



2021 Report on International Religious Freedom

For Prelims: 2021 Report on International Religious Freedom

For Mains: Effect of Policies & Politics of Countries on India's Interests, Religious Freedom in India and relation Issues

Why in News?

Recently, the 2021 Report on **International Religious Freedom (IRF)** was released by the US Department of State.

- The document is distinct from the IRF report released by the [US Commission on International Religious Freedom \(USCIRF\)](#).
- USCIRF is an **independent, bipartisan federal government entity** while the IRF is part of the US State Department. The former's report holds a statutory obligation.

What is the US Office of International Religious Freedom?

- **History:**
 - In 1998, the then-US President Bill Clinton **signed the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA, 1998) into law.**
 - The Act led to the creation of the Office of International Religious Freedom headed by an Ambassador-at-Large within the State Department of the US government, and the establishment of a **US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF).**
- **Purpose:**
 - The US Office of International Religious Freedom (IRF) monitors **religiously motivated abuses, harassment, and discrimination globally.**
 - Additionally, it **recommends, develops and implements policies** and programs to address the mentioned concerns.
 - The IRF also mentions that it **assists emerging democracies globally to implement freedom of religion and conscience.**
 - Further, **identify and denounce regimes** that persecute on the basis of religion and assist NGOs globally in promoting religious freedom.

What are the Key Highlights of the Report?

- **India:**
 - **Rising Attacks:**
 - India has seen an **increase in attacks on people** (due to religious intolerance) and places of worship.
 - Attacks on members of religious minority communities, including killings, assaults, and intimidation, occurred throughout the year.
 - These included incidents of 'cow vigilantism' against non-Hindus based on allegations of cow slaughter or trade in beef.

- **Anti-Conversion laws:**
 - The India segment also **highlights [anti-conversion laws](#) in the country**, noting that **28 states have these laws** and arrests were made under them.
 - It also notes that **several State governments announced plans to introduce anti-conversion laws.**
 - **Arrests by Police:**
 - Police arrested **non-Hindus for making comments in the media** or on social media that were considered offensive to Hindus or Hinduism.
 - **Suspected Terrorists Targeted:**
 - There have been attacks in Jammu and Kashmir targeting and killing civilians and migrants, including Hindu migrant workers from Bihar.
 - As per reports, **this caused extensive fear in the Hindu and Sikh communities**, leading to an exodus of migrants from the area.
 - **Lynching:**
 - Incidents of lynching of Muslims in Tripura, Rajasthan, and Jammu and Kashmir in 2021 are also mentioned.
 - **Foreign Contributions Regulations Act:**
 - **[Foreign Contributions Regulations Act](#)** was used by the government to constrain the functioning of **[Non-Governmental Organisations \(NGOs\)](#)**.
 - The government claims that the Act is used to strengthen oversight and accountability of foreign NGOs.
- **World:**
 - **About:**
 - **Vietnam and Nigeria have been cited as countries** where religious expression was being curtailed.
 - **Another set of examples of countries with religious freedom restrictions** cited include US ally Saudi Arabia, as well as China, Pakistan and Afghanistan.
 - China continues its genocide and repression of predominantly **[Muslim Uyghurs](#)** and other religious minority groups.
 - In Pakistan, many persons have been accused of **[blasphemy](#)**, or sentenced to death by courts in 2021.
 - **Progress Made:**
 - **Morocco, Timor Leste, Taiwan and Iraq** as examples of countries where progress had been made on religious freedom.
 - Some countries were not respecting the **“basic rights” of citizens** - including by using apostasy and blasphemy laws and curtailing religious expression - such as by restricting religious attire.

What is the State of 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 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 interests of minorities.

[Source: TH](#)

