



DEBATE PACK

CDP 003 (2021) | 11 January 2021

Persecution of Muslims, Christians and minority groups in India

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 12 January 2021

9.30am to 11.00am

Debate led by Jim Shannon MP, David Linden MP,
Stephen Timms MP and Paul Girvan MP

The proceedings of this debate can be viewed on [Parliamentlive.uk](https://www.parliamentlive.uk)

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1. Background

India is a multi-faith democracy, with a majority Hindu population. According to [2011 census data](#), 79.80% of the population of India is Hindu, 14.23% Muslim, 2.30% Christian, 1.72% Sikh, 0.70% Buddhist, and 0.37% Jain.

India's [constitution](#) defines the nation as secular and protects freedom of religion or belief. However, there are concerns that religious minorities and other minority groups are suffering from persecution and discrimination, and that conditions have [deteriorated](#) in recent years.

Human rights groups have criticised the Government, which has been led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) since 2014, for not doing enough to protect minorities. Human Rights Watch, in its [2019 report on India](#) claimed that "the government failed to properly enforce Supreme Court directives to prevent and investigate mob attacks, often led by BJP supporters, on religious minorities and other vulnerable communities".

Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, who has led the BJP Government since it came to power, has defended its record on religious freedom. Mr Modi in an address to the US Congress in 2016, [said](#):

For my government, the Constitution is its real holy book. And, in that holy book, freedom of faith, speech and franchise, and equality of all citizens, regardless of background, are enshrined as fundamental rights. ¹

Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA)

India's Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), passed by its Parliament in December 2019, has been a particular cause for concern for those worried about religious freedom in the country. BBC News outlined the purpose and effects of the law:

The act offers amnesty to non-Muslim illegal immigrants from three countries - Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan.

It amends India's 64-year-old citizenship law, which currently prohibits illegal migrants from becoming Indian citizens.

It also expedites the path to Indian citizenship for members of six religious minority communities - Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi and Christian - if they can prove that they are from Muslim-majority Pakistan, Afghanistan or Bangladesh. They will now only have to live or work in India for six years - instead of 11 years - before becoming eligible to apply for citizenship.

¹ ['Freedom of speech and religion enshrined in constitution: PM Modi'](#), Economic Times, 8 June 2016.

The government says this will give sanctuary to people fleeing religious persecution, but critics argue that it will marginalise India's Muslim minority.²

In a press release Amnesty International [stated](#) that the law “legitimises discrimination on the basis of religion and stands in clear violation of both the constitution of India and international human rights law”.³

That same month as protests against the law [sparked violent clashes](#), the Indian Prime Minister [defended the law](#) saying “we passed this bill to help the persecuted”. Mr Modi said the law would have “no effect on citizens of India, including Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Jains, Christians and Buddhists”. He also blamed the opposition for the protests, accusing them of “spreading lies and rumours” and “instigating violence” and “creating an atmosphere of illusion and falsehood”.⁴

Other causes for concern for India’s Muslims include [mob violence against Muslims](#) accused of [killing cows](#), animals that are sacred to Hindus.

Christians

According to a 2018 [briefing by the Library of Congress](#), eight out of India’s twenty-nine states have Freedom of Religion Acts often called “anti-conversion” laws, that regulate religious conversions. These laws are seen to in particular target Christian groups. However, it is [reported that](#) there have been very few arrests or prosecutions under these laws.

According to the [United States Commission on International Religious Freedom](#) (USCIRF) an independent U.S. federal government commission that reports on religious freedom, the right to proselytize is protected alongside freedom of religion or belief in India’s constitution. However, religious freedom is “subject to public order,” a “vague phrase allowing the suspension of rights to protect social “tranquillity””.⁵

In its 2020 report the Commission reported that violence against Christians also increased:

With at least 328 violent incidents, often under accusations of forced conversions. These attacks frequently targeted prayer services and led to the widespread shuttering or destruction of churches.⁶

USCIRF report

The Commission’s report recommended that the US State Department designate India as a “country of particular concern,” citing the

² [‘Citizenship Amendment Act: Court refuses to put controversial law on hold’](#), BBC News, 22 January 2020.

