

Debate Pack

CDP-0042 (2022)

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Persecution of Christians and religious minorities in India

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1 Summary

A Westminster Hall debate on the "Persecution of Christians and religious minorities in India" is scheduled for Thursday 24 February 2022, from 3:00-4:30pm. The debate will be opened by Jim Shannon MP.

2 Background

2.1 Demographics and overview of religious rights

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.

2.2 Citizenship Amendment Act and violence against Muslims

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.

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

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".

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".

Violence against Muslims

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

Human Rights Watch's [report on human rights in India in 2021](#) stated:

Hindu mobs beat up Muslims, often working class men, with impunity while pro-BJP supporters filed baseless complaints against critics, especially religious minorities.

In January, a Muslim stand-up comic, Munawar Faruqui, and five of his associates were arrested on a complaint brought by the son of a BJP politician who accused him of hurting Hindu sentiments in jokes Faruqui apparently did not utter. Police subsequently admitted they had no evidence of the performance.

2.3

Discrimination against Christians and anti-conversion laws

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'".

In its [2021 report](#) (pdf) the USCIRF stated that "these anti-conversion laws are too often the basis for false accusations, harassment, and violence against non-Hindus that occur with impunity". In 2020, the Commission detailed that

[M]obs—fuelled by false accusations of forced conversions—attacked Christians, destroyed churches, and disrupted religious worship services. In many cases, authorities did not prevent these abuses and ignored or chose not to investigate pleas to hold perpetrators accountable.

Case of Stan Swamy

The case of Stan Swamy, an 83-year-old Jesuit Priest and human rights activist in India who died in custody in 2021 while awaiting trial on counter-terrorism charges, has been held up as an example of discrimination against India's religious minorities. Nadine Maenza, chair of USCIRF, [stated that](#) "Father Stan Swamy's death is a stark reminder of the egregious and ongoing persecution of India's religious minority communities".

Stan Swamy was first [arrested on 8 October 2020](#), on the outskirts of Ranchi, the capital city of the eastern state of Jharkhand in India. The arrest and investigation were led by the National Investigation Agency (NIA), India's counterterrorism enforcement agency, who stated that he was arrested in connection to a [2018 incident of caste-based violence](#) and alleged links with Maoist rebels. The priest was transferred to Mumbai, where he was imprisoned reportedly under the [Unlawful Activities \(Prevention\) Act](#).

Stan Swamy [was denied bail](#), and there were [concerns over his treatment in prison](#). He died in July 2021. His death brought criticisms from opposition politicians and human rights organisations. Leader of the main opposition Congress party [Rahul Gandhi tweeted](#) that Swamy "deserved justice and humaneness". United Nations Special Rapporteur Mary Lawlor [said she was](#)

[devastated to hear about his death](#) and that "jailing HRDs [Human rights defenders] is inexcusable":

The [Indian government said](#) Swamy's arrest followed "due process under law", and that his bail had been denied because of the "specific nature of charges against him". It added in [a statement](#) that "Authorities in India act against violations of law and not against legitimate exercise of rights. All such actions are strictly in accordance with the law".

3

UK Government Information Note

[Country policy and information note: Religious minorities and scheduled castes and tribes, India, November 2021 \(accessible\)](#)

Updated 10 December 2021

Purpose

This guidance provides country of origin information (COI) and analysis of COI for use by Home Office decision makers handling particular types of protection and human rights claims. It is not intended to be an exhaustive survey of a particular subject or theme.

[Extract]

2.4 Risk

b. State treatment of Christians

In general, Christians are able to express and practice their faith freely throughout India, including at established churches, without facing restrictions from the state. Christians also have access to education and employment, although experience a lack of representation in the political sphere.

Christians are the religious minority primarily affected by state laws on ‘forced’ conversion, which use vague definitions of what forced conversion is and provide state agents with wide powers of arrest. Perceived violators of these laws, including missionaries, may be subject to fines of varying amounts dependent on the state in which the conversion occurred as well as other penalties such as prison sentences of up to 4 years. However, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) report that there have been ‘very few’ arrests and prosecutions under these laws. There are also isolated instances of police failing to investigate or pursue those responsible for crimes committed against Christians as a result of suspected ‘forced’ conversions.

Christians in India, particularly those accused of forcibly converting or attempting to convert a person to Christianity, may face instances of local state discrimination, including police hostility and harassment, as well as the possibility of arrest and detention. However, Christians are, in general, unlikely to be subject to treatment or discrimination by the state that is sufficiently serious, by its nature or repetition, to amount to persecution or serious harm. Each case must be considered on its own facts and the onus is on the person to demonstrate that they would be at risk of persecution or serious harm on return to India.

c. State treatment of Muslims

Muslims generally have freedoms to practice their faith, including attending mosques, and have access to education and employment. They are represented in the political sphere, both in parliament and at Cabinet level, although under-represented when considering the size of their population. There have also been several Muslim Chief Ministers in various states and, to date, two Muslim Presidents of India.

