

Who will win the race of US presidential election?



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THE question that peeps into everybody's mind ahead of the US presidential election is who will turn victorious in this electoral race? A number of electoral surveys and other analyses predict Obama's victory. Such conclusion is made based on the failure of the pre-Obama Republican regimes in both their domestic and foreign affairs. Although this hypothesis may be supported by too many arguments, the possibility of Romney's victory may not also be blown out.

Romney's most important electoral attack against Obama is related to the latter's grand failure to combat the declining American economy. In his video-film named as Too Many Americans prepared at Virginia as the device for electoral advertisement, Romney claimed that despite

their converging policy of considering the middle class and the poor Americans, he and Obama hold diverging operational modus operandi. What he wants in that is to improve the standard of living of his countrymen. Through Table, Obama's video-film, the Democrat candidate explained how he wants to bring change in the remaking of the economy of the poor and the marginalised. Another important instrument of the Republican candidate is Obama's lack of efficient employment policy. This argument is fuelled by the release of the US Labor Statistics Bureau on September 7 of a frustrating report regarding US employment. It says that the number of new employment in August was 96 thousand which is far below expectation. The report marks a decline in unemployment rate from 8.3% in July to 8.1% in August. What Romney used against Obama is the

latter's failure with regard to the implementation of the electoral promise of reducing the unemployment rate to 5.4%.

Responding to Mitt Romney's accusations, Barack Obama pointed out that the economic devastation and unemployment had been the legacy and continuity of pre-Obama republican regimes. In his Table, he reiterated that they were loosing about 800000 jobs almost every month at the time of his presidential oath.

US Republican Presidential nominee Mitt Romney has attacked Barack Obama on various foreign policy issues that include his policy towards Middle East, his response to Iran's nuclearisation, his handling of the violent demonstrations in the Muslim world following the release of an amateur US film named Innocence of Muslim. He accused that under Obama's policy, the Middle East descends into chaos, Iran proceeds toward nuclear breakout, and Israel's security is compromised. He warned that such foreign policy will pull America into the maelstrom. In an op-ed piece in The Wall Street Journal, he said of recent "disturbing" developments in the Middle East that the US seems to be at the mercy of events rather than shaping them. He also said that the present Democrats are not moving them in a direction that protects American people or their allies. Obama is criticised for not taking prompt action against those involved in the killing of the US diplomats in Libya which must threaten the security of US envoys and citizens everywhere.

Challenging the foreign policy arguments raised by Republicans, the Democrat campaigners claimed that their foreign policy is founded on the bunch of efficient, updated

and American national interest-oriented strategies. Their realist perspective of foreign policy is not opposed to the welfare of the humanity. They argue that Obama has been successful in killing the al-Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden, dismantling their worldwide terrorist networks, reducing the burden of trillion dollar wars in Iraq and Afghanistan through an early end and ensuring the security of the Americans in foreign lands. The Democrats have also been able to move toward diplomatic defeat for Iran on its nuclear issue through imposing a number of economic sanctions, trade embargo and bank restrictions. Any war threat to Iran or a direct war against it might endanger American interests in the Middle East region.

In the light of above points made by the two competing political blocs, Obama's victory in the upcoming election may be predicted. The reasons are as follows. First, the victory for the second term in the presidential election has been America's historical phenomenon. All presidents have been elected for the second term in the contemporary history except Jimmy Carter. The Republican campaigners may try to bring back the Carter episode in the present electoral drama. The aim is to attract the electoral voters. Some analyses including New York Times concluded that Obama's prospective victory can not be prevented by the play of Carter card.

Second, Obama is more prospective to get the mandate from the new and swing voters by virtue of his innovative domestic and vibrant foreign policies. The horrors of war, anti-war feelings and Obama's "change" theory might bring those voters in

favour of the Democrat candidate. The insecurity achieved in the foreign countries because of the pro-war Republican policy should prevent the new generation from siding with Mitt Romney.

Third, the integrity of Obama's personality may also be the resultant factor behind the forecast of his victory. Romney has been accused of not disclosing tax return for years. In the face of severe criticism, he has published at a time the tax return of last 20 years which have earned a very bad name. His file shows that he and his wife have disbursed 20 years' tax at the rate of only 13.6 percent and 20.2 percent that falls far below of a rich American's tax giving rate which is normally 35 percent. On the contrary, Obama, being a near middle income individual, has paid tax in 2011 at 20.5 percent rate.

In fine, it can be said that Obama's success in the electoral race is obvious. The two candidates' face-off of October 3 may not have any significant impact on the ensuing election results. The 2008 Gallup survey showed that the results of only two elections during the 1960-2004 periods had been determined based on the face-offs. According to Robert Erickson, the author of The Timeline of Presidential Election, the presidential debate has only the temporary influence that does not change the minds of voters. However, despite explicit probability of Obama's electoral win, the unpredictability at the psyche of those voters may not also blow out the implicit possibility of the Republican comeback to the throne of America.

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The Korean Peninsula: The future of a geopolitical nexus

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KOREA has returned to the world stage as a crucial geopolitical nexus in the coming decade. It will affect in important ways the future of China, Japan, the United States, and perhaps Russia as well. Yet, paradoxically, its future depends primarily on itself.