³ Amnesty International, [‘India: New Citizenship Amendment Bill ‘reeks of fear-mongering and bigotry’](#), 12 December 2019.

⁴ [‘India protests: PM Modi defends citizenship bill amid clashes’](#), BBC News, 22 December 2019

⁵ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, [2020 Annual Report](#), pp 21.

⁶ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, [2020 Annual Report](#), pp 20.

Citizenship Amendment Act as part of its justification for the recommendation.

The Washington Post [reported](#) that Anurag Srivastava, the spokesman for India's ministry of external affairs, rejected the conclusions in the report. The commission's "biased and tendentious comments against India are not new," he said. "On this occasion, its misrepresentation has reached new levels."⁷

Other minority groups

Human Rights Watch's 2019 report on India, suggested that Dalits and tribal communities continue to face discrimination:

Dalits, formerly "Untouchables," faced violent attacks and discrimination. In September, the Supreme Court issued notices to authorities to [examine caste-based exclusion at universities](#) across India following a petition filed by mothers of two students—one Dalit and one from a tribal community—who committed suicide allegedly due to discrimination.

Nearly 2 million people from tribal communities and forest-dwellers remained at risk of forced displacement and loss of livelihoods after a February [Supreme Court ruling](#) to evict all those whose claims under the Forest Rights Act were rejected. Amid [concerns over flaws](#) in the claim process, the court stayed the eviction temporarily. In July, [three UN human rights experts](#) urged the government to conduct a transparent and independent review of the rejected claims, and evict only after it exhausted all options, ensuring redress and compensation.

Caste-based discrimination is banned under India's constitution. On independence the Indian Government introduced quotas in government jobs and educational institutions for scheduled castes and tribes. Successive Governments have attempted to tackle caste-based discrimination.

⁷ ['Religious freedoms in India deteriorated last year, U.S. government watchdog says'](#), *The Washington Post*, 28 April 2020

2. Press articles

The following is a selection of press and media articles relevant to this debate.

Please note: the Library is not responsible for either the views or accuracy of external content.

[Love jihad: the Indian law threatening interfaith love](#)

BBC News Online
Soutik Biswas
8 December 2020

[Anxiety of oppression](#)

Indian Express
Hasina Khan and Rishika Jain
15 November 2020

[Modi's Slide Toward Autocracy](#)

Foreign Policy
Azeem Ibrahim
13 July 2020

[Religious discrimination is hindering the covid-19 response](#)

BMJ
Sonia Sarkar
29 June 2020

[Delhi police accused of filing false charges over February riots](#)

Guardian
Hannah Ellis-Petersen
23 June 2020

[Freedom of religion in India](#)

NewsClick
Ram Puniyani
21 June 2020

[State-sponsored religious discrimination rises with the pandemic](#)

Freedom House
Sam Selsky
18 May 2020

['I cannot find my father's body': Delhi's fearful Muslims mourn riot dead](#)

Guardian
Hannah Ellis-Petersen and Shaikh Azizur Rahman
6 March 2020

[Indian MPs fight in parliament as first session since Delhi riots descends into chaos](#)

Independent
Adam Withnall
2 March 2020

'Assess human rights situation In Kashmir, religious freedom in India': US Senators ahead of Trump visit

Outlook India
13 February 2020

The 3 most polarizing words in India

Foreign Policy
Snigdha Poonam
Spring 2020, 13 February 2020

Citizenship Amendment Act: Court refuses to put controversial law on hold

BBC News Online
22 January 2020

3. Press releases

[Boris Johnson to visit India to boost jobs and prosperity](#)

10 Downing Street

15 December 2020

Prime Minister Boris Johnson will travel to India in January 2021 to strengthen a key strategic relationship which supports jobs and investment across the UK.

