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Countries of Particular Concern: US

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Why in News

Recently, the **US State Department** has designated **Pakistan and China** among eight other countries that are of **particular concern for violation of religious freedom**.

Earlier, the **US State Department** had released its annual **International Religious Freedom (IRF) Report in 2019**, which is a survey of the state of religious freedom across the world.

Key Points

- **Country of Particular Concern (CPC):**
 - Designation of the CPC is the top tier recommendation by the **US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF)** when it comes to violation of **international religious freedom**. It is **followed by Special Watch List Countries for severe violations**.
 - This is in line with the **International Religious Freedom Act of 1998** which was passed to promote religious freedom as a foreign policy of the United States.
 - The Act 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.
 - **Nations on the CPC list** for engaging in or tolerating **systematic, ongoing, egregious violations of religious freedom** are Pakistan, China, Myanmar, Eritrea, Iran, Nigeria, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. **Nigeria** is the **first secular democracy** that has been named a **CPC**.
 - Notably, the State Department **did not accept the USCIRF recommendation** that **India, Russia, Syria and Vietnam be also designated as CPCs**.
 - Earlier, the **US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF report)** had downgraded India's religious freedom to the lowest grade in the '**Country of Particular Concern (CPC)**' category.
 - **India's Stand:**

The Indian government had **rejected the report** by asserting that there is **no locus standi for a foreign government** to comment on the state of its **citizens' constitutionally protected rights**.
- **Special Watch List:** Governments that have engaged in or tolerated "**severe violations of religious freedom**" are included in this list.
 - **Comoros, Cuba, Nicaragua and Russia** are on the list.
 - **Sudan and Uzbekistan** have been **removed from the list** based on significant, concrete progress undertaken by their respective governments over the past year.
- **Entities of Particular Concern:** This list includes **al-Qaida, Boko Haram** (based in Nigeria), **the Houthis** (of Yemen), **ISIS** (Islamic State), ISIS-Greater Sahara, ISIS-West Africa, and the **Taliban**, etc.

Freedom of Religion in India

- Freedom of religion in India is a **fundamental right guaranteed by Article 25-28 of the Constitution of India.**
 - **Article 25** (Freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion).
 - **Article 26** (Freedom to manage religious affairs).
 - **Article 27** (Freedom as to payment of taxes for promotion of any particular religion).
 - **Article 28** (Freedom as to attendance at religious instruction or religious worship in certain educational institutions)
- Further **Article 29 and 30** of the Constitution deal with the **protection of interest of minorities.**

Source:IE