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**W**ith less than a week to go for what is arguably the most important election in the world, the world is waiting to see who the American people will choose as their next leader.

Never before has a US election been so polarised nor have the stakes been higher for each side and, indeed, the rest of the world.

On one side stands Hillary R Clinton, who will go down in history as the US' first woman president if she wins, with decades of public service behind her, including an eight-year stint as Secretary of State, but whose campaign has been clouded by an FBI investigation of improper email practices.

On the other is the improbable Republican candidate Donald J Trump, a real estate tycoon who has roiled the conservative establishment with his often divisive remarks, beaten veteran politicians by a landslide, and has been hit by one scandal after another, the most recent being an audio tape in which he is heard bragging about sexually assaulting women.

The stakes for India, too, are

"India and America work together in so many different areas that it almost doesn't matter who the president is. The institutional engagement on so many levels, our interface with the US Congress, which is independent of the President, is so strong, though the Presidency of course matters a lot," says Ashok Malik, Head-Neighbourhood Regional Studies Initiative, Observer Research Foundation. About the current administration, he says, "Under Obama's presidency, India has made gains but they were not as sharp as they were under (George W.) Bush."

Khan believes US' foreign policy and its relationship with other countries is linked with its national interest.

"The change of leadership in Washington is not likely to make major changes in its relationship with the world until and unless its foreign policy planners change their national interests as was witnessed in the cases of US' engagements with Iran and Cuba."

Whether India should be concerned depends on how much governments fear uncertainty, feels Neelam Deo, former Ambassador to the US and director of Gateway House, a policy think-tank based in Mumbai. "With Trump would come a lot of uncertainty, with Hillary Clinton who is a known personality in the global stage,

sort of through dialogue."

Strategic analyst Shamshad A Khan says Clinton is likely to maintain status quo with Pakistan while Trump is likely to deepen US engagement with Pak's political and military leadership as they plan to be more aggressive on rooting out terrorism.

"Before Obama, they used to engage them (Pak) during key officials visits to the region. When Bush visited New Delhi, he visited Islamabad too. However, Obama visited New Delhi bypassing Islamabad and he never fulfilled his commitment to visit Pakistan," he says.

But a new president may not be as friendly as India might be hoping for, says Malik, pointing out that while the rhetoric will be sharper under Trump, the macro position will be equally hard under both. "However, this doesn't mean America will fight India's battles for it. It is upset with Pakistan for its own reasons. So it's not like America will do the dirty work. Trump won't. Clinton won't," he says.

Deo finds it interesting that neither candidate has commented on Afghanistan. "We don't know what Trump's policies on Afghanistan will be but we do know that Clinton is likely to continue with the policy of the present administration which is to continue to with-

brilliant and we would like to keep them in the United States' and, at the same time, he has said that they are stealing American jobs and H-1B visa has to be stricter," Deo said.

Clinton, on the other hand, acknowledges the benefits of attracting "talented people who build businesses and expand the economy," with a measured approach to outsourcing.

But more than these skilled workers, it is their Indian employers, the majority of who are IT industry leaders, who stand to lose millions of dollars in contracts if they cannot send their Indian staff to the US on work.

Several IT companies say they expect stability from the next US President.

"The world is vulnerable to Brexit, the refugee crisis, shifts in power, and the changes in balances," said Umeed Kothavala, CEO and co-founder of Pune-based Extentia Information Technology. "There is a great need for stability, for someone who can help lower the temperature of prospect quo rather than raise it."

"The industry will gain from stability which makes Clinton a safer bet," Abhishek Rungta, Chief Executive Officer, Indus Net Technologies, said. "Trump's

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