

PREDICTABLE COUNTER: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON INDIA'S REACTION TO U.S. REPORTAGE ON RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION

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There was little surprise about the manner in which [the government reacted](#) to the [U.S. State Department's report on India](#), and other countries, dealing with religious freedoms. The [report](#), which was released by U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, lists a number of incidents of "concern" over the "continued targeting of religious minorities". It also documents hate speech by leaders across the country, which includes members of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The report was followed by a briefing by a senior official who said that according to the U.S. Holocaust Museum, which tracks majoritarian trends, India is ranked eighth among 162 countries on the risk of "mass killing", a serious allegation. A Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson said the report was based on "misinformation and flawed understanding", and that the official's commentary was "motivated and biased". The rejection of the report is in line with India's past reaction, as both the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), as well as the U.S. State Department Report that bases itself on USCIRF recommendations, have been increasingly critical of India. They have noted that senior U.S. officials have repeatedly "encouraged" New Delhi to condemn religious violence and hate speech, indicating that they have not been successful. To this, the MEA has said that it "values" its U.S. partnership and have "frank exchanges".

While the government's reaction is stern, it is by no means as harsh as its response to a similar report last June, where the MEA had accused the U.S. government of catering to "vote bank politics". For one, the report has come out just ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's meeting with U.S. President Joe Biden on the sidelines of the G-7 summit in Japan, as well as Mr. Modi's state visit to the U.S., in June; it is likely that the government does not wish to queer the pitch publicly. The government may also recognise that while the State Department has been searing in its criticism, it has not placed India in the list of "Countries of Particular Concern" so far, as the USCIRF has often recommended. Given the consistent reportage on religious persecution in India by the U.S. government, however, New Delhi may wish to engage with the allegations made, and come out with its own report on the state of religious freedom in the country to counter it. As Mr. Modi wrote in a letter to a resident of Jammu and Kashmir, the world is drawn to India because of the "natural and instinctive love" Indians have for diversity. The government must find more comprehensive ways to repudiate any unfounded and incorrect challenges to India's reputation, and remediate in the areas it is found wanting.

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