



USCIRF Annual Report-2020

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Why In News

Recently, **the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF)** has downgraded India to the lowest ranking of **“Countries of Particular Concern” (CPC)** in its 2020 report on religious freedom.

- USCIRF has **placed India alongside** China, North Korea, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. India was categorised as a **“Tier 2 country”** in last year’s listing.
- This is the first time since 2004 that India has been placed in the CPC category.

Key Points

- Designation of the CPC is the top tier recommendation by the USCIRF when it comes to **violation of international religious freedom**. It is followed by **Special Watch List Countries** for severe violations.
- **Reasons:**
 - **India took a sharp downward turn in 2019**, which included specific concerns about the **Citizenship Amendment Act**, the proposed **National Register for Citizens**, anti-conversion laws and the situation in Jammu and Kashmir.
 - Indian government used its parliamentary majority to institute **national-level policies violating religious freedom of minorities**, especially for Muslims. Earlier, the **Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) had criticised the Indian government** for “growing Islamophobia” in the country.

- **Steps suggested to U.S:**
 - The U.S. government should take stringent action against India under the **“International Religious Freedom Act” (IRFA)**.
 - The **International Religious Freedom Act of 1998** was passed to promote religious freedom **as a foreign policy of the United States**.
 - It **aims to promote greater religious freedom** in countries which engage in or tolerate violations of religious freedom, and to advocate on the behalf of individuals persecuted for their religious beliefs and activities in foreign countries.
 - To impose **targeted sanctions** on Indian government agencies and officials responsible for severe violations of religious freedom.
- **India’s stand:** The **Indian government has rejected** the USCIRF **report** and termed it **“biased and tendentious”**.

U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF)

- USCIRF is an **independent, bipartisan U.S. federal government commission**, dedicated to **defending the universal right to freedom of religion or belief abroad**.
- The USCIRF is also an **advisory body** to the US Congress.
- USCIRF reviews **the facts and circumstances of religious freedom violations** and makes policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State, and Congress.
- It is **Headquartered at Washington DC**.

Source: TH