

# INDIA 2019 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

## Executive Summary

The constitution provides for freedom of conscience and the right of all individuals to freely profess, practice, and propagate religion; mandates a secular state; requires the state to treat all religions impartially; and prohibits discrimination based on religion. It also states that citizens must practice their faith in a way that does not adversely affect public order, morality, or health. Nine of the 28 states have laws restricting religious conversions. In August the central government revoked the semiautonomous status of the Muslim-majority state of Jammu and Kashmir and split it into two union territories: Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh. The revocation sparked protests, criticism from Muslim leaders, and challenges filed in the Supreme Court from opposition politicians, human rights activists, and others. The government sent thousands of additional security forces to the region, shut down many internet and phone lines, and had not restored full service by year's end. The government also closed most mosques in the area until mid-December. Seventeen civilians and three security personnel were killed during the protests. In December parliament passed the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), which accelerates citizenship for Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi, and Christian migrants from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan who entered the country on or before December 31, 2014, but not for similarly-situated migrants who are Muslims, Jews, atheists, or members of other faiths. The law generated widespread media and religious minority criticism, including legal challenges in the Supreme Court. Protests and violent clashes between protesters and security forces in Uttar Pradesh and Assam following the passage of the law resulted in 25 civilian deaths and hundreds of injuries. Issues of religiously inspired mob violence, lynching, and communal violence were sometimes denied or ignored by lawmakers, according to a number of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and media outlets. There were reports by NGOs that the government sometimes failed to act to prevent or stop mob attacks on religious minorities, marginalized communities, and critics of the government. Some officials of Hindu-majority parties, including from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), made inflammatory public remarks or social media posts against minority communities. Mob attacks by violent Hindu groups against minority communities, including Muslims, continued throughout the year amid rumors that victims had traded or killed cows for beef. Authorities often failed to prosecute perpetrators of such "cow vigilantism," which included killings, mob violence, and intimidation. According to some NGOs, authorities often protected perpetrators from prosecution and filed charges against victims. In July Madhya Pradesh became the first state to set fines

and prison sentences for cow vigilantism. Attacks on religious minorities in some cases included allegations of involvement by law enforcement personnel. According to the NGO Persecution Relief, on January 13, police disrupted a worship service in Uttar Pradesh and arrested six people, including the female pastor, who was beaten by the officers. In November the Supreme Court awarded the site of the destroyed Babri Masjid mosque in Ayodhya to Hindu organizations to build a temple there, while providing five acres of land elsewhere in the city for Muslims to build a new mosque. Leading national Muslim organizations and some Muslim litigants petitioned the court to review the decision and permit the mosque, which was destroyed by members of Hindu nationalist organizations in 1992, to be rebuilt on its original site. In December the Supreme Court dismissed these petitions and maintained its ruling. The government continued its challenge in the Supreme Court to the minority status of Muslim educational institutions, which affords them independence in hiring and curriculum decisions. In November the Supreme Court took up challenges to its 2018 reversal of a ban on females aged 10 to 50 years from entering the Hindu Sabarimala Temple in Kerala.

There were reports of religiously motivated killings, assaults, riots, discrimination, vandalism, and actions restricting the right of individuals to practice and speak about their religious beliefs. According to Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) data, 7,484 incidents of communal violence took place between 2008 and 2017 in which more than 1,100 people were killed. MHA data for 2018-2019 was not available, but incidents of communal violence continued through the year. On June 18, a mob in Jharkhand killed Muslim Tabrez Ansari after forcing him to declare allegiance to Hindu deities. NGO Human Rights Watch (HRW) stated that through 2019, Hindu groups characterized as extremist, some of which, according to HRW, had links with BJP supporters, continued to perpetuate mob violence against minorities, especially Muslims, amid rumors they traded or killed cows for beef. According to NGO Hate Crime Watch, 123 incidents of cow-related mob violence, in which Muslims comprised 50 percent of the victims, took place between 2010 and the first half of 2019. Lower-caste Hindus were also victims of cow vigilantism. Hate Crime Watch reported 10 cow vigilante attacks, with one person killed between January and June. On April 10, Prakash Lakda of Jurmu village in Jharkhand was killed by a mob, and three others seriously injured, reportedly for butchering a dead ox. All four victims were Christians who were Scheduled Tribe members. On September 22, according to media reports, individuals from Suari Village in the Khunti District of Jharkhand beat three tribal Christians suspected of selling beef in the village market. One died in the hospital, while the other two sustained serious injuries. Media reported that local police arrested several individuals following the attack. Amnesty International (AI) in

