

NEWS WRAP

AGD

ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS IN West Bengal, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Assam and Puducherry in 2011, and assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Goa and Manipur of 2012 reflect a high turnout varying from 70% to 81%. Larger number of voters makes predicting election results more difficult. There are several factors other than resentment against the incumbent, which could explain the high turnout. Polls over the last one year have lesser incidents of intimidation and violence, specially in violence prone states like Punjab and Uttar Pradesh. The increase in safety has encouraged the weak and the powerless to exercise their voting rights. Revision of the electoral rolls has taken non-voters off the electoral lists, and brought more voters in, particularly from the disadvantaged sections of society. Availability of “Report Cards” on local legislators’ performance and qualifications, media reports and analysis, increasing literacy and access to information have guided voters in making selections. Even then, with voters’ electoral abstentions still high, no legislative candidate received the approval of at least half of the eligible voters.

SECURITY FORCES FIGHT

Infighting, indiscipline and open rebellion are afflicting the numerous security forces deployed in Janglemahal area of West Bengal, covering the districts of West Midnapure, Purulia and Bankura. Different police forces of the same government, in the maoist belt, are taking up arms against each other. An Indian Reserve Battalion Unit was disbanded from Silda in Sep 2011, after open complaints of mismanagement, lack of infrastructure and “inhuman treatment” by superiors. At end Feb 2012, jawans of Eastern Frontier Rifles and Counter Insurgency Force clashed at Salua (Kharagpur) and almost opened fire at each other, over misbehaviour with the family of a security personnel. There is discontent among EFR jawans over the inequities in command structure, salary and perks, in comparison to CIF. Forces with different ethnicity were given family shelters side by side at Salua. Many of the security personnel do not have a permanent commandant, EFR families of those killed by maoists in Feb 2010 are yet to receive government job and terminal monetary compensations.

AMERICA IN OKINAWA

The island of Okinawa, in Japan, has 1.4 million residents. The locals resent at the oversize US presence on the island, which is host to two-thirds of the 37,000 shore based US military personnel in Japan. For more than a decade, the southern island has been demonstrating against the large number of military bases that the United States has maintained on Okinawa, since the end of World War II. Resistance continues against the construction of a new air field base at Henoko, with its noise and risk of crashes. 80% of voters in Okinawa oppose a plan to

move the Futenma base to Henoko. But the bases help Japan to offset the rising threat of China, just across the East China Sea.

PENAL CODE IN IRAN

All executions by stoning and the death penalty for juvenile offenders have been removed from Iran's penal code, by recent amendments. At least 99 men and women have been executed by stoning since 1980. Stoning to death was one of the sentences applied for adultery, under the old penal code. Iran was leading the world in juvenile executions. Iran's guardian council ensures the country's laws do not contradict sharia or islamic law. Now execution in Iran remains the main penalty for murder, adultery, homosexuality, drugs smuggling, armed action, and any action which disrupts the country's political, economic and social order. □□□