

The US Presidential Election



Comments 2



Rashmi_R_Baruah 11 July 2008 13473 views

In the U.S. Presidential election, the month of June began with Illinois Senator Barack Obama winning the Democratic presidential nomination and making history by becoming the United States's first black candidate to represent a major party in the US presidential election. Obama wrapped up the nomination following a rush of endorsements from Democratic superdelegates and the results in the final primaries of Montana and South Dakota that made him surpass the 2,118 delegates needed to secure the Democratic nomination. His rival Senator Hillary Clinton refused to concede defeat initially but a few days later formally ended her presidential campaign and endorsed Obama. His campaign got another boost by the endorsement of former Vice President Al Gore who urged voters to back Obama. Further two weeks after winning the nomination, a latest Newsweek poll has shown Democrat Barack Obama leading Republican John McCain by a margin of 51-36 percent. According to political analysts this 15 point lead indicates that Senator Hillary Clinton's supporters are now backing Senator Obama. In its previous survey last month, Newsweek found that 34 per cent of Clinton supporters would rather vote for McCain than Obama in November. But now, that figure was down to 18 per cent, with 69 per cent backing Obama.

Barack Obama's nomination as the first black president of a major U.S. party has created interests in India. In the beginning of the race to the White House, Indians were skeptical about him as being a first time senator not much was known about him. On top of that his attack on Senator Hillary Clinton as the Democrat from Punjab due to Clinton's ties with India and Indian Americans did not go down well with the Indian American community. Much later in the race he tried to improve his relationship with India and the Indian American community. He has pledged to build a close strategic partnership between U.S and India as according to him, the two countries are natural partners sharing important interests and fundamental democratic values His promise to

go after high value terror targets in Pakistan has given reason for Indians to feel secure as India's biggest threat comes from Pakistan which is the breeding ground for terrorists. His assertion that the outsourcing of jobs to India and China is irreversible as he believes in free trade without building "protectionist walls" has come as a relief to the business community in India. Since winning the nomination, Obama has also apologized for calling Hillary Clinton a Democrat from Punjab saying his campaign has made a 'dumb mistake' when it circulated a memo criticizing Hillary Rodham Clinton's financial ties to India.

Senator Barack Obama who has shattered presidential campaign fundraising records during the primaries, opted out of the federal public financing system in the general election as according to him the system has collapsed and it would put him at disadvantage in running against Senator John McCain. Senator Obama would be the first candidate to do so since Congress passed 1970s post-Watergate campaign finance laws. But Senator John McCain would be accepting public fund for his campaign. Interestingly it was for the first time that Senator John McCain matched Senator Obama's fundraising as each candidate raised more than \$21 million in the month of May. This has been the best fundraising month for Republican Senator John McCain during his presidential campaign.

In his first foreign policy speech after clinching the Democratic nomination, Barack Obama pledged to safeguard Israel's security if elected president in November. Hours after winning the nomination, Obama told the annual conference of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, a powerful pro-Israel lobbying group that Jerusalem will remain the 'undivided' capital of Israel and any deal between Israelis and Palestinians should preserve Israel's identity as a Jewish state and Hamas should be isolated. Obama also vowed to stop Iran from acquiring nuclear weapon and will use military force if necessary in the

event of an Iranian attack on Israel. This assurance was given in order to reach out to the Jewish voters who have for long supported him at lower levels than past Democratic nominees and rumours surrounding that he is a Muslim.

In order to get better acquaintance with the ground situation of Iraq and Afghanistan, Obama has made plans to visit these countries before the November elections. Obama who is against the Iraq war has pledge for a phased withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq shortly after taking office in order to make it clear that the U.S. occupation of Iraq is not permanent whereas his rival Republican John McCain is a staunch advocate of the war and has been a frequent visitor to Iraq. Infact, Senator McCain has often criticized Democrat Obama for his failure to visit the country since 2006 and see the situation on the ground before concluding that U.S. efforts have failed to get the war-torn nation back on track. McCain has visited Iraq eight times since the war began while Obama has been to Iraq once, in 2006. If he goes this summer, it would be his first visit since becoming a presidential candidate.