Korea is one of that rare breed - a country with a very long history as a political and cultural entity, with varying degrees of unity as a single kingdom. In modern times, it was an independent state until Japan first made it a protectorate in 1905 and then annexed it in 1910. Japan's defeat in the Second World War ended her rule in Korea. In the very last days of the war, American and Russian troops entered Korea, meeting at the 38th Parallel. Two states came into existence, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK, or North Korea) and the Republic of Korea (ROK, or South Korea).

In 1950, the two Koreas came to be at war with each other. How this started remains a subject of fierce controversy to this day. The United States, profiting from the absence of the Soviet Union from the Security Council, was able to mobilize the United Nations to come to the military aid of South Korea. There were troops from 16 countries under the U.N. umbrella, although U.S. troops constituted over 80% of the total. Soon thereafter, Chinese troops entered North Korea to support the DPRK against the U.S./U.N. troops. The Korean War thus became also, and most importantly, a Chinese-American war.

By 1953, the war was at a stalemate, and the opposing sides signed an armistice at a line that was almost the same as the 38th Parallel. In short, the war was a draw. Technically, the war has never ended. There is no peace treaty, but there also is no war, although there remains great hostility and there are skirmishes from time to time. In 1957, the United States renounced a clause of the armistice agreement and introduced nuclear weapons into South Korea, over the protest of the North Koreans.

In 2003, in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union, North Korea withdrew from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and sought bilateral talks with the United States on a treaty of non-aggression. The U.S. refused bilateral talks but proposed six-party talks that would include also South Korea, Japan, China, and Russia. In 2006, North Korea announced a nuclear test, and in 2009 announced that it had produced a nuclear weapon. These days, some South Korean intellectuals designate the situation with an invented term. They say the Korean Peninsula is in a state of "peacelessness."

The U.S. goal of getting North Korea to repudiate nuclear weapons has not been achieved. On the other hand, North Korea has been suffering for quite some time from an acute food shortage, in part explained by the regime's insistence on giving primacy to their military expenditures.

Korean nationalism is extremely strong, and both the North and the South claim to look forward to reunification. But on what terms? The level of mutual suspicion is high. And South Korea's attitude towards this prospect is one that deeply divides South Koreans.

In 1961, Park Chung-hee led a military coup d'état and ruled as a dictator until 1979 when he was assassinated. Park believed that reunification was only possible and desirable if it involved the overthrow of the North Korean regime. In 1980, students led an uprising critical of the United States and calling for democratization of the regime. It was brutally suppressed. After this, conservative forces dominated South Korean poli-

tics until a left-of-center party led by long-time dissident Kim Dae-jung won the election in 1997. He inaugurated the so-called Sunshine Policy. The name refers to an Aesopian fable, showing that it is easier to get someone to remove his coat if the sun shines than if the wind blows. The policy centered upon seeking concrete forms of cooperation with North Korea and repudiating any attempt to absorb the DPRK. He won the Nobel prize for peace in 2000 for this policy, which was continued by his successor, Roh Moo-hyun, president from 2003-2008.

In 2008, the conservatives won back the presidency, in part because the opening to the DPRK hadn't proved too successful and in part because of scandals affecting the Roh government. The new president, Lee Myung-bak, vociferously repudiated the Sunshine Policy, and asserted a hostile policy stronger even than that of the United States.

It seems clear today that neither China nor the United States nor Japan nor even Russia is really in favor of Korean reunification. All of them prefer the status quo. And yet, at this very time, the forces favoring reunification over the next decade seem suddenly stronger.

There are two factors in this new situation. One is the forthcoming election in South Korea. The conservatives have put forward the daughter of Park Chung-hee, Park Geun-hye, who has insisted on a total justification of her father's regime.

The left-of-center forces are currently split between two candidates. Moon Jae-in is the candidate of the left-of-center party and stands for renewing the opening to the DPRK. There is also an independent candidate, Ahn Cheol-soo, who presents himself as the anti-politician candidate, appealing to those who are unhappy with both parties. However, his actual program is virtually identical with that of Moon Jae-in.

The polls show that if the two left-of-center candidates remain in the race, the conservative candidate will surely win. The polls also show however that if one of the two withdraws in favor of the other, the left-of-center forces will probably win. The likelihood of a withdrawal is high. The big question is who will withdraw in favor of whom.

If the left-of-center forces win, what will be the response in North Korea? No one knows. But everyone has noticed that the initial moves of the new leader, Kim Jong-un, seem to be rather different from the policy of his father, Kim Jong-il. He seems to be more concerned with providing more real income for the ordinary North Korean, and more open to changes. He may welcome some sunshine from the south.

If then the left-of-center wins in the South and the new leader in the North is in fact more open to sunshine, the world might see over the next decade a sort of loose confederation of north and south - ignoring the real fears of China and the United States.

A reunited Korea will have a major impact on the geopolitics of Northeast Asia, and indeed on world geopolitics. It will possibly mediate between China and Japan and enable a tristate common structure to come into existence. It may result in South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan all becoming nuclear powers.