October recorded 72 incidents of mob violence in the first half of the year, of which 37 were directed at Muslims. AI recorded 181 alleged hate crime incidents overall in the first half of the year, compared with 100 during the same period in 2018. According to the NGO Persecution Relief's annual report, 527 incidents of persecution of Christians took place through the year. In August Parvati Devi was killed by her husband's relatives reportedly because she was a Dalit (lower caste) and the couple had converted to Christianity. In February Anant Ram, a Christian, was taken from his home in Odisha and beheaded.

U.S. government officials underscored the importance of respecting religious freedom and promoting tolerance and mutual respect throughout the year with the ruling and opposition parties, civil society and religious freedom activists, and religious leaders belonging to various faith communities. In their engagement with government officials, media, interfaith harmony organizations and NGOs, U.S. officials emphasized the need to address the legitimate concerns of the country's religious minorities, condemn communal rhetoric, and ensure full protection of minorities as guaranteed under the constitution. In March the embassy organized a speaking tour by a U.S. religious harmony expert to the northern cities of Lucknow, Allahabad, and Varanasi. In late May the Ambassador hosted a Ramadan iftar with leaders from the Muslim, Hindu, Christian, Sikh, Buddhist, and Jewish communities, journalists, and multiple political parties at which he stressed the importance of religious diversity and demonstrating empathy and mutual respect for members of other faiths. In July the Department of State senior bureau official for South and Central Asian Affairs met with religious leaders from multiple faiths and representatives from civil society groups advocating for the rights of religious minorities. In August the Deputy Secretary of State conducted a roundtable with religious leaders and religious freedom experts to hear their perspectives on conditions in the country. In October the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, in meetings with senior government officials raised concerns over violence and discrimination against religious and ethnic minorities, including communal violence. He also shared concerns he received from foreign religious leaders and religious institutions about challenges in acquiring visas. In meetings with religious leaders from multiple faiths and civil society groups, he raised concerns over the treatment of religious minorities, including cow-related lynchings, anticonversion laws, and communal violence. Throughout the year, the U.S. Ambassador to India routinely engaged with religious communities, including representatives of the Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, and Sikh faiths, to hear their perspectives and concerns.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 1.3 billion (midyear 2019 estimate). According to the 2011 national census, the most recent year for which disaggregated figures are available, Hindus constitute 79.8 percent of the population, Muslims 14.2 percent, Christians 2.3 percent, and Sikhs 1.7 percent. Groups that together constitute less than 2 percent of the population include Buddhists, Jains, Zoroastrians (Parsis), Jews, and Baha'is. The Ministry of Tribal Affairs officially classifies more than 104 million members of Scheduled Tribes – indigenous groups historically outside the caste system who often practice animism and indigenous religious beliefs – as Hindus in government statistics, although an estimated one-third of those listed as Scheduled Tribe members have converted to Christianity.

According to government estimates, there are large minority Muslim populations in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Maharashtra, West Bengal, Telangana, Karnataka, and Kerala. Muslims constitute 68.3 percent of the population in the former state of Jammu and Kashmir, the only state in which Muslims constituted a majority. Most of the Muslim population is concentrated in the Kashmir Valley, while Jammu and Ladakh have a Hindu and Buddhist majority, respectively. On August 5, the government divided the state into two union territories. Slightly more than 85 percent of Muslims in the country are Sunni; most of the rest are Shia. Christian populations are found across the country but in greater concentrations in the northeast, as well as in the states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Goa. Three small northeastern states have large Christian majorities: Nagaland (90 percent of the population), Mizoram (87 percent), and Meghalaya (70 percent). Sikhs constitute 54 percent of Punjab's population. The Dalai Lama's office estimates that there are significant resettled Tibetan Buddhist communities in Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Uttarakhand, and Delhi. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and media reports, there are approximately 100,000 Tibetan Buddhists in the country. Media report that approximately 40,000 Muslim Rohingya refugees from Burma live in the country.