In response to rising tensions between religious groups as a result of protests against the CAA in 2019 and 2020, there were reported incidents of public officials, including politicians, instigating communal violence against religious minorities. During the protests there was an increase in violence committed against Muslims as well as instances of their arrest and imprisonment as a result of the disorder. Available evidence also indicated levels of police complicity in violence directed towards Muslims during these clashes. It is reported that the police failed to protect anti-CAA protesters during the riots, attacked and arrested anti-CAA protesters, and failed to register their complaints. The police have also been criticised by NGOs for their failure to apprehend perpetrators of violence, including Hindu Nationalist groups, who have reportedly committed attacks with impunity against Muslims. Some NGOs have accused police of bias against Muslims in their investigation following the riot. The police have also been criticised by NGOs for their failure to apprehend perpetrators of violence, including Hindu Nationalist groups, who have reportedly committed attacks with impunity against Muslims.

Anti-cow slaughter legislation, which disproportionately affects some Muslims due to their traditional consumption of beef, is reportedly used by authorities to harass, bribe, arrest and imprison Muslims. 4,000 people had been arrested in Uttar Pradesh under cow slaughter legislation as of August 2020. It is unknown how many of the 4,000 arrested were Muslims. According to World Population Review, the population of Uttar Pradesh as of 2021 stands at approximately 200 million and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) noted that 47% of Muslims in India live in Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and Bihar. Relative to the size of the Muslim population in India, the prevalence of arrests and convictions under anti-cow slaughter legislation in Uttar Pradesh is low.

Police have also been criticised by NGOs for their inadequate responses to complaints filed against those who have committed violence against Muslims in cow-slaughter disputes.

Muslims in India, particularly those involved in cow-slaughter incidents, may face instances of local state discrimination, including police hostility and harassment. However, relative to the size of the Muslim population in India, Muslims are, in general, unlikely to be subject to treatment or discrimination by the state that is sufficiently serious, by its nature or repetition, to amount

to persecution. Each case must be considered on its own facts and the onus is on the person to demonstrate that they would be at risk of persecution or serious harm on return to India.

d. State treatment of Sikhs

Sikhs generally have freedoms to practice their faith, have access to education and employment and are represented in the political sphere. There are very few reported incidents of recent police mistreatment.

Following the introduction of new farming laws in September 2020 widespread protests against the legislation, considered to favour large corporations, erupted throughout India and have been ongoing in 2021. The protests have been largely led and organised by Sikh farmers from the state of Punjab. Whilst the majority of the protests have been peaceful in some isolated instances police reportedly responded to the protests by using tear gas, beating protesters with batons and using water cannons to disperse crowds.

Over 500 farmers have reportedly died since the protests began, with the overwhelming cause of deaths either due to health issues or suicide as a result of camping outside for months, with little protection against the weather or Covid-19. The death of one farmer, reportedly caused in a tractor accident during a protest, has been widely contested with the real cause of his death being attributed to the police.

In general, Sikhs in India are unlikely to face state treatment which is sufficiently serious by nature and repetition that it would amount to persecution or serious harm. Sikhs in India involved in the farmers protests may face instances of local state discrimination, including police hostility and harassment. However, it is unlikely that this would, in general, be sufficiently serious by nature and repetition that would cause them to face a real risk of persecution or serious harm. Each case must be considered on its own facts and the onus is on the person to demonstrate that they would be at risk of persecution or serious harm on return to India.

e. State treatment of Scheduled Castes and Tribes (Dalits)

Articles 15 and 16 of the Constitution provide reservations (a system of affirmative action) that provides representation in education, employment, and politics for Dalits. These groups are eligible to receive special benefits and to compete for reserved seats in legislatures, government, and educational institutions. The current Indian president (Ram Nath Kovind) is the second Dalit to hold the post. The constitution allows for a form of positive action for Dalits, though only for Hindus, Sikhs, or Buddhists. Non- Hindu Dalits, especially Christians and Muslims, do not qualify for the officially reserved jobs or school placements available to Hindu Dalits, putting these groups at a significant economic and social disadvantage. The only means through which Christians and Muslim Dalits may qualify for affirmative action

benefits is if they are considered members of the 'backward' classes (groups deemed by the government of India to be economically or socially disadvantaged) due to their social and economic status.

The Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act of 1989 provides for 'punishment for atrocities against persons belonging to the SCs' and provides 'relief and rehabilitation of the victims of such offences'. It is unknown how many people have been prosecuted under the Act since its introduction in 1989.