This will be the Prime Minister's first major bilateral visit since taking office, and the first since our departure from the EU, and underlines his commitment to step up the UK's engagement with the Indo-Pacific region.

The trip in January will kick off a significant year for Global Britain on the world stage. In 2021, the UK will host both the G7 Leaders' Meeting and COP26 Summits, as well as a global education conference aimed at getting girls into school, and an event to mark the first meeting of the UN General Assembly in London in 1946.

The Prime Minister has written to Prime Minister Modi to accept his invitation, and to invite India to attend the UK's G7 Summit as one of three guest nations alongside South Korea and Australia – delivering the Prime Minister's ambition to work with a group of like-minded democracies to advance shared interests and tackle common challenges.

The Prime Minister will use his visit to India to boost our cooperation in areas that matter to the UK and that will be priorities for our international engagement throughout 2021 – from trade and investment, to defence and security, and health and climate change.

The UK and India are significant investors and markets for each other's economies and our growing trade and investment relationship is worth around £24 billion a year, supporting more than half a million jobs.

There are 842 Indian companies in the UK with a combined turnover of £41.2 billion, creating jobs in all four corners of the United Kingdom.

That includes 19,500 people employed by Tata Consultancy Services at sites including Peterborough, Liverpool, and Edinburgh; around 5,700 people in Warrington, Derby, Cardiff, Derry/Londonderry and Belfast working for business support firm Firstsource Solutions – which is soon to open a new office in Middlesbrough; and 1,200 people employed by Accord Healthcare Ltd in Newcastle and Barnstaple to manufacture and supply medicines to the NHS.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said:

I am absolutely delighted to be visiting India next year at the start of an exciting year for Global Britain, and look forward to

delivering the quantum leap in our bilateral relationship that Prime Minister Modi and I have pledged to achieve.

As a key player in the Indo-Pacific region, India is an increasingly indispensable partner for the United Kingdom as we work to boost jobs and growth, confront shared threats to our security and protect our planet.

As the 'pharmacy of the world' India supplies more than 50% of the world's vaccines, with over a billion doses of the UK's Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine being manufactured at India's Serum Institute in Pune.

Our countries have cooperated closely throughout the coronavirus outbreak to maintain the flow of medical goods for our citizens. The UK has received 11 million face masks and 3 million packets of paracetamol from India during the pandemic, and we continue to work together to keep vital supply chains open.

There are more than 400 British companies in India, including those at the forefront of our collaboration to tackle climate change. Our partnership is creating jobs and opportunities for UK firms in areas such as renewable energy and electric vehicles, as our countries work together to reduce global emissions ahead of next year's COP26 Summit in Glasgow.

During the visit, the Prime Minister will be only the second British leader since Indian independence to attend India's annual Republic Day parade in New Delhi as Guest of Honour, after John Major in 1993.

UK Cabinet Ministers out in force to endorse India ties

British High Commission New Delhi

10 July 2020

The strength of the UK-India relationship was on show today at the India Global Week conference organised in London, with Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab leading a senior UK delegation that also included Home Secretary Priti Patel, Health Secretary Matt Hancock and Trade Secretary Liz Truss.

It brought together influential participants from the private and public sectors to discuss India, the UK and the world. This included a special address by His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales - who visited India last year - highlighting enduring UK-India bilateral ties and the importance of building a green, sustainable future.

The UK Foreign Secretary gave a speech by video, discussing the way Britain and India are maximising research and innovation links to tackle the challenges posted by COVID-19 and climate change.

Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said:

As leaders in the international COVID-19 response, the UK and India also co-authored the G20 Action Plan, providing an

immediate package of \$200 billion of global support to the most vulnerable countries around the world. A vaccine developed in Britain and manufactured in India, if successful in clinical trials, will reach a billion people across the developing world, thanks to Oxford University and India's Serum Institute. We also believe our friendship with India will be crucial as the UK fulfils its ambition to be an even stronger force for good in the world. When the UK hosts COP26 in 2021, we will need to be key partners in tackling climate change.