## **Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom**

### **Legal Framework**

The constitution mandates a secular state and provides for freedom of conscience and the right of all individuals to profess, practice, and propagate religion freely, subject to considerations of public order, morality, and health. It prohibits government discrimination based on religion, including for employment, as well as

any religion-based restrictions on individuals' access to public or private facilities or establishments that are open to the general public. The constitution states that religious groups have the right to establish and maintain institutions for religious and charitable purposes, manage their own affairs in religious matters, and own, acquire, and administer property. It prohibits compelling anyone to pay taxes to promote or maintain any specific religion. National and state laws make freedom of religion "subject to public order, morality, and health." The constitution stipulates that the state shall endeavor to create a uniform civil code applicable to members of all religions across the country.

Federal law empowers the government to ban religious organizations that provoke intercommunal tensions, are involved in terrorism or sedition, or violate laws governing foreign contributions.

Nine of the 28 states have laws restricting religious conversion: Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Rajasthan, and Uttarakhand. Such legislation in Rajasthan, passed in 2008, was rejected by the central government in 2017 and remains unimplemented. In August the Himachal Pradesh state legislature added "coercion" to the list of conversion crimes, which also includes conversion by "fraud," "force," and "inducement." The definition of "inducement" was broadened to include "the offer of any temptation."

Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttarakhand prohibit religious conversion by "force," "allurement," or "fraudulent means," and require district authorities to be informed of any intended conversions one month in advance. Himachal Pradesh and Odisha maintain similar prohibitions against conversion through "force," "inducement," or "fraud," and bar individuals from abetting such conversions. Odisha requires individuals wishing to convert to another religion and clergy intending to officiate at a conversion ceremony to submit formal notification to the government. Violators, including missionaries and other religious figures who encourage conversion, are subject to fines and other penalties, such as prison sentences of up to three years in Chhattisgarh and up to four years in Madhya Pradesh if the converts are minors, women, or members of government-designated, historically disadvantaged groups (Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes). Gujarat mandates prior permission from the district magistrate for any form of conversion and punishes "forced" conversions with up to three years of imprisonment and a fine up to 50,000 rupees (\$700). In Himachal Pradesh, penalties include up to two years' imprisonment and/or fines of 25,000 rupees (\$350). Punishments for conversions involving minors, Scheduled Caste or

Scheduled Tribe members, or in the case of Odisha, women, may consist of prison sentences rather than fines.

According to the Supreme Court, converting from Hinduism to another religion may deny those converting from lower castes the government benefits available to them if they had remained Hindu, such as placement in educational institutions or job training.

Under Andhra Pradesh and Telangana law, authorities may prohibit proselytizing near another religion's place of worship. Punishment for violations may include imprisonment for up to three years and fines up to 5,000 rupees (\$70).

The federal penal code criminalizes "promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion" and "acts prejudicial to maintenance of harmony," including acts causing injury or harm to religious groups and members. The penal code also prohibits "deliberate and malicious acts, intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs." Violations of any of these provisions are punishable by imprisonment for up to three years, a fine, or both. If the offense is committed at a place of worship, imprisonment may be for up to five years.

There are no direct requirements for registration of religious groups unless they receive foreign funds, and federal law requires religiously-affiliated organizations to maintain audit reports on their accounts and a schedule of their activities and to provide these to state government officials upon request.

A federal law regulates foreign contributions to NGOs, including faith-based organizations. Organizations with "definite cultural, economic, educational, religious, or social programs" must receive a federal government certificate of registration to receive foreign funds. The federal government may also require that certified organizations obtain prior permission before accepting or transferring foreign funds. The central government may reject an application for a certificate of registration or a request for prior permission to transfer funds if it judges the recipient to be prejudicially affecting "harmony between religious, racial, social, linguistic, regional groups, castes, or communities."