Laws have set aside quotas in education and government jobs for historically underprivileged Dalits to improve their position in society. It is unlikely that Dalits, in general, will face state treatment that is sufficiently serious by nature and repetition that would cause them to face a real risk of persecution or serious harm. Each case must be considered on its own facts and the onus is on the person to demonstrate that they would be at risk of persecution or serious harm on return to India.

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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.

[**20-foot tall Jesus statue destroyed by gov't in India after Hindu nationalists complain**](#)

Christian Post
Anugrah Kumar
20 February 2022

[**Hindu nationalism is a threat to Muslims and India's status as the world's largest democracy**](#)

Los Angeles Times
16 February 2022

[**'Playing with fire': How increasing hate speech threatens India Narendra Modi's government accused of 'encouraging hatred' of minority groups**](#)

The Week
9 February 2022

[**Assembly election: In a 1st, BJP includes 12 Christians in its Goa list of 40**](#)

Times of India
29 January 2022

[**Genocide may happen in India, US Congress told**](#)

The Citizen
26 January 2022

[**Practice your religion but don't indulge in hate speech: Vice President**](#)

Times of India
3 January 2022

[**Jesus statue smashed in spate of attacks on India's Christian community**](#)

The Guardian
Hannah Ellis-Petersen
27 December 2021

[**Shock after leaders of several far-right Hindu groups allegedly call for genocide of minorities in India**](#)

The Independent
Stuti Mishra
25 December 2021

Indian Christians fear attacks or jail over conversions

BBC News
Imran Qureshi
21 December 2021

US ignores recommendation to put India on religious freedom violation list

Axios
Zachary Basu
19 November 2021

Q&A: 'Religious freedom conditions in India greatly concerning'

Al Jazeera
Raqib Hameed Naik
28 October 2021

Indian Christians discuss different reports on persecution

Christianity Today
Surinder Kaur
19 August 2021

Report shows 'excruciating struggle' of Christians in India

The Tablet
1 July 2021

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Press releases

[UK forges closer defence and security partnership with India, October 2021](#)

Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office

23 October 2021

- Foreign Secretary to build stronger security and defence links as she visits HMS Queen Elizabeth in Mumbai
- Liz Truss discussing developing security and defence tech, and strengthening defence-related trade with India during her trip
- the visit of the Carrier Strike Group underlines the UK's increasing defence, security and maritime co-operation with India and the wider region

Foreign Secretary Liz Truss is forging stronger UK security and defence links with India on her visit to the country, as she visits HMS Queen Elizabeth in Mumbai today.

The ship is the spearhead of the Carrier Strike Group (CSG), a symbol of the UK's world-leading defence capability, whose visit to Mumbai is a clear sign of our growing defence and maritime co-operation with India. While in India the CSG is taking part in the most demanding exercise ever between undertaken between the UK and India, involving all three military services.

During her visit the Foreign Secretary will progress talks to ramp up defence and security ties and boost strategic cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region. It will take forward joint work agreed by the Prime Minister and Indian Prime Minister Modi in the landmark 2030 Roadmap on maritime security, cyber security and counter terrorism signed earlier this year.

She will also discuss developing innovative security and defence tech with the Indian government to tackle common threats and will talk through strengthening defence-related trade between the 2 countries.

The Foreign Secretary sees developing this security and defence relationship with India, the world's largest democracy, as a key part of the UK's Indo-Pacific tilt. She wants to strengthen such links with fast-growing economies and like-minded partners in the region and build "a network of liberty" around the globe. The Foreign Secretary sees India as essential in ensuring a free, open, inclusive and prosperous Indo-Pacific.

Foreign Secretary Liz Truss said:

Closer defence and security partnerships between the UK and India underpin deeper economic ties and make both countries, as well as the wider region, safer. We need to protect our sea and trade routes and, operating from a

position of strength, be hard-headed in defending our interests and challenging unfair practices.

The arrival of the Carrier Strike Group in India this weekend represents the UK's Indo-Pacific tilt in action. This is a true symbol of Global Britain, working closely with like-minded partners like India.

The Foreign Secretary will join the Queen Elizabeth Carrier at sea to tour the vessel and observe live exercises involving UK and US F35B fighter jets.

Chief of Defence Staff Sir Nick Carter is also visiting Mumbai to see the Carrier Strike Group in action. He joined his Indian counterpart General Bipin Rawat in Delhi to discuss regional security and laid a commemorative wreath at the National War Museum.

Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said:

A strengthened partnership with India is a key pillar of the UK's tilt to the Indo-Pacific. Our Carrier Strike group visit represents an important step towards our goal of establishing a maritime partnership with India in support of mutual security objectives in the Indian Ocean.

The Foreign Secretary will also visit the Taj Mahal Palace Hotel in Mumbai today to lay a wreath at the memorial for those killed in the 2008 terrorist attacks.

