

NEWS WRAP

AGD

Efforts by West Euro-pean nations and USA to strengthen human rights, liberty and multiculturalism through the United Nations have been failing over the last few years. A changed balance of power, favouring Russia, China and India has been obstructing the global agenda of the West. Western values and policies have not been victorious in crisis regions, ranging from Myanmar, the Balkans, Zimbabwe and Georgia. Russia, China and the Islamic world have an increasing influence in the voting patterns of the UN bodies, debilitating western power. During the George Bush era, differences between the European Union and USA on several human issues, have weakened the global agenda of both. USA and EU countries failed to win UN security council votes on Zimbabwe, Darfur, Kosovo and Myanmar. Western efforts did not succeed in support of action against Iran, because of its nuclear ambitions.

Voting patterns point to opposition to the EU, and disagreement to European efforts at promoting universal human rights, in the general assembly. Over a decade, the support of UN members to European human rights policies, declined from 72% to 48%. Similarly, support of UN members to US global agenda has reduced from 77% to 30%. In respect of grievous atrocities and human rights violations by national governments, China and Russia have been defending national sovereignty and non-interference. At the UN general assembly, support for Chinese and Russian views on human rights issues, has increased from 50% to 74%, spread over a decade. Kosovo's independence has been recognized by only 46 of the 192 UN states. Serbia is insisting for a vote on the "illegality" of Kosovo's secession, and wants to refer the dispute to the UN's international court of justice. Following the Danish cartoon crisis of 2005, at the UN Human Rights Council of Geneva, the Islamic bloc in March 08, changed the mandate for the Council's rapporteur on freedom of expression, by recording blasphemy.

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Iraq like Egypt, Syria and Lebanon had been a developed and secular society in the Middle East. Now in Iraq, about 43 women have carried out suicide bombings since 2003, and in larger numbers over the last two years. Eight women blew themselves up with explosives in 2007. There have been about 35 women suicide bomber explosions in 2008, of which about 16 have occurred in Diyala, where Kurd, Arab Shia and Arab Sunni account for one third each of the population. Diyala on the banks of the Diyala river, is one of the most conservative rural provinces in Iraq. Tribal structures and male domination being strong, women have suffered repression for hundreds of years.

There are more than a million of young or middle aged widows in Iraq, as a result of three wars within a span of 25 years. A husband's death causes a woman's protection and financial support to vanish, and at the same time she is not permitted to live alone. Seeing fathers, brothers and husbands killed, women are haunted by depression. US air strikes and ground offensive led to a pool of local people seeking revenge or redress. Since 2004, al-Qaida has been stringing up anti-Shia suspicions, painting the Shia community as agents of Iran, and no longer true Muslims, who belonged to the 'takfir' ideology. The ignorant were convinced that Iraq was under Iran and US occupation, since the government of Baghdad was led by the Shias. Depressed girls constitute a

larger category than that of al-Qaida converts, or those forced into marriages with al-Qaida members. Young women who are depressed and ready to end their lives are vulnerable to al-Qaida recruiting in remote parts of Diyala, in south Iraq.

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Over sixty have died and over a lac are homeless, in the Assam districts of Udalgiri, Chirang and Darrang, following the October violence, between Muslims and Bodos. Simmering anti-Bangladeshi sentiments erupted in riots between Bodo rebels and Bangladeshi migrants. The Assam state government has accused the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) of spearheading ethnic cleansing, in the Bodoland Administered Districts. The cease-fire agreement with the NDFB is in jeopardy. After ignoring the issue of illegal Bangladeshi immigrants for over thirty three years, the Union Indian government now plans to update the National Register of Citizens (NRC). With reference to the Assam Accord (1985), all descendents of those in the 1951 NRC, and all those in the 1971 electoral rolls, will be included as part of the updated NRC. While illegal Bangladeshi migrants try to settle on land owned by the indigenous Assamese, the violence revives memories of the Nellie massacre, twenty-five years earlier.

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Financial corruption is a major reason for the poor conditions of Darjeeling's water supply, health and roads. Over Rs 4000 crores have been sanctioned to Darjeeling, since the formation of Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) in 1988. Violent agitations by the Gorkha Janamukti Morch (GJM) have led to the DGHC being practically defunct. Even then the West Bengal Government has sanctioned Rs 30 crores for 2008-09. □□□