The constitution states that any reference to Hindus in law is to be construed to include followers of Sikhism, Jainism, and Buddhism, meaning they are subject to laws regarding Hindus, such as the Hindu Marriage Act. Subsequent legislation continues to use the word Hindu as a blanket category that includes Sikhs,

Buddhists, Baha'i, and Jains, but clarifies that these are separate religions whose followers are included under the legislation.

Federal law provides minority community status to six religious groups: Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Parsis, Jains, and Buddhists. State governments may grant minority status to religious groups that are minorities in a particular region and designate them as minorities under state law. Minority status makes these groups eligible for several government assistance programs. The constitution states that the government will protect the existence of religious minorities and will encourage conditions for the promotion of their individual identities.

Personal status laws determine rights for members of certain religious communities in matters of marriage, divorce, adoption, and inheritance based on religion, faith, and culture. Hindu, Christian, Parsi, Jewish, and Islamic personal status laws are legally recognized and judicially enforceable. Personal status issues that are not defined for a community in a separate law are covered under Hindu personal status laws. These laws, however, do not supersede national- and state-level legislation or constitutional provisions. The government grants autonomy to the All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB) and the Parsi community to define their customary practices. If the law board or community leaders cannot offer satisfactory solutions, the case is referred to the civil courts.

Interfaith couples and all couples marrying in a civil ceremony are required to provide public notice 30 days in advance – including addresses, photographs, and religious affiliation – for public comment. Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, Sikhs, or Jains who marry outside their religions, however, face the possibility of losing their property inheritance rights under those communities' personal status laws.

The law recognizes the registration of Sikh marriages, but there are no divorce provisions for Sikhs. Other Sikh personal status matters fall under Hindu codes. Under the law, any person, irrespective of religion, may seek a divorce in civil court.

The constitution prohibits religious instruction in government schools; the law permits private religious schools. The law permits some Muslim, Christian, Sindhi (Hindu refugees), Parsi, and Sikh educational institutions that receive government support to set quotas (in most cases, 50 percent) for students belonging to the religious minority in question. For instance, Aligarh Muslim University must admit at least 50 percent Muslims. St. Stephen's College in Delhi and St. Xavier's in Mumbai must admit at least 50 percent Christians.

Twenty-four of the 28 states apply partial to full restrictions on bovine slaughter. Penalties vary among states and may vary based on whether the animal is a cow, calf, bull, or ox. The ban mostly affects Muslims and members of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. In the majority of the states where bovine slaughter is banned, punishments include imprisonment for six months to two years and a fine of 1,000 to 10,000 rupees (\$14-\$140). Rajasthan, Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, and Jammu and Kashmir penalize cow slaughter with imprisonment of two to 10 years. The law in Gujarat mandates a minimum 10-year sentence (the punishment for some counts for manslaughter) and a maximum sentence of life imprisonment (the punishment for premeditated murder of humans) for killing cows, selling beef, and illegally transporting cows or beef.

As of July, one state (Madhya Pradesh) penalizes cow vigilantism by setting fines of 25,000 to 50,000 rupees (\$350-\$700) and prison sentences of six months to three years for committing violence in the name of protecting cows. This is the first law of its kind in the country.

The National Commission for Minorities, which includes representatives from the six designated religious minorities and the National Human Rights Commission, investigates allegations of religious discrimination. The Ministry of Minority Affairs may also conduct investigations. These bodies have no enforcement powers, but launch investigations based on written complaints by plaintiffs charging criminal or civil violations and submit their findings to law enforcement agencies for action. Eighteen of the country's 28 states and the National Capital Territory of Delhi have state minorities commissions, which also investigate allegations of religious discrimination.

The constitution allows for a form of affirmative action for Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe communities, and the "Other Backward Class," a category for groups deemed to be socially and educationally disadvantaged. Since the constitution specifies only Hindus, Sikhs, or Buddhists shall be deemed members of a Scheduled Caste, the only means through which Christian and Muslim individuals may qualify for affirmative action benefits is if they are considered members of the "backward" classes due to their social and economic status.