This evening, she will welcome senior business leaders and guests from the world of education, film, sport and politics onto HMS Defender, a Type 45 Destroyer, where the UK will showcase its world-leading tech and innovation in defence, healthcare, science and climate.

[Prime Minister welcomes new era in UK-India relationship](#)

Prime Minister's Office, 10 Downing Street

4 May 2021

- 2030 roadmap' includes commitments to deepen cooperation on health, climate, trade, education, science and technology, and defence
- Prime Minister has praised the overwhelming display of support from the British people to India over the last week

The Prime Minister and Prime Minister Modi have made an historic commitment to strengthen work between the UK and India over the next decade, bringing our countries, economies and people closer together.

The UK's [Integrated Review](#), published earlier this year, highlighted the importance of the Indo-Pacific region to the UK's security and prosperity. India is an indispensable partner in that region.

The Prime Minister and Prime Minister Modi have pledged to achieve a quantum leap in the UK-India relationship, boosting our cooperation in areas that matter to the UK and India. India has elevated the status of its relationship with the UK to a 'Comprehensive Strategic Partnership' – the first European country to be granted that status.

During a virtual meeting today the two leaders agreed a '2030 Roadmap' which will provide a framework for UK-India relations across health, climate, trade, education, science and technology, and defence. The Roadmap includes commitments to:

- Expand the UK-India health partnership to enhance global health security and pandemic resilience. This includes firming up international supply chains to ensure critical medicines, vaccines and other medical products reach those who need them most.
- Work together to achieve the ambitious goals set out by the Prime Minister and Prime Minister Modi on tackling climate change and preserving nature. Accelerating the development of clean energy and transport, protecting biodiversity and helping developing countries adapt to the impact of climate change.
- Deepen the economic relationship between the UK and India through an Enhanced Trade Partnership and confirming our intent to negotiate a Free Trade Agreement with a view to doubling UK-India trade over the next decade.
- Increase cooperation between British and Indian universities on crucial research in areas like health, emerging technologies and climate science.
- Work in lockstep to tackle threats to our shared security in all their forms. The UK's Carrier Strike Group will visit India later this year to boost this work with our navies and air forces undertaking joint training exercises to enable future cooperation on operations in the Western Indian Ocean.

The breadth and depth of India's relationship with the UK is underpinned by the living bridge between our people. 1.6 million Brits have Indian ancestry, there are more Indian companies in the UK than in the rest of Europe combined, and our people share history, culture and values.

During their meeting, the Prime Minister and Prime Minister Modi undertook to work closely together in support of those values, including at next month's G7 in Cornwall which India will attend as a guest nation.

Over the last week British business, civil society and the wider public have demonstrated the strength of the relationship between the UK and India by donating much-needed medical supplies to the country. During their call, the Prime Minister and Prime Minister Modi agreed to continue to work together

on our shared fight against coronavirus. They pointed to the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine, currently being produced by India's Serum Institute, as an example of the power of UK-India cooperation.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said:

The UK and India share many fundamental values. The UK is one of the oldest democracies, and India is the world's largest. We are both committed members of the Commonwealth. And there is a living bridge uniting the people of our countries.

In the last week the British people have stepped up in their thousands to support our Indian friends during this terrible time in a demonstration of the deep connection between the UK and India.

This connection will only grow over the next decade as we do more together to tackle the world's biggest problems and make life better for our people. The agreements we have made today mark the beginning of a new era in the UK-India relationship.

Work towards the goals of the 2030 Roadmap will be reviewed annually by the British and Indian Foreign Ministers and Ministers across Government will hold regular meetings with their Indian counterparts to make progress on our shared ambitions.

6

PQs

India

10 Feb 2022 | HL5732

Asked by: Baroness Cox

To ask Her Majesty's Government, with regard to the Joint Analysis of Conflict and Stability: Guidance Note, published in June 2017, when an assessment on India was last conducted; and what is their assessment of the situation in India, with particular reference to instances of Islamophobic hate speech.

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

The British High Commission in New Delhi regularly assesses human rights across India. We condemn any instances of discrimination because of religion or belief, regardless of the country or faith involved. We look to India to uphold all freedoms and rights guaranteed in its strong constitution and by the international instruments to which India is a party. We engage with India on a range of human rights matters, working with Union and State Governments, and with 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, including at ministerial level.

Officials regularly meet religious representatives and have run projects supporting minority rights. The British High Commission supports a UK-India Interfaith Leadership Programme for a cohort of emerging Indian faith leaders, including Muslims, creating an opportunity to exchange expertise on leading modern, inclusive faith communities, and promote values of tolerance and multi-culturalism. The UK will host an international Ministerial conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief in 2022 to energise collective efforts on this agenda. We also work with the UN, OSCE, Council of Europe, G7 and other multilateral fora to promote FoRB.