Home Secretary Priti Patel said:

Our relationship with India is deeply rooted in shared history, culture and our people to people ties. It is difficult to think of two other countries so deeply intertwined as the living bridge between our nations strengthens. Our partnership for the future is based upon our shared values and determination to be a force for good as we collectively embark upon new challenges and new shared opportunities.

Other senior UK speakers included:

[Lizz Truss](#), Trade Secretary. She spoke about the expansion of the UK-India trade and investment relationship, including the path towards a possible free trade deal.

[Matt Hancock](#), Health Secretary. He highlighted the strong collaboration between the two countries on health-tech and pharmaceuticals during the pandemic, the invaluable contribution of Indian professionals to the National Health Service, and new opportunities to work together in areas like genomics and bioinformatics.

[Lord \(Tariq\) Ahmad of Wimbledon](#), Minister of State for South Asia and the Commonwealth. He thanked the Government of India for its support in the UK's repatriation efforts and praised the living bridge that links the two countries.

[Lord Jitesh Gadhia](#), Member of the House of Lords. He moderated a dialogue on the strategic relationship between the UK and India.

[John Murton](#), the Government's COP26 envoy. The UK will host next year's UN climate conference and he highlighted how the world can unite behind a clean, resilient recovery.

[Richard Moore](#), Director General for Political Affairs, Foreign and Commonwealth Office. He participated in a discussion on how the UK and India can work together to ensure that multilateral institutions continue to be relevant.

[Alan Gemmell](#), British Deputy High Commissioner for Western India and Her Majesty's Trade Commissioner for South Asia. His session focused on effective cross-sector partnerships to counter the COVID-19 pandemic.

Further information

India Global Week is organised annually by London-based India Inc. This year's event was entitled '#BeTheRevival: India and A Better New World'. The full programme and list of speakers is available, [here](#).

The UK is a top partner for India on climate change issues, having joined the India-led International Solar Alliance last year, which aims to mobilise more than \$1 trillion of investments in solar energy by 2030. The UK will host COP26 next year, and this week announced a £3 billion green investment recovery package which will help build jobs, decarbonise homes and cut emissions.

In March 2020, the UK became the first co-chair of the Governing Council on the India-led global Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI), which aims to bring about a transformation in how infrastructure is designed, constructed, operated and maintained.

The UK has committed £313 million to research and development to support the development of a possible vaccine to COVID-19, and AstraZeneca is leading the development work with Oxford University and India's Serum Institute. This builds on the already thriving science and technology collaboration between the UK and India which has seen joint research and innovation spending increase from £1 million in 2008 to over £400 million by 2021.

The 'living bridge' of people, ideas and institutions that tie the UK and India together includes a vibrant Indian diaspora of more than 1.5 million people in the UK. There are currently 15 Indian-origin MPs in Parliament, three of whom are Cabinet level.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon visits India to strengthen UK-India Force for Good links

**British High Commission New Delhi
3 October 2019**

Lord Tariq Ahmad of Wimbledon is currently in India to further strengthen UK-India relations. While in New Delhi, Lord Ahmad will promote the UK's role as a force for good, working with India on major global challenges such as climate change and gender equality, celebrate the 150th anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi's birth, and lay the foundations for a prosperous and strengthened trading relationship.

Lord Ahmad is expected to meet the Indian Minister of Minority Affairs, Abbas Naqvi; Minister of Textiles, and of Women and Child Development, Smriti Irani; and Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, and of Information and Broadcasting, Prakash Javadekar, amongst others.

Arriving in New Delhi, Lord Ahmad said:

I am delighted to be here in India, a place that holds a special place in my heart. The UK aspires to be a Force for Good around the world and I look forward to strengthening our collaboration

with India on global challenges that are threatening our world, in particular, climate change and gender equality.