The government requires foreign missionaries to obtain a missionary visa.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

## Government Practices

A video that circulated widely on the internet showed a mob near Kharsawan in Jharkhand violently attacking 24-year-old Muslim Tabrez Ansari after forcing him to chant “Jai Shri Ram” and “Jai Hanuman” (allegiance to Hindu deities). Members of the mob accused Ansari of stealing a motorcycle. Ansari died in a hospital several days later. On September 10, the Jharkhand police dropped murder charges against all 11 individuals accused of the attack, citing the initial autopsy report that stated that Ansari had died of cardiac arrest. On September 18, the police reintroduced murder charges against all the accused after a detailed postmortem exam revealed grievous injury to Ansari’s skull. The Jharkhand government set up a special investigation team and suspended two policemen for not reporting the seriousness of the issue to a higher authority and for failure to report a case of lynching.

On December 12, parliament passed the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), which amends the 1955 Citizenship Act to provide an expedited path to Indian citizenship for Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi, and Christian migrants from Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh who had entered India on or before December 31, 2014. Similarly-situated Muslims, Jews, atheists, and members of other faiths from these three countries were excluded from the CAA. The legislation – the first-ever to use religion as a criterion for citizenship – was criticized heavily by domestic and international media, NGOs, religious groups, intellectuals, and some political parties. Opponents stated it was unconstitutional because it violated the tenets of a secular state. Passage of the legislation was followed by widespread protests in Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Assam, but they soon spread to university campuses and cities nationwide. The government deployed police, severely limited public gatherings, imposed a curfew, and cut internet service, primarily in Uttar Pradesh, Assam, and Jammu and Kashmir. As of the end of December, domestic and international media had reported 25 deaths, hundreds of injuries and thousands of detentions, with 5,500 detained in Uttar Pradesh alone. There were multiple reports of excessive force by police against protesters, particularly against Muslim university students. For example, in December police moved onto the campus of Jamia Millia University in New Delhi to end a protest, deploying tear gas and beating protesters with batons, according to witnesses who spoke to the media.

Government critics, civil liberty activists, NGOs, and political organizations, including the Congress party, filed more than 100 legal challenges to the CAA in the Supreme Court on the grounds that it added a religious qualification to the

country's historically secular citizenship laws. Some opposition leaders said the CAA was part of an ongoing BJP effort to marginalize Muslim communities throughout the country. The government defended the CAA by saying that it was legislation aimed at facilitating citizenship for illegal refugees from six religious minorities who had fled three neighboring countries due to religious persecution and that Muslims could still apply for citizenship through the normal, non-expedited route. Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that the CAA was an act to provide citizenship and not to take it away from legal Indian citizens. In November he stated that the constitution should be revered as a "holy book and a guiding light." Some officials linked the CAA with the National Register of Citizens (NRC), a process used to identify illegal immigrants in the state of Assam. On December 22, Modi disavowed any discussion of implementing the NRC nationwide, including earlier comments from Home Minister Amit Shah that a nationwide NRC should be in place so "we will detect and deport every infiltrator from our motherland." Some opposition leaders and protestors stated they feared that a national NRC could disenfranchise Muslims in the country.

According to a number of NGOs and media outlets, lawmakers sometimes denied or ignored incidents of mob violence, lynching, and communal violence, which often had a religious component. On September 18, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said in an interview that there had been no incidents of mob lynching in Uttar Pradesh during his tenure, which began in 2017. According to the Uttar Pradesh Law Commission in July, however, 50 incidents of mob violence had taken place in the state between 2012 and 2019, resulting in 11 deaths. Adityanath also used the term "love jihad," a derogatory term suggesting a deliberate effort by Muslim men to lure Hindu women into a relationship and coerce them to convert to Islam, which analysts stated proved to be a crucial election issue for the ruling BJP.