India: Minority Groups and Religious Freedom

31 Jan 2022 | HL5436

Asked by: Baroness Helic

To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they (1) have taken, or (2) are taking, or (3) are planning to take, to support (a) minority rights, and (b) religious tolerance, in India.

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

We condemn any instances of discrimination because of religion or belief, regardless of the country or faith involved. We look to India to uphold all freedoms and rights guaranteed in its strong constitution and by the international instruments to which India is a party. We engage with India on a range of human rights matters, working with Union and State Governments, and with 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, including at ministerial level.

The British High Commission in New Delhi and our network of Deputy High Commissions regularly meet religious representatives and have run projects supporting minority rights. The British High Commission supports a UK-India Interfaith Leadership Programme for a cohort of emerging Indian faith leaders, including Christians and Muslims, creating an opportunity to exchange expertise on leading modern, inclusive faith communities, and promote values of tolerance and multi-culturalism. The UK will host an international Ministerial conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief in 2022 to energise collective efforts on this agenda. We also work with the UN, OSCE, Council of Europe, G7 and other multilateral fora to promote FoRB.

India: International Assistance

24 Jan 2022 | HL5227

Asked by: Baroness Cox

To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they will make to the government of India regarding the distribution of foreign aid donations, particularly in reference to the blocking of funds to religious charities.

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

We are aware that some non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have faced difficulties in India due to the application of the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) by the Indian authorities, and that some have recently had applications to renew their foreign funding licenses rejected. We continue to support a wide range of local NGO partners in India, including through programmes, and officials have discussed issues facing NGOs directly with the Indian Government. On 8 January, the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs restored the FCRA license of the Missionaries of Charity, meaning the NGO will be able to receive and use foreign funding again. The British High Commission in New Delhi will continue to monitor developments.

We engage India on the full range of human rights issues, including freedom of religion or belief, working with Union and State Governments, and NGOs, to build capacity and promote human rights for all.

India: Islam

20 Jan 2022 | 105680

Asked by: Catherine West

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether her Department has made an assessment of the implications for its policies of recent reports of anti-Muslim attacks in India; and whether she has raised that matter with the Indian Government.

Answering member: Amanda Milling | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

We condemn any instances of discrimination because of religion or belief, regardless of the country or faith involved. We look to India to uphold all freedoms and rights guaranteed in its strong constitution and by the international instruments to which India is a party. We engage with India on a 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. Where we have concerns, we raise them directly with the Government of India, including at ministerial level.

The British High Commission in New Delhi and our network of Deputy High Commissions regularly meet religious representatives and engage with Indian faith communities. The British High Commission supports a UK-India Interfaith Leadership Programme for a cohort of emerging Indian faith leaders, including Muslims, creating an opportunity to promote values of tolerance and multi-culturalism. The UK will host an international Ministerial conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) in 2022 to energise collective efforts on this agenda, demonstrating our enduring commitment to promoting FoRB for all. We also work with the UN, OSCE, Council of Europe, G7 and other multilateral fora to promote FoRB.

India: Missionaries of Charity

06 Jan 2022 | 817 c681

Asked by: Lord Harries of Pentregarth

I thank the Minister for his reply. The work of Mother Theresa and the charity she founded, the Missionaries of Charity, is renowned throughout the world. It works among some of the poorest and most destitute people on earth. What possible reason could the Indian Government have for wanting to hinder and block its work? The rumour, I am afraid, is that it is continuing pressure from Hindu nationalism, because people might come into contact with Christianity and eventually convert to it. We need to know from the Indian Government precisely, in writing, what their reasons are so that we can examine the validity of their reasoning.

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

My Lords, first, I share the noble and right reverend Lord's view on the important work the Missionaries of Charity has done among particularly vulnerable populations within India. On the issue of the licence in India, I have looked into this specifically, and we do not know why its applications were rejected. I have asked and pressed to see the kinds of numbers that currently exist. Among the 12,580 organisations whose licences have ceased to exist, some ceased to exist because they did not submit their applications in time, and others were rejected for other reasons. There are Christian NGOs, but there are also 250 Hindu NGOs and more than 250 Muslim NGOs, so whether this is specifically against Christian organisations is not shown by the data, but I am requesting further information in this respect.

Religious Freedom: India

06 Dec 2021 | 85314

Asked by: Patricia Gibson

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, pursuant to the Answer of 18 October to Question 52516 on Human Rights: India, what representations her Department has made to the Government of India on ensuring that freedom of religion or belief protections are enshrined in any future trade agreement.

Answering member: Ranil Jayawardena | Department for International Trade

The United Kingdom is committed to defending freedom of religion or belief for all, and promoting respect between different communities. Promoting the right to freedom of religion or belief is one of the United Kingdom's longstanding overseas priorities.

