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Minority groups in Virginia to play key role in US Prez poll

Washington, Oct 21: With the November 4 presidential polls in the US just two weeks away, minority groups including Indian-Americans are expected to play a pivotal role in deciding between Barack Obama and John McCain in Virginia, a solidly Republican State for the last four decades but now seen as heading the way of the Democratic nominee.

Virginia is also a state where several Asian communities have come to play a key role in shaping the political landscape and where Indian-American leaders have not shied away from actively and aggressively promoting their political beliefs -- both conservative and liberal.

"Perhaps the most-organised Asian voters in Virginia are the Indian Americans, a highly educated and entrepreneurial group. They tend to vote Democratic, although they have applauded the Bush administration's warm relations and recent nuclear technology agreement with India.

"Some of their leaders are active in Democratic party politics, raising substantial funds for local and state candidates. Many initially supported Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton and have now switched their allegiance to Obama," 'The Washington Post' said in an article.

With 13 electoral college votes at its disposal, polls have been showing in the last few weeks that Democrat Obama is leading his Republican rival McCain by at least six percentage points, nothing to sneer at given the kind of competition that has come about in a state that last saw backing a Democrat in 1964 with Lyndon Johnson.

But the Republican party and the campaign of Senator McCain have not given up for there are implications beyond 2008 should this traditionally "Red" State gets into the "Blue" column. The political stakes are simply too high down the road, analysts said.

The role and impact of the minority groups has been a subject of some intense scrutiny in the media with many coming to the conclusion that the African-American and Hispanic voters have long decided where their votes are going -- the way of Senator Obama.

But what is being pointed out in The Post article is that the Asian-Americans cannot be seen as a monolithic voting group moving the way of the Illinois Democrat.

For instance it is being pointed out that the Hispanic population put at around 250,000 outnumbered that of Asian Americans, but Hispanic residents are relatively new comers to the area and a minority of them are citizens -- the estimate is that nearly one half of Asian-American residents in Virginia are citizens and of voting age.

The National Asian American Survey showed that Asian- Americans across the country favour Obama over McCain but that more than one-third are undecided, which could make them a critical factor in several states, 'The Post' has cited.

In Virginia, for example, there is a lot of support from the Vietnamese American community for McCain where older refugees from the Communist state admire the Arizona Republican for being a prisoner of war in the country and later on playing a major role in helping restore diplomatic relations with Washington.

Likewise, 'The Post' points to the older Korean Americans, especially Christians and small-business owners, are drawn to Republican party values.

It is being pointed out that many first-generation Asian Americans, who came here as refugees or economic immigrants in the 1960s and 1970s and are now reaching retirement age, have tended to be business-oriented, insular and focussed on issues in their homelands whereas the second-generation professionals and their college-age children tend to be more liberal and engaged in domestic issues.

Bureau Report

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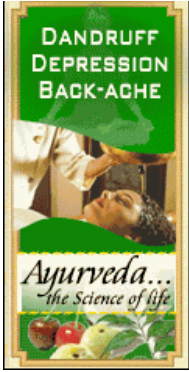
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