that one of the densely populated states of America that is Florida can qualify as part of any of the Third World countries. Judging from the US presidential election result those are coming out of Florida, one may very well say that the election conducting authorities in that state are certainly acting like one of those in a Third World country.

As the Florida vote re-count continues, allegations of wrongdoings and improprieties are coming to light. On November 8, we learned that Bush had won the state by a slim margin of only 1800 votes out of about 5.8 million votes those were cast the day before. As the votes were recounted, more were added to Gore. As of noon on November 9, the difference between Bush and Gore fell to only 795 in favour of Bush. But at 4:30 PM (CDT) I saw that more votes were added to Gore's column. Now the difference has only 360 votes in favour of Bush. Nine more counties are not finished yet with the vote re-count. It is expected that Gore might receive more votes. Whether he will receive an extra 403 votes to tie the election is an open question. But there are more to the Florida vote counts than meets the eye. The state is run by another scion of Bush family Jeb Bush, the younger brother of George Bush.

In Palm Beach and Osceola counties, the voters claimed the design of the ballots was confusing enough to cast their vote for the wrong candidate. Voters erroneously punched the wrong hole giving their votes to wrong candidate. When some voters have realized that they voted for the wrong candidate, they punched the hole for their candidate (Gore). But by doing so, they disqualified their votes. Palm Beach officials announced that 19,120 presidential ballots were thrown out (disqualified) before they were counted because more than one candidate was picked. That is a high number no doubt, considering the fact that US Presidential election would be decided at this time by the outcome of Florida election, which Al

Gore is losing by only 403 votes. Some of the voters in Palm Beach county think they have wrongly voted for Reform Party candidate Pat Buchanan who had garnered 3,407 votes. One holo-caust victim in Palm Beach who wrongly voted for Mr. Buchanan said on November 9 to TV reporters that she was very much agitated knowing what she did and she could not sleep because of what she did. Mr. Buchanan himself said he believed most of the votes he received in the county were intended for Mr. Gore. In a statement Mr. Buchanan said, "I don't want any votes that I did not receive and I don't want to win any votes by mistake. It seems to me that these 3,000 votes people are talking about most of those are probably not my vote and that may be enough to give the margin to Mr. Gore."

There is more election ballot blunder than just the one I mentioned above. Take the bizarre case of Volusia county, which is located south of Daytona Beach on Florida's Atlantic coast. In this county Mr. James E. Harris, an obscure Socialist Workers candidate polled 9,888 votes. He received 10,471 votes throughout Florida. Why did he receive 94 per cent of his total votes in an obscure county is puzzling. It was revealed that Mr. Harris received 0, 1, or 2 votes in counties surrounding Volusia.

Voters in heavily populated Miami-Dade, Broward and other nearby counties complained about delays in delivery of ballot boxes to polling. It is noteworthy that these urban areas are the strongholds of Democratic Party. It makes one wonder whether these were deliberate act to help one candidate over the other.

NAACP, the organization that represents the minority citizens, has received complaints on election day that some voters were told that there were no more ballots, or that polls were closed. These are gross civil rights violations. Therefore, serious allegations against the state organization conducting the presidential poll raised by NAACP are quite legitimate.

Both Democratic and Republican Parties have sent their high-powered emissaries to the battle-

ground, i.e., Florida to oversee the vote re-count. Meanwhile, Mr. Bush is pretending to be the President-elect while Mr. Gore is in seclusion. The way Democratic representatives are talking in Florida one thing is for sure: the decision of Florida State's presidential election result will be contested in the court.

On November 9, in the middle of the day we read in the Internet network news that Gore representatives had asked the Florida Election authorities to hand count the votes in three counties including the Palm Beach. The normal vote re-count is done by reading the result given by each polling booth or box.

Three women have already filed a complaint against the Palm Beach County Canvassing Board in the Circuit Court of the 15th Judicial Circuit (Case No. CL00 10965 AN). This is just the beginning of lawsuits centering the impropriety that may have taken place in Florida.

There are other legal problems, too. Because of his vested interest in the outcome, Mr. Jeb Bush, the governor and younger brother of the republican candidate, excused himself from the panel that will certify the election results of the re-count. But the other members of the panel are Republicans.

Contrary to what Mr. George W. Bush may think, this election for presidency is far from over. Litigations would delay the outcome of the Florida result. The state of Florida by revealing these instances of impropriety on the part of polling authorities has marred the election results. The big guns from both the parties are there in the state capital, Tallahassee, to make sure that the election result conveys the wishes of Floridians. Since no one really knows how many absentee ballots are coming this year, it makes it next to impossible to guess who really have won the state. Till that happens, speculation, news report, analysis would satiate the interest of the citizens here and abroad. This would give us food for thoughts. Who says that handful of votes do not count?

So, stay tuned. More is yet to come. The writer, a senior research scientist, writes from New Orleans.

by Jim Davis

Emerging Thaw in US-N Korea Relations

by A S M Nurunnabi

MOVES to kickstart US-North Korea ties have lately been in evidence. After nearly half a century of enmity, the United States and North Korea are trying to mend their relationship. The initial move in this context was taken by Jo Yong Rok, the second-most powerful man in North Korea who visited the White House in the second week of October. No deal was forged during Jo's three-day visit, but as diplomatic forays go, it was a promising start. The two countries issued a joint communique that broke no new ground, but was encouraging nonetheless. It stressed the importance of the dialogue between North and South Korea, a mutual declaration of "no hostile intent" between Washington and Pyongyang and affirmed North Korea's moratorium on missile testing.