We believe that trade is vital for our economy and future prosperity, but it need not come at the expense of our values. We engage with India on a range of matters, independent of a Free Trade Agreement, as part of our ongoing bilateral relationship. This involves working with Union and State Governments, and with non-governmental organisations, to build capacity and share expertise.

India: Religious Freedom

25 Nov 2021 | 77466

Asked by: Kirsten Oswald

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent discussions she has had with (a) her Indian counterpart

and (b) the United Nations on violence against Muslims in the Indian states of Assam and Tripura.

Answering member: Amanda Milling | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

We condemn any instances of discrimination because of religion or belief, regardless of the country or faith involved. We look to India to uphold all freedoms and rights guaranteed in its strong constitution and by the international instruments to which India is a party. We engage with India on a 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. Where we have concerns, we raise them directly with the Government of India, including at ministerial level. Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, Minister for South Asia, discussed UK Parliamentary interest in human rights in India with Indian Foreign Secretary Harsh Shringla on 23 July. Lord Ahmad has also previously raised our concerns about the impact of recent legislative and judicial measures on India's minorities with Indian Government Ministers.

The UK will host an international Ministerial conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) in 2022 to energise collective efforts on this agenda, demonstrating our enduring commitment to promoting FoRB for all. We also work with the UN, OSCE, Council of Europe, G7 and other multilateral fora to promote FoRB.

Human Rights: India

18 Oct 2021 | 52516

Asked by: Brendan O'Hara

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, what representations (a) she and (b) officials in her Department have made to the Government of India on the human rights of Christian and Muslim minorities in that country in the context of forthcoming trade negotiations; and if she will include clauses recognising the centrality of human rights, including those of freedom of religion or belief, in any future trade agreement with India.

Answering member: Ranil Jayawardena | Department for International Trade

In May, the United Kingdom and India announced our intent to negotiate a free trade agreement. Since then, the Department of International Trade has launched a public consultation about our approach to negotiations.

HM Government has a history of promoting British values globally, including freedom of religion, and we are clear that upholding rights and responsibilities go hand-in-hand with our trading ambitions. We engage with the Government of India on a range of matters.

India: Minority Groups

18 Oct 2021 | 52513

Asked by: Brendan O'Hara

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if she will support the formation of an international commission to assess reports of violence and other human rights violations against religious minorities in India.

Answering member: Amanda Milling | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

We look to the government of India to assess and address any concerns in line with India's strong constitution. We will continue to work with both Union and State authorities to support freedom of religion in India, raising concerns where we have them.

India: Minority Groups

18 Oct 2021 | 52512

Asked by: Brendan O'Hara

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if she will raise the situation of Christian and Muslim minorities in India with her Indian counterpart in any upcoming discussions.

Answering member: Amanda Milling | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Where we have concerns over discrimination because of religion or belief, we raise them directly with the Government of India, including at ministerial level. We also raise issues relevant to religious minorities in our wider engagement with Union and State authorities. Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, Minister for South Asia, discussed UK Parliamentary interest in human rights in India with Indian Foreign Secretary Harsh Shringla on 23 July.

India: Religious Freedom

23 Sep 2021 | 51720

Asked by: Brendan O'Hara

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what steps her Department is taking to help promote the rights of religious minorities in India.

Answering member: Amanda Milling | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

The British High Commission in New Delhi and our network of Deputy High Commissions across India regularly meet religious representatives and have

run projects promoting minority rights. Over the last three years, they have worked with local Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) to bring together young people of diverse faith backgrounds to work together on social action projects in their local communities. This year, the British High Commission supported an interfaith leadership programme for a cohort of emerging Indian faith leaders, including Christians, creating an opportunity to exchange expertise on leading modern, inclusive faith communities, and promoting values of tolerance and multi-culturalism. We also raise issues relevant to religious minorities in our engagement with Union and State authorities. On 15 March, while visiting India, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, Minister for South Asia, discussed the situation for Christians with India's then-Minister of State for Home Affairs, Kishan Reddy.

[India: Religious Freedom](#)

23 Sep 2021 | 51719

Asked by: Brendan O'Hara

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, with reference to the report by the charity Open Doors entitled *Destructive Lies*, what assessment her Department has made of the levels of freedom of religion or belief of Christian and Muslim minorities in India.

Answering member: Amanda Milling | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

We look to India to uphold all freedoms and rights guaranteed in its strong constitution, and by the international instruments to which India is a party. We engage with India on a 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. We condemn any instances of discrimination because of religion or belief, regardless of the country or faith involved.

[Persecution for Religion or Belief](#)

22 Jul 2021 | 699 c1124

Asked by: Sir Desmond Swayne

How concerned is my hon. Friend about the rise of persecution of Christians in India, and is there anything to be done?

