

PRESENT IMPERFECT: ON THE U.S. COMMISSION ON INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM'S LATEST REPORT AND INDIA

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: Effect of policies and politics of developed & developing countries on India's interests

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May 04, 2023 12:20 am | Updated 12:20 am IST

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For the fourth consecutive year, the government has expressed outrage and rejected the recommendations of the [U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom's \(USCIRF\) latest report](#), calling it "[biased and motivated](#)". In its report released on Monday, the independent congressional body has called for India to be designated a "Country of Particular Concern" (CPC) for its "worsening" record on religious freedoms. The report has targeted the Indian government for "promoting and enforcing religiously discriminatory policies", naming laws that deal with conversion, interfaith relationships, wearing the hijab and cow slaughter, as well as the Citizenship (Amendment) Act and the National Register of Citizens. All of these, it alleges, have impacted minorities including Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Dalits, and Adivasis (indigenous peoples and Scheduled Tribes) negatively. The USCIRF has also catalogued acts of violence and the vilification of minorities and criticised the "suppression of critical voices" by intimidation that includes surveillance, demolition of property, detentions and the targeting of NGOs through laws curtailing foreign donations. It has criticised the U.S. State Department for not having designated India as a CPC, and has called for sanctions on Indian government agencies and officials. In the only such sanction imposed on India, the U.S. had, in 2005, revoked Prime Minister Narendra Modi's U.S. visa after a USCIRF recommendation on the 2002 Gujarat riots. In its response, the External Affairs Ministry has told the USCIRF to "desist" from such reports and to "develop a better understanding of India.... "

The government's stern reaction is understandable, and is in line with its response to such reports over the last two decades, since the USCIRF began to publish its findings. The process the USCIRF follows is non-inclusive, and the fact that it does not study the state of religious freedoms inside the U.S., suggests a double standard. Moreover, its recommendations hold no sway within India, and are meant only for the U.S. government to deliberate on, and accept or dismiss. Either way, there is little need for or utility to New Delhi's public responses, which make it sound defensive and do not actually repair the reputational damage to India as a secular, inclusive and pluralistic democracy. Given the detailed and pointed accusations, however, the Centre may well consider an internal review of its conduct and the direction it hopes to lead India in, on issues such as religious freedoms and rights. Eventually, any government's duty is not in achieving a perfect score in a survey run abroad, but rather in burnishing its record of delivering justice, equality and security to its citizens back home.

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