In August the central government revoked the semiautonomous status of Jammu and Kashmir, the country's only Muslim-majority state, splitting it into two union territories, one for Jammu and Kashmir and the other for Ladakh. Opposition political parties and other critics condemned this decision; the central government pledged to hold assembly elections in the new territories. The government sent thousands of additional security forces to the region and shut down internet and phone lines just before announcing the decision. Many of these restrictions were gradually reduced by December. The government also closed most mosques in the area, including the Jamia Masjid, the main mosque in Srinagar, from August 5 until mid-December. Muslim leaders criticized the move. The government's actions sparked protests. Several politicians belonging to opposition parties,

human right activists, journalists, and retired army personnel filed petitions in the Supreme Court challenging the government's actions. Government and media reported there were incidents of violence and intimidation carried out by militants. In November the government told parliament that 20 persons, including 17 civilians and three security personnel, were killed in terror-related incidents in Jammu and Kashmir since August 5. On November 21, Home Minister Shah told the media, "Not a single person has died by police firing" in Jammu and Kashmir.

On July 20, Maharashtra police arrested one person the day after a group accosted and allegedly tried to lynch Muslim youth Imran Patel, forcing him to say "Jai Shri Ram" (allegiance to a Hindu deity). Patel said a Hindu family residing nearby rushed to his rescue and saved his life.

By year's end, parliament had not acted on a July 2018 Supreme Court order that it enact a federal law to outlaw mob violence. The court also ordered all state governments to designate a senior police officer in every district to prevent mob violence and ensure that the police act promptly in such cases. Only Rajasthan and West Bengal had partially followed the Supreme Court order.

In July Rajasthan passed an anti-lynching law, but its implementation remained pending at the end of the year. The law defines lynching as "any act or series of acts of violence or aiding, abetting, or attempting an act of violence, whether spontaneous or planned, by a mob on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth, language, dietary practices, sexual orientation, political affiliation, [or] ethnicity." Penalties include up to life in prison. The law followed attacks on Muslims and was a state-level response to the Supreme Court order directing state legislatures to pass laws to address lynching and mob violence. In August the West Bengal state legislature passed a bill that made lynching punishable by life in prison or the death penalty. The bill defined lynching as any mob violence on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth, language, dietary practices, sexual orientation, political affiliation, ethnicity, or any other ground. The West Bengal bill had not been implemented by year's end.

HRW said that since May 2015, 50 people have been killed and over 250 injured in mob violence. HRW reported that Muslims were also beaten and forced to chant Hindu slogans and that the police failed to properly investigate these incidents, instead filing criminal cases against witnesses in order to intimidate them. The NGO Alliance for Defending Freedom India (ADF India) reported that less than 40 of more than 300 cases of "cow vigilantism" that it had documented were prosecuted by the police. At the same time, according to HRW, the government

failed to properly enforce Supreme Court directives designed to prevent and investigate mob attacks on religious minorities and other vulnerable communities, which, according to HRW, were sometimes linked to BJP supporters.

On April 14, according to the website AsiaNews, 200 men attacked a church in Jaunpur District of Uttar Pradesh as police officers looked on without intervening. The report stated that the church's clergy fled while the men attacked members of the congregation with sticks.

A police investigation continued into a May 2018 communal clash in Aurangabad in Maharashtra in which a Muslim youth was shot and killed by police and a Hindu man died in his burning shop. The clash followed allegations that authorities were cracking down on illegal water connections in a discriminatory manner. Police briefly arrested two city councilors, but they were released on bail.

On August 22, authorities arrested a fourth individual for the 2018 cow vigilante killing of Rakbar Khan in Rajasthan, who was assaulted by villagers who suspected him of cattle smuggling. Khan died when police took at least three hours to transport him to a local hospital that was 2.5 miles away. According to media reports, the police stopped for tea along the way. The case of the fourth individual was pending trial at year's end.

On July 24, the Uttar Pradesh government dropped charges in 22 cases tied to riots in Muzaffarnagar in 2013 that claimed at least 65 lives and displaced thousands. By year's end, the state government had dropped charges in at least 70 cases related to the riots. Since 2017, Muzaffarnagar courts have acquitted the accused in 40 of 41 cases involving attacks against Muslims. A BJP state legislator from the region said there were 93 other (pending) cases involving false allegations of Hindu attack against Muslims, which he said were brought for political reasons. By year's end, there was one conviction related to the riots that followed the killings of two Hindu youths.