Answered by: Andrew Selous | Department: Church Commissioners

My right hon. Friend is right about the reports that keep coming out of India. The Church is pressing the Government to see India as a country of particular concern where targeted sanctions on individuals and entities responsible for severe violations of religious freedom may be needed. Overseas development

assistance should be used to advance the human rights of people of all faiths in India.

Stan Swamy

21 Jul 2021 | HL1819

Asked by: Lord Patten

To ask Her Majesty's Government what discussions they have had with the government of India about the death of Father Stan Swamy in custody whilst awaiting trial in that country.

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

I was greatly saddened to learn of Father Swamy's passing on July 5, aged 84. I raised Father Swamy's case with India's Foreign Secretary, Harsh Shringla, and India's Minister of State for Home Affairs, Kishan Reddy, on 15 March while in India. Most recently, I discussed Father Swamy's case with the Indian High Commissioner on 8 June.

We engage with India on a range of human rights matters and oppose discrimination against minorities because of religion, caste, or belief. The British High Commission in New Delhi and Deputy High Commission in Mumbai had been monitoring Father Swamy's case closely and will continue to monitor progress on the rights of Dalits and indigenous people in India.

The British High Commission in New Delhi and our network of Deputy High Commissions across India regularly meet representatives from minority communities and run projects promoting minority rights. Our project work has provided legal training for 2,000 Dalit women to combat violence against them. We also helped establish the first network of Dalit Women Human Rights Defenders who are trained as paralegals in the states of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Telangana, and Maharashtra. Furthermore, we engaged 365 state criminal justice system officials in case issues, training programmes, legal roundtables, and awareness raising programmes.

India: Community Relations and Violence

28 Jun 2021 | HL1038

Asked by: Lord Alton of Liverpool

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made as to whether elections have inflamed tensions and violence between religious and ethnic groups in India; and what steps they are taking to promote freedom of religion or belief in that country following the intercommunal violence in West Bengal.

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

We recognise that the state assembly elections in West Bengal were divisive, and we look to the Indian and West Bengal authorities to address this through inclusive social and economic policies in the recovery from the pandemic. Human rights form a regular part of our dialogue with India and of our frontline line outreach and project work. Most recently, I discussed the situation for Christians with India's Minister of State for Home Affairs on 15 March. Our Acting High Commissioner in New Delhi also discussed UK Parliamentary interest in India's minorities with officials from India's Ministry of External Affairs on 5 January. The British High Commission in New Delhi and our network of Deputy High Commissions across India also regularly meet religious representatives and have run projects promoting minority rights.

India: Religious Freedom

25 Jun 2021 | 17878

Asked by: Feryal Clark

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent representations he has made to his Indian counterpart on protecting the religious freedoms and freedom of belief of (a) Christians, (b) all minority religious groups and (c) people with no religion in India; and if he will make a statement.

Answering member: Nigel Adams | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Human rights form a regular part of our dialogue with India. Most recently, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, the Minister of State for South Asia, discussed the situation for Christians in India with India's Minister of State for Home Affairs, Kishan Reddy, on 15 March. Our then Acting High Commissioner in New Delhi also discussed UK Parliamentary interest on this in India with officials from India's Ministry of External Affairs on 5 January. A senior FCDO official discussed the situation for India's religious minorities with the Indian High Commissioner on 29 December 2020.

The British High Commission in New Delhi regularly meets religious representatives and has run projects promoting minority rights. This year, they supported an interfaith leadership programme for a cohort of emerging Indian faith leaders, including Christians, creating an opportunity to exchange expertise on leading modern, inclusive faith communities, and promoting values of tolerance and multi-culturalism.

[India: Blasphemy](#)

28 Apr 2021 | 184571

Asked by: Imran Ahmad Khan

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with his Indian counterpart on the application of blasphemy laws in that country.

Answering member: Nigel Adams | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

India has a proud history of religious tolerance and we look to the Government of India to address concerns raised about articles in the Indian Penal Code which relate to religion. Human rights forms a regular part of our dialogue with the Government of India. On 15 March, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, the Minister of State responsible for Human Rights and South Asia, discussed the situation for Christians with India's Minister of State for Home Affairs, Kishan Reddy. Our Acting High Commissioner in New Delhi also discussed UK Parliamentary interest in minorities in India with officials from India's Ministry of External Affairs on 5 January, and a senior FCDO official discussed the situation for India's religious minorities with the Indian High Commissioner on 29 December 2020.

Staff in our diplomatic network across India regularly meet religious representatives and have run projects promoting minority rights. Over the last three years, they 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 interfaith tolerance. This year, they supported an interfaith leadership programme for a cohort of emerging Indian faith leaders, creating an opportunity to exchange expertise on leading modern, inclusive faith communities.

