

INDIA SHOULD BE A 'COUNTRY OF PARTICULAR CONCERN': U.S. PANEL

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: India - USA

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), an independent bi-partisan commission, has recommended for the second year in a row that the State Department put India on a list ('Countries of Particular Concern' or CPCs) for the worst violations of religious freedoms in 2020. One of the 10 USCIRF commissioners presented a dissenting view.

The USCIRF recommended that the administration impose targeted sanctions on Indian individuals and entities for "severe violations of religious freedom".

A second recommendation was for the administration to promote inter-faith dialogue and the rights of all communities at bilateral and multilateral forums "such as the ministerial of the Quadrilateral [the Quad]". Another recommendation — to the U.S. Congress — was to raise issues in the U.S.-India bilateral space, such as by hosting hearings, writing letters and constituting Congressional delegations.

The USCIRF recommendations are non-binding and the Trump administration had rejected the USCIRF recommendation to designate India a CPC last year, when it released its own determinations in December.

The key concerns of the 2021 report include the Citizenship (Amendment) Act. The report says, "Mobs sympathetic to Hindu nationalism operated with impunity," and used "brutal force" to attack Muslims in Delhi's riots in February 2020.

On the National Register of Citizens (NRC), the report says, "The consequences of exclusion — as exemplified by a large detention camp being built in Assam — are potentially devastating..." Efforts to prohibit interfaith marriage — such as those in Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh — are also highlighted as a concern. "These efforts targeting and delegitimising interfaith relationships have led to attacks and arrests of non-Hindus and to innuendo, suspicion, and violence toward any interfaith interaction," the report notes.

In an apparent reference to the Tablighi Jamaat Markaz in March 2020, the USCIRF says, "At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, disinformation and hateful rhetoric — including from government officials — often targeted religious minorities, continuing familiar patterns."

Johnnie Moore, an evangelical who is the president of The Congress of Christian Leaders as per his USCIRF bio, included a dissenting note in the text of the report saying India should not be designated a CPC but was at a "crossroads". India is "diversity personified" and "its religious life has been its greatest historic blessing," Mr. Moore wrote. "India's government and people have everything to gain and nothing to lose from preserving social harmony and protecting the rights of everyone," he said. Last year, three of 10 commissioners — including Mr. Moore — had presented dissenting views.

India's government and people have everything to gain and nothing to lose from preserving social harmony

Johnnie Moore

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