It's too early to declare peace in Korea. Some 690,000 South Korean soldiers and 37,000 US troops are still garrisoned in the 38th parallel against nearly a million adversaries. Yet Jo's visit, the culmination of two years of painstaking diplomacy, has moved the peninsula from a state of near-constant crisis to the brink of rapprochement. The United States aims to encourage the process while keeping the pressure on North Korea leader Kim Jong Il to make concessions.

Most of the discussions in Washington during Jo's visit focussed on North Korea's ballistic missile programme. US Administration was considering Kim's proposal that North Korea would end its missile programme if other countries agree to put North's satellites into orbit.

Barely six years ago the United States was poised to attacking suspected nuclear weapons labs in North Korea. It took a last-ditch peace mission by former president Jimmy Carter to produce compromise. Known as the Agreed Framework, Pyongyang pledged to mothball its A-bomb programme in exchange for two light-water nuclear power plants now under construction in the North. The crisis flared anew in August 1998, when Pyongyang test-fired its newest ballistic missile. Declared as a "satellite launch", the missile soared over northern Japan and crashed into the Pacific.

The provocation sparked panic in Japan and enraged hawks in Washington. To appease Congress, Clinton deputized former Defence Secretary William Perry to review his North Korea policy, a move wisely anticipated to harden Washington's stance. Instead Perry adopted a softer view of North Korea's behaviour. He interpreted North Korea's missile programme as largely a bargaining chip for a desperate regime fast running out of options. Rather than push containment, he endorsed diplomatic efforts aimed at coaxing Pyongyang towards moderation. Last year he became the highest ranking US official to visit North Korea since the war. At the core of his thinking was a recognised need

for South-North dialogue". And he found a huge ally in South Korean President Kim Dae Jung. The latter's "sunshine policy" focussed on providing financial aid to the North helped Kim Jong Il out of his communist cocoon.

While relishing the success of the Perry strategy and the prospect of a Clinton visit to Pyongyang, US officials cautioned that good feelings must be reinforced with concrete actions by the North. "Our countries are moving in a positive direction," said Albright, US Secretary of State, "but as both sides recognise, we still have far to go." Fundamental issues like lack of transparency on food aid, Pyongyang's refusal to pull its Army back from the border or to release Korean War POWs are still outstanding issues requiring attention for settlement, according to an analyst in Washington. In his opinion, "Jo's visit will help keep tensions in check, but it cannot be seen as a breakthrough."

That said, analysts were picking up intriguing signals. Since the North-South summit, for example, Kim Jong Il has hinted that his government might countenance US troops in Korea even after reunification a 180 degree shift from Pyongyang's long-standing demand that the "imperialists" leave ahead of peace talks.

North Korea has long shown a flair for forcing the outside world to take note of its diplomacy. But on October 12, barely four months after the first summit between the leaders of the two Koreas, Pyongyang dropped a news bombshell by announcing it was inviting the President of the United States, Bill Clinton, to visit. While Washington politics could yet throw a wrench in Pyongyang's Clinton meet the People's Paradise plan, there is for now less cold water being splashed over the notion than might have been expected.

Whether Clinton's trip comes off remains to be seen, but the developments that have led up to it are already being seen as an unprecedented show of North Korean moderation. Is North Korea's new moderation genuine? The signs are said to be positive. For one, it has abandoned a longstanding insistence on shutting South Korea out of talks on replacing the armistice that has been in place since the 1950-53 Korean War. The North now agrees that a formal end to the state of war can be discussed in the currently stalled four-party talks between the two Koreas, China and the United States. That may be sufficient to restart the dialogue, as it brings Pyongyang closer to Seoul's so-called "two-plus-two" formula, under which North and South Korea would sign a peace treaty first, to be endorsed by China and the US.

Government analysts in Seoul view Pyongyang's invitation to Clinton as sincere. The offer, along with the other measures agreed to by the North, is inter-

and its allies have yet to retake the initiative. While the objective of Washington's diplomacy may be to make Northeast Asia a tangibly safer place, that goal is distant and uncertain. And while Albright's October 23-25 visit produced hope that North Korea may be on the way towards shelving its missile programme, Pyongyang's exchanges with both Seoul and Washington have been chiefly symbolic, and of significantly greater value to Kim than to his interlocutors.

What is clear is that North Korea is the driving force behind the recent diplomacy. What may be repelling North Korea's haste in its diplomatic initiatives is concern at the country's protracted food crisis and the dangers that is posing to the long-term survivability of Kim's regime. Washington-based analysts believe there is a realisation in Pyongyang that outside help, at least in the form of trade and investment, will be needed if basic prosperity is to be achieved and maintained.

With talk of a visit by US President Bill Clinton, North Korea can now claim to have steered the actions of the world's most powerful nation in war and peace. Kim might be forgiven for feeling a little pleased. By contrast, the US

Garfield



James Bond



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