As we leave the European Union, our partnership with India across an array of sectors from trade and education, to climate change and the rule of law will be more important than ever. I am keen while I am here to also build on the Living Bridge of people-to-people links that bind our two countries so closely.

Lord Ahmad will also lay a wreath at Raj Ghat, meet the winner of the British High Commission New Delhi's 'High Commissioner for a Day' competition and visit Jamia Milia Islamia University to speak to students about climate change, inter-faith, diversity and equality in India and the UK.

4. PQs

[Summit of Democratic Governments](#)

30 November 2020 | 808 c506

Asked by: Lord Singh of Wimbledon

My Lords, can the Minister tell us why India, currently in the news for trying to make Punjab farmers serfs on their own land, is suggested as one of the 10 leading democracies? Why are we turning a blind eye to the Modi Government's discriminatory laws making millions of Muslims second-class citizens and others stateless, their brutal suppression in Kashmir, and the expulsion of Amnesty International for drawing attention to their widespread abuse of human rights? Does the Minister agree that a country which ignores human rights in its pandering to majority prejudice cannot be called a democracy?

Answered by: Lord True | Cabinet Office

My Lords, as a Cabinet Office Minister answering a relatively narrow question, I will not make a broad denunciation of any nation. Our values are democratic; they are very widely shared and practised across the world. We wish to sustain that.

[Religious Freedom](#)

24 Nov 2020 | 116480

Asked by: Jim Shannon

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if his Department will publish written strategies to guide its work on promoting freedom of religion or belief in Nigeria, **India**, China, Eritrea and Pakistan.

Answering member: James Duddridge | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

The UK is committed to defending Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB), and promoting respect between different religious and non-religious communities. We remain deeply concerned about violations and abuses of FoRB in many parts of the world and promoting the right to FoRB is one of the UK's human rights policy priorities.

At a country level, we lobby governments for changes in laws and practices that discriminate against individuals on the basis of their religion or belief, and we continue to raise cases of concern. We also support a number of development programmes that promote FoRB for all. The strategies employed may vary from country to country, and lobbying is often one of several activities which can be very sensitive. We have no plans to publish written strategies as we assess that doing so could undermine the effectiveness of our work on this sensitive area.

[India: religious freedom](#)**11 Nov 2020 | 110832****Asked by: Jim Shannon**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with his UN counterparts on freedom of religion or belief in India.

Answered by: Nigel Adams | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

We engage India on the full range of human rights issues, working with Union and State Governments, and NGOs, to promote human rights for all. Where we have concerns, we find it most effective to raise our concerns directly with the Government of India. Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon speaks regularly to his opposite number in the Ministry of External Affairs in New Delhi and the Indian High Commissioner in the UK to raise our concerns where we have them.

[India: religious freedom](#)**16 Sep 2020 | 82301****Asked by: Paul Girvan**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what representations he has made to his Indian counterpart on the persecution and murder of Christians and members of other minority religious groups in India.

Answered by: Nigel Adams | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

The British High Commission in New Delhi and our network of Deputy High Commissions maintain a continuous assessment of the human rights situation across India, talking regularly to the Government of India, including about freedom of religion or belief. Where we have concerns, we raise them directly with the Government of India: the Minister of State for South Asia and the Commonwealth, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, has raised these issues on several occasions with the Indian High Commissioner in London and his opposite number in the Ministry of External Affairs in New Delhi. We also continue to engage Indian religious leaders of all faiths and to support Indian partners to promote interfaith relations among young people.

[India: Christianity](#)**7 Sep 2020 | 77847****Asked by: Carla Lockhart**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what representations he has made to his Indian counterpart on anti-conversion laws in India in relation to converting people from Hindu to Christianity.

Answered by: Nigel Adams | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

We engage India on the full range of human rights matters. We work with Union and State Governments, as well as NGOs, to build capacity and share expertise to promote human rights for all. Where we have concerns we raise them directly with the Government of India. Most recently, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon discussed the situation for India's minorities with the Acting Indian High Commissioner on 22 May, and has previously raised our concerns about the impact of recent legislative and judicial measures on minorities with Indian Government Ministers.