The issue of terrorism also surfaced during the campaign trial with Republican John McCain's camp accusing Democrat Barack Obama of being weak on terrorists for saying terrorist suspects could be treated as criminals "within the constraints of the Constitution." But Obama forcefully fired back saying "These are the same guys who helped to engineer the distraction of the Iraq war at a time when we could have pinned down the people who actually committed 9/11". This exchange is infact a part of a deeper debate about the U.S. effort against al- Qaeda and the treatment of terrorist detainees. Both McCain and Obama want the U.S. military-run prison at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, to be closed. But when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that detainees in the Guantánamo Bay have the constitutional right to challenge their detention in U.S. federal court, Obama praised the ruling whereas McCain condemned

the ruling, calling it "one of the worst decisions in the history of this country." Obama, for his part, has linked the ruling to one of his favorite broader themes about rebuilding America's damaged image abroad.

The energy issue came into focus during the campaign trail due to the soaring price of gasoline. In order to make the country reduce dependence on foreign oil, Senator McCain proposed to lift the 27 year federal moratorium on new oil and gas drilling along the nation's coastline and leave it up to states to decide whether to explore for energy in coastal waters. This statement has come under attack from the environmental community and has also been dismissed by his rival Obama as such a measure would not help the problem in the short term. Senator McCain also promised that if elected president he would construct 45 new nuclear reactors by 2030 with a longer term goal of adding another 55 in the future and pledged \$2 billion a year in federal funds "to make clean coal a reality". Senator McCain argued for more nuclear plants due to plans by countries like China, Russia and India to build more new power plants in the coming decades and hence in order to counter them it is necessary for the United States to upgrade its nuclear power. As regards Obama, he is open to expanded nuclear energy, but said producers must address concerns over transparency, security of nuclear fuel and waste, and waste storage.

Democrat Barack Obama, on the otherhand, believes oil speculation is responsible for record high oil prices. He offered a four-step program to crackdown on speculation in oil markets and stabilize the soaring gasoline prices. He proposed closing the Enron loophole, a legal provision that exempts energy commodities from government oversight. The other three components of the plan are to ensure that U.S. energy futures trade on regulated exchanges; to work towards international regulation of oil future markets in cooperation with like minded countries; and to have both the Federal Trade Commission and the

Justice Department investigate the oil markets.

On the issue of nuclear proliferation, Senator John McCain made a recent speech that signaled a significant change from the Bush Administration in certain important areas, including his call for negotiation with China to temporarily halt production of nuclear grade material and proposed a new treaty with Russia to destroy more atomic weapons; opening a discussion on the ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT); strengthening efforts to secure vulnerable bomb-grade material; pursuing negotiations for a Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty (FMCT); and increasing funding for the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). He favours an approach that does not rely too heavily on either direct talks or military force to reduce the spread of nuclear weapons. Though questions remained regarding some specific policies like whether Senator McCain will continue the successful engagement with North Korea to achieve a verifiable dismantlement of its nuclear weapons program, and whether he will be willing to negotiate directly with Iran. After Senator McCain's speech on proliferation, the Obama camp gave a statement that "by embracing many aspects of Barack Obama's nonproliferation agenda today, John McCain highlighted Obama's leadership on nuclear weapons throughout this campaign." But while there are similarities between their plans their respective outlook on the issue remains remarkably different. McCain wants to "seek to reduce the size of our nuclear arsenal to the lowest number possible consistent with our security requirements and global commitments" whereas Obama's goal is "a world where there are no nuclear weapons."

The debate over the key issues will continue till a new President is in place in January 2009 although attention will continue to remain focused on Barack Obama's race and his effort to win the election as the

first African-American presidential candidate and Senator McCain's advantage over him in terms of experience.

Rashmi_R_Baruah

ON THIS DAY

Raijor Dal on the doorstep

Heroin smugglers arrested

Gandhi Jayanti celebrated by Army in Lingibore

Cleanliness Drive By FCI and SOS Children's Village marks Gandhi Jayanti in Hojai.

PoK editor bats for more exchanges