Furthermore, a unified Korea will link up with the repositioning of Egypt and the ever stronger geopolitical position of Brazil to entrench the redistribution of geopolitical power worldwide. And, let me repeat, this is in the hands of the Koreans themselves.

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IN the tumultuous March of 1970, the Planning Commission convened an advisory panel of economists from East and West Pakistan to provide input to the outline of the Fourth Five-Year Plan. The panel consisted of 12 economists, six from each wing, and held six meetings in three different cities.

The panel could not come to an agreement regarding important questions of growing regional disparities in Pakistan, and as a result split into two different groups. The economists from East Pakistan went off in a group led by Mazharul Haq who was the chairman of the panel, while their West Pakistani colleagues worked separately to produce their own report.

As a result, two separate reports were submitted to the government from the same panel. East and West never had a meeting of minds on the crucial questions of their time, and their tortured attempts to communicate with each other makes for grievous reading, and deserves to be quoted at length.

"The future of the nation, indeed its very survival, hinges on whether the benefits and burdens of economic development can be shared equitably by the people of all the regions," wrote the East Pakistani economists in the opening pages of their report.

The authors regretted that the panel was forced to split into two, saying "[o]ur differences were fundamental, touching, we felt, the very sense of the crisis the nation is passing through".

Regional disparities lay at the heart of the crisis and could be seen in ever-widening disparities in per capita incomes, in the East's share in government expenditure, in private investment, in the marginal saving rate "imposed" on the eastern wing, in the utilisation of foreign aid and export proceeds and many other areas.

This growing disparity could only be redressed "by reversing the past ratios of regional allocation of total expenditures in favour of East Pakistan" in the Fourth Plan, the authors argued, urging that delay in this reallocation would only make the eventual adjustment more difficult.

"The problem is already acute now as a drastic reversal of policy will cause a sudden retardation of the growth rate in West Pakistan," the report states, showing the sensitivity the authors had to the constraints faced by their colleagues from the West wing.

"We have proposed merely that the Fourth Plan allocation between East and West Pakistan be made in proportion to population," they wrote, arguing that even this was an insufficient step and would require a bigger thrust in the subsequent Fifth Plan. "Our colleagues from West Pakistan, however, could not be persuaded to agree even to our moderate proposal.

"We could not communicate with each other adequately as to the urgency of removal of disparity," they complained, adding that in moderating their demands, the West Pakistanis "were asking East Pakistan not only to forget the past inequities ... but to wait for a long time to reach parity.... [and] to assume a disproportionate burden of the effort to build a more harmonious nation".

The West Pakistani economists, in their separate report, did acknowledge the "considerable political sentiment" that the issue of regional disparity had created within the coun-

try, but expressed their helplessness to address the issue in the time allowed by one Five-Year Plan.

"We, the members of the panel from West Pakistan felt that our colleagues from East Pakistan were starting from certain rigid political parameters, and were not willing to give due consideration to the very real economic problems which would be faced by West Pakistan if a very sudden and sharp further reduction in the investment ratio of that wing were to take place," they wrote.

"We further believe strongly that protecting growth in West Pakistan to the extent advocated by us is in the overall national interest" wrote the authors. "We understand and sympathise with the impatience of our colleagues. This impatience has grown as a result of failure of past attempts to arrest the growth of inter-wing disparity."

The "impatience" of the East Pakistani economists grew out of a long history. In a separate appendix attached to their report, they noted that "East Pakistan's long ridge of protest" began in the debates around the inception of the First Plan, and continued through the Second and Third Plan, and the first and second finance commissions.

"The irony is that, in essence, the East Pakistani members of this panel are not saying anything new," they wrote and added that in 1962, during the finance commission discussions, their call for a more "harmonious national development" not only fell on deaf ears, but the then deputy chairman of the Planning Commission, "referred to some of the East Pakistani economists as 'minions of foreign powers' in a widely publicised radio broadcast".

When submitting the Fourth Plan in July 1970, M.M. Ahmed, then deputy chairman of the Planning Commission, made no mention of the split that had developed in the panel, saying only that drafting the plan has "been a difficult exercise".

And then, in two sentences he added that "[i]t was gratifying for the Planning Commission that the recommendations finally made by it found unanimous approval of the National Economic Council. It is our earnest hope that the Fourth National Plan will find enthusiastic support both within the country and abroad."

Less than a year later, the outcome of a national election was annulled and military action was ordered in the eastern wing. The earnest hopes of a gratified Ahmed were dashed, and the worst fears of the East Pakistani economists had materialised as Pakistan began its final lap to a blood-soaked, rubble-strewn dismemberment.

Less than 10 months later, the flag of Bangladesh was hoisted atop the very buildings in Dhaka where the economists of the eastern wing had earlier formulated their complaint.

"Will an impatient nation give us yet another chance?" the East economists had asked in closing their report. There was no more patience. There were no further chances.

The question of regional disparities is back vis-a-vis Balochistan. This time it's more complicated since the disparities are not only economic. Let's not walk down that road all over again.

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