[India: religious freedom](#)

29 Jul 2020 | HL7012

Asked by: Lord Alton of Liverpool

To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the announcement by the Chief Minister of Haryana that he intends to introduce a freedom of religion law to ensure that anyone involved in "unlawful conversions" will be brought to justice, what plans they have to make urgent representations to the government of (1) India, and (2) Haryana, about the impact such a law would have on (a) the reality of freedom of religion or belief for Indian citizens, and (b) international confidence in the government of India's willingness to uphold Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Answered by: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | Foreign and Commonwealth Office

We engage India on the full range of human rights matters. We work with Union and State Governments, as well as NGOs, to build capacity and share expertise to promote human rights for all. Where we have concerns we raise them directly with the Government of India. Most recently, I discussed the situation for India's minorities with the Acting High Commissioner of India on 22 May. I have previously raised our concerns about the impact of recent legislative and judicial measures on minorities with Indian Government Ministers.

[India: religious freedom](#)

6 Jul 2020 | 66910

Asked by: Conor McGinn

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent representations he has made to his counterpart in the Government of India on its treatment of religious minorities.

Answered by: Nigel Adams | Foreign and Commonwealth Office

We engage with India on the full range of human rights matters, working with Union and State Governments, and with non-Governmental organisations (NGOs), to build capacity and share expertise to promote human rights for all. The Minister of State for South Asia and the Commonwealth, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, has raised our concerns about the impact of recent legislative and judicial measures on minorities with Indian Government Ministers.

The British High Commission in New Delhi and our network of Deputy High Commissions across India also regularly meet religious representatives and run projects promoting minority rights. For example, over the last three years, we have worked with local NGOs to bring together young people of diverse faith backgrounds to work together on social action projects in their local communities and promote a culture of inter faith tolerance.

[India: religious freedom](#)

9 Jun 2020 | 51593

Asked by: Sir George Howarth

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what assessment he has made of the appropriateness of India's designation as a country of particular concern for religious freedom violations by the US Commission for International Religious Freedom.

Answered by: Nigel Adams | Foreign and Commonwealth Office

India has a proud history of religious tolerance and inclusive government. The British High Commission in New Delhi and our network of Deputy High Commissions maintain a continuous assessment of the human rights situation across India, talking regularly to the Government of India, including about freedom of religion or belief. Where we have concerns, we raise them directly with the Government of India, including at ministerial level. We also continue to engage Indian religious leaders of all faiths and to support Indian partners to promote interfaith relations among young people.

[India: religious freedom](#)

18 Mar 2020 | HL2462

Asked by: Baroness Tonge

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of violence towards Muslims in India by Hindu Nationalists supported by the Delhi police.

Answered by: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | Foreign and Commonwealth Office

The British High Commission in New Delhi and our network of Deputy High Commissions across India are closely monitoring the situation in Delhi and other regions. The death of one protester is one too many. India's strength, like that of the UK, is in its diversity and we trust the Indian Government will address the concerns of people of all religions.

The UK has long regarded protest as a key part of democratic society. Democratic governments must have the power to enforce law and order when a protest crosses the line into illegality; yet must in turn act with restraint and proportionality. Any allegation of human rights abuses is deeply concerning and must be investigated thoroughly, promptly, and transparently.

[India: Christianity](#)

2 Apr 2019 | 237732

Asked by: Paul Girvan

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with his counterpart in India on the persecution of Christians in that country.

Answered by: Mark Field | Foreign and Commonwealth Office

The British High Commission in New Delhi, our network of Deputy High Commissions, and Foreign and Commonwealth Office officials in London maintain a continuous assessment of the situation across India, including Christian persecution. Our officials regularly meet with Christian minority representatives. Most recently, the British High Commission highlighted the importance of Christian persecution to the British Government with India's Ministry of External Affairs on 25 March 2019. We also run a number of projects with religious minorities to raise awareness of their rights and promote interfaith tolerance in India.