On April 23, the Supreme Court directed the Gujarat government to pay a Muslim woman five million rupees (\$70,400) in compensation for being gang-raped during the 2002 Hindu-Muslim communal riots in that state. Fourteen members of her family, including her two-year-old daughter and mother, were killed during the riots.

On July 27, Gujarat police arrested four persons on charges that they beat a 17-year-old Muslim youth to death because they objected to his relationship with a tribal girl in Ankleshwar District.

A Special Investigation Team formed in 2018 to assess 186 cases related to anti-Sikh riots in Delhi and Punjab in 1984 submitted its report to the government in April; the government presented it to the Supreme Court in November. Supreme Court action, which could include an order to reopen some of the cases, was pending at year's end.

On September 8, Jharkhand police arrested Catholic priest Binoy John and lay leader Munna Handsda for allegedly trying to convert villagers in Jharkhand's Godda District. The accused had also reportedly asked villagers to donate their land to the church. They were arrested under a 2017 Jharkhand law that criminalizes religious conversion by inducement or coercion, following a complaint lodged by a villager. Both men were released on bail later in the same month.

Media reported that many of the 271 Christians charged by police in Jaunpur District of Uttar Pradesh in September 2018 with "spreading lies about Hinduism" remained in prison at year's end. Authorities said the Christians violated national laws against spreading enmity among different religious groups and causing social disharmony.

NGOs International Christian Concern (ICC) and ADF India stated authorities pursued charges against Christians in several states, especially Uttar Pradesh, under religious conversion laws or laws prohibiting "insults" to religion or religious belief, such as Section 259A of the national penal code. In September ICC reported that eight persons were arrested and several house churches closed down in Lakhimpur Kheri District. Those arrested were charged under Section 259A, then released a few days later on bail.

According to ICC, Christian pastors, their families, and their congregations were threatened by police and Hindu residents in Jharkhand, with some fleeing their villages out of concern for their safety. ICC reported pastors receiving death threats, mobs attacking Christian worship services, and Christians being detained by police for not giving money for Hindu ceremonies. ICC said that "an atmosphere of impunity" (for attacking Christians) had "been allowed to gather" in the state.

According to the NGO Persecution Relief, on January 13, police disrupted a worship service in Uttar Pradesh and arrested six persons, including the female pastor, Sindhu Bharti. According to the NGO and media accounts, the pastor was beaten by police officers and had boiling tea poured down her throat to ensure she was not feigning unconsciousness.

In September activists from the Bajrang Dal, the youth wing of the Hindu nationalist group Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), disrupted a Christian prayer meeting held by the New Life Fellowship Association in a public school in the Worli neighborhood of Mumbai, accusing it of being a cover for religious conversion. Mumbai police issued a notice to the association, warning that it had not sought the required advance permission to gather in a public place and would face prosecution if it did so again without permission. The police also warned the Bajrang Dal not to disrupt the fellowship's meetings. The church pastor stated that he objected to the police action and said it violated the right to worship.

According to the website AsiaNews, in June police detained four Christians in Uttar Pradesh for organizing prayer meetings following reports that they were conducting "forced conversions." The police released the men the same day without charges.

In May the Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC) reported that police in Uttar Pradesh arrested Reverend Gyan Singh and another Pentecostal Christian in the village of Bugauliya Block, Basti District, for forced conversions. Police told GCIC that they would release the two without charges. In June authorities arrested Uttar Pradesh pastor Dependra Prakash Maleywar of the Church of North India after he was accused of the forced conversion of 16 persons. Police originally arrested Maleywar after a local Hindu activist accused him of an assault against Bajrang Dal activists. A judge ordered Maleywar held in custody for 14 days pending an investigation; after a week, authorities released him on bail. Police in Jharkhand arrested Dalu Soren, a Christian veterinarian, on October 16, after a 13-year-old girl's father filed a complaint alleging forced conversion of his daughter by Soren.