[India: Religious Freedom](#)

11 Jan 2021 | 133295

Asked by: Carla Lockhart

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the effect of the introduction of the Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Ordinance legislation in India on freedom of religious belief and religious conversion in that country.

Answering member: Nigel Adams | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

The British High Commission in New Delhi maintain a continuous assessment of the human rights situation in India, and are monitoring developments regarding new inter-faith marriage laws in some Indian states, including the Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Ordinance legislation in Uttar

Pradesh. India has a proud history of religious tolerance and we trust the Government of India to address the concerns of any people that may be affected by this legislation. Where we have concerns, we will continue to raise them directly with the Government of India.

[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.

Answering member: 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.

Answering member: 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.

7

Debates

Human Rights Situation in India

22 Jul 2021 | House of Lords | 814 cc114-132GC

Lords question for short debate on what assessment has been made of the human rights situation in India; and in particular, of the impact it is having on (1) academics, (2) non-governmental organisations, (3) Muslims, (4) Christians, and (5) marginalised groups, such as the Dalits.

India: Persecution of Minority Groups

12 Jan 2021 | House of Commons | 687 cc53-76WH

Motion, That this House has considered the matter of persecution of Muslims, Christians and minority groups in India. Agreed to on question.

Freedom of Religion or Belief

12 Mar 2020 | House of Commons | 673 cc177-200WH

Unallotted backbench debate on a motion that this House has considered freedom of religion of belief. Motion lapsed.

8

Early Day Motions

Protecting Hindus and minorities, Indian legislation on genocide and atrocities prevention and commemoration of the 32nd anniversary of genocide of Hindu Kashmiri Pandits in Jammu and Kashmir

EDM 861 (session 2021-22)

18 January 2022

Bob Blackman

That this House commemorates the 32nd anniversary of the attack in January 1990 by cross-border Islamic militants on the population of Jammu and Kashmir; expresses its condolences to the families of all those who were killed and injured in this massacre; condemns the desecration of the holiest sites in Jammu and Kashmir; is concerned that the Kashmiris who fled persecution have still not seen justice for the atrocities committed against them; commends the resilience and courage shown by the members of Kashmiri Pandit community who survived this gruesome ethnic genocide and who did not resort to taking up arms but instead pursued education and aspiration; deplores those sponsoring such cross-border terrorist attacks and demands that such attacks cease immediately; further notes that the international principle of the responsibility to protect obliges individual states and the international community to take effective measures to prevent the commission of genocide and crimes against humanity as suffered by the Kashmiri Hindu community; and urges the Government of India to fulfil its long-standing international commitment to recognise and acknowledge the worst form of genocide of Hindus in Jammu and Kashmir and enact the proposed Panun Kashmir Genocide Crime Punishment and Atrocities Prevention Bill, therefore delivering the long awaited justice for the Kashmiri Pandits in exile; and further urges the UK Government to extend the UK's long standing commitment to protect the victims of genocide to the Kashmiri Pandits.

Open Doors' report entitled Destructive Lies, and religious minorities in India

EDM 278 (session 2021-22)

5 July 2021

Brandan O'Hara

That this House notes with grave concern the contents of Destructive Lies, the recently published report from the Christian charity Open Doors, based on work done by a research team from the London School of Economics, which concludes that due to a sharp rise in extreme Hindu religious nationalism, Christians, Muslims and other religious minorities in India are living in an atmosphere of deep trauma, fear and anxiety; is alarmed to learn that

religious minorities in India are suffering systematic persecution and are, in the words of the report, facing an existential threat due to the increasing instances of beatings and murders carried out by extremists mobs, whose crimes all too often go unpunished by the police and local courts; is deeply saddened that as a result, India is now ranked 10th in the world on the Open Doors Watch List of where it is the most dangerous place to be a Christian; notes that since the start of the covid-19 pandemic, religious persecution has significantly worsened amid false accusations that Christians and Muslims have deliberately spread the virus, accusations are repeated and amplified on several social-media platforms; demands that social media companies do more to ensure that such dangerous and harmful content is immediately removed; and calls on the UK Government to raise the plight of Indian religious minorities with the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and the High Commissioner as a matter of urgency.

Kashmiri Hindus and World Refugee Day

EDM 208 (session 2021-22)

16 June 2021

Bob Blackman

That this House pays tribute to the resilience of the persecuted minorities, victims of Jihad, living as refugees, fighting for their rights, the world over; empathises with the plight of those people; highlights the special case of Kashmiri Hindus (Pandits) who continue to live as refugees in their own country as their genocide is yet to be acknowledged; urges the Government of India to ensure that the legal recognition of genocide of Kashmiri Hindus is followed by due action to deliver justice to that hard working, resilient community of nation builders; and hopes that the Kashmiri Hindus are able to return to their homeland, Panun Kashmir, and see an end to being refugees in their own country.

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