We will continue to engage the Indian government and the wider international community on this matter.

[India: Religious Freedom](#)

18 Mar 2020 | HL2462

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To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of violence towards Muslims in India by Hindu Nationalists supported by the Delhi police.

Answering member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | Foreign and Commonwealth Office

The British High Commission in New Delhi and our network of Deputy High Commissions across India are closely monitoring the situation in Delhi and other regions. The death of one protester is one too many. India's strength, like that of the UK, is in its diversity and we trust the Indian Government will address the concerns of people of all religions.

The UK has long regarded protest as a key part of democratic society. Democratic governments must have the power to enforce law and order when a protest crosses the line into illegality; yet must in turn act with restraint and proportionality. Any allegation of human rights abuses is deeply concerning and must be investigated thoroughly, promptly, and transparently.

[Engagements](#)

26 Feb 2020 | 672 cc317-8

Asked by: David Linden

As we have seen today, religious intolerance in India is on the rise—whether through the anti-Muslim citizenship laws, or Christians whose prayer meetings are disturbed and who are then subjected to brutal beatings. Will the Prime Minister agree to meet me and representatives

from Christian Solidarity Worldwide to look more closely at the issue and ensure that India upholds freedom of religion or belief?

Answered by: Boris Johnson | Prime Minister

The hon. Gentleman raises a crucial issue that I am particularly concerned to defend and advance. That is why I was pleased to appoint my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham and Rainham (Rehman Chishti) as our special envoy for freedom of religion or belief. I would be more than happy to meet the hon. Gentleman to discuss protecting those of a Christian faith in India and around the world.

[India: Nationality](#)

22 Jan 2020 | HL375

Asked by: Lord Alton of Liverpool

To ask Her Majesty's Government what discussions they have had with the government of India about the (1) impact of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act 2019 on religious minorities in India, (2) amendment or repeal of that Act, and (3) obligations under Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to protect freedom of religion or belief.

Answering member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | Foreign and Commonwealth Office

The British High Commission in New Delhi and our network of Deputy High Commissions across India are following reports on the protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the National Register of Citizens, as well as the Government of India's response. We raise our concerns with the Government of India where appropriate. I discussed the Government of India's intent with the CAA, and public response to the legislation, with India's Minister of State for External Affairs on 19 December 2019. The British High Commissioner in New Delhi also raised this issue with the Indian Government on 6 January.

India has a proud history of inclusive government and religious tolerance. Post-election, Prime Minister Modi promised to continue this under the guiding principles of "together with all, development for all, trust of all". We trust the Government of India will provide reassurances to its citizens who are expressing concern about the impact this legislation may have. We will continue to monitor the situation.

[India: Christianity](#)

10 Jul 2019 | 273749

Asked by: Mr Gregory Campbell

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, if he will make representations to his Indian counterpart on attacks on Christians by Hindu activists.

Answering member: Dr Andrew Murrison | Foreign and Commonwealth Office

The British High Commission in New Delhi, and our network of Deputy High Commissions, maintain a continuous assessment of the human

rights situation across India and raise issues with Indian officials where appropriate. We have raised Christian persecution with the Indian Government. Most recently, on 25 March 2019, the British High Commission highlighted the importance of tackling Christian persecution with India's Ministry of External Affairs.

We will continue to engage with India on the full range of human rights matters, working with Union and State Governments, and with non-governmental organisations, to build capacity and share expertise to promote human rights for all.

India: Religious Freedom
29 May 2019 | 256389

Asked by: Liz McInnes

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of India's adherence to Article 18 of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Answering member: Mark Field | Foreign and Commonwealth Office

India has a strong democratic framework and constitutionally enshrined protections for freedom of religious belief, but faces some challenges enforcing these due to its size and social and economic development. The situation for religious minorities in India varies, depending on location, socio-economic background and proportion of religious minorities.

We maintain a continuous assessment of the human rights situation across India. We engage with India on the full range of human rights matters, both bilaterally and through the European Union. We work with Union and State Governments, and with Non-Governmental Organisations, to build capacity and share expertise to promote human rights for all. The British High Commission in New Delhi, and our Deputy High Commissions across India, also run projects promoting minority rights and regularly meet religious representatives, as well as official figures such as the Chair of the National Human Rights Commission and the National Commission for Minorities. Recent project work included 'Empowering Muslim youth' which reached 150 youths, 20 teachers and over 100 educational institutions.

5. Other Parliamentary material

5.1 Urgent Question

[Recent Violence in India](#)

03 Mar 2020 | 672 cc750-9

5.2 Debates

[International Human Rights Day](#)

10 Dec 2020 | 808 cc1327-30

[Jammu and Kashmir: Human Rights](#)

2 Nov 2020 | 807 cc482-5

[Freedom of Religion or Belief](#)

12 Mar 2020 | 673 cc178-200WH

[India: Citizenship \(Amendment\) Act 2019](#)

25 Feb 2020 | 802 cc96-110GC

5.3 Early Day Motions

[Criminalisation of dissent in India](#)

EDM 1278

Apsana Begum

15 December 2020

That this House expresses its profound concern at the growing number of arrests in India of human rights defenders, student leaders, feminist activists, Dalit rights campaigners, trade unionists, opposition politicians, and writers, artists, lawyers, academics and journalists who are critical of Narendra Modi's regime; notes that many of these arrests have been made under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, which owes its origins to colonial-era repressive legislation; further notes that ruling-party leaders have engaged in what many argue to be incendiary hate speech against religious minorities and democratic dissenters throughout the tenure of the present BJP-led government; further notes that militarised police violence has repeatedly been used against peaceful protesters, including farmers currently protesting controversial privatisation bills; further notes that the recent shutdown of the Indian branch of Amnesty International, the world's leading human rights advocacy group, bears witness to the currently perilous state of Indian democracy; stands in solidarity with those incarcerated for raising their voices against the oppressive anti-minority politics of the current regime; and calls upon the UN, its member states and international governments to hold the Indian Government to account, and to subject its violations of basic democratic principles to international scrutiny.

6. Further reading

Research briefings

[State anti-conversion laws in India](#)

Law Library of Congress report
30 December 2020

[Effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on freedom of religion or belief](#)

Commons Library debate pack CDP 0146 (2020)
23 November 2020

[Progress on the Bishop of Truro's independent review on persecution of Christians and freedom of religion or belief](#)

Commons Library debate pack CDP 110 (2020)
15 October 2020

[Challenges facing India's democracy and economy](#)

European Parliamentary Research Service briefing PE 651.915
May 2020

[Freedom of religion or belief](#)

Commons Library debate pack CDP 2020-056
11 March 2020

[India's Citizenship \(Amendment\) Act 2019](#)

Lords Library briefing
12 February 2020

Government reports

[Human Rights and Democracy Report 2019](#)

Foreign and Commonwealth Office
16 July 2020

- Freedom of expression (p4)
- Freedom of religion or belief (p14-15)

[India report – USCIRF annual report 2020](#)

United States Commission on International Religious Freedom
April 2020

NGO reports

[Open Doors World Watch List Report 2020](#)

- Persecution goes digital: Is India next? (p21)
- The global campaign for Christians in India (p27-29)

[Commentary on the current state of Freedom of Religion or Belief 2019](#)

All-Party Group on Freedom of Religion or Belief

- India (p30-34)

[World Report 2020: Events 2019 \(India\)](#)

Human Rights Watch

January 2020

Human Rights Organisations

[Amnesty International](#) (India country webpage)

[Human Rights Watch](#) (India country webpage)

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