On April 11, in Jamadha Village in Uttar Pradesh, according to the NewsClick website, members of a Christian group were detained under a section of the criminal procedure code that gives local magistrates the authority to prohibit the gathering of four or more persons or the holding of public meetings. The action came after a Hindu nationalist group interrupted the Christians' prayer meeting and called the police.

In August a judge of the Madras High Court in Tamil Nadu said that coeducational study in Christian institutions was “unsafe for girls.” The judge made his remarks in the context of a case involving allegations of sexual assault against a professor in a Christian college that was not linked to conversion. After strong protests from the Tamil Nadu Catholic Bishops’ Council, other Christian organizations, and civil society groups, the judge removed his comments from the court order.

On September 2, Uttar Pradesh police launched a smartphone-based intelligence-gathering system that they said was designed to alert them to flare-ups of communal tensions, so-called “anti-social elements,” and land disputes. According to reports, 10 individuals in every village across the state agreed to provide information on communal tensions. Cross-referencing among the informants was meant to help combat rumors.

On November 9, the Supreme Court awarded the site of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh – which was destroyed in a riot by members of Hindu nationalist organizations in 1992 – to Hindu organizations to build a temple. Hindus stated the site of the mosque was the birthplace of the god Ram, and that the mosque had been built in the 16th century by destroying a Hindu temple there. Muslims stated they rejected this account and claimed ownership of the mosque. The court decision provided five acres of land elsewhere in Ayodhya for Muslims to build a new mosque. In December Muslim litigants, the prominent Muslim organization Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind, and the AIMPLB petitioned the court to review the decision and permit the mosque to be rebuilt on its original site. The Hindu Mahasabha organization filed a petition against the decision to provide five acres for the mosque. Prominent Muslim community members signed a petition to accept the court ruling, but also stated that the judgment gave precedence to the Hindu faith. Others criticized the court for not addressing Muslim grievances concerning the violent destruction of the mosque. On December 12, the Supreme Court dismissed all review petitions and upheld its original decision.

On August 10 in New Delhi, the Delhi Development Authority demolished the Guru Ravidas Hindu temple and its idols on the grounds that it had been built illegally on government-owned property. The demolition, which had been delayed by court challenges from Dalit groups since 1986, was followed by protests in Punjab and other parts of North India. On August 21, large groups of mostly Hindu Dalit protesters came to New Delhi from Punjab, Rajasthan, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and other states to demand that the government hand over the concerned plot of land to the community and rebuild the temple. Police armed with batons

dispersed the crowd, and some were detained. Representatives of several Muslim organizations supported the demand for reconstructing the temple. In September the management of the temple petitioned the Supreme Court to intervene again in the matter. In October the Supreme Court accepted the government's plan to rebuild a smaller temple at the same site.

In April, according to AsiaNews, the High Court in Prayagraj (formerly Allahabad) ordered Uttar Pradesh to reopen a church in Siddharth Nagar District, protect the church members, and allow them to conduct religious observances in peace. Authorities shut down the church in 2018 when a Hindu group filed a complaint against it.

In March the Kerala Law Reforms Commission circulated a draft of a proposed "Kerala Church (Properties and Institutions) Bill" for public review. The draft bill proposed the state set up a tribunal to intervene in any property disputes in which a church was involved (such disputes were not further specified). The proposed bill elicited a strong reaction from Christian churches in Kerala, as it would have eroded the authority of a church's leadership in managing the affairs of the church. Officials in the Kerala state government later stated the government had no intention to move forward with the bill following strong opposition from leading churches in the state.

On August 31, Assam authorities published the final state-level NRC, which listed the citizens residing there. The NRC list excluded 1,906,657 residents, compared to four million in the earlier draft NRC of July 2018. Excluded residents were able to appeal to foreigners' tribunals, and subsequently to the high court and the Supreme Court. Although the religious profile of those excluded was not contained in the NRC list, the BJP's Assam unit stated it was concerned that more Bengali Hindus were excluded than Muslims, and that the results "favor the illegal Bangladeshi migrants."

A report released in August by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies found evidence of anti-Muslim bias among police in the country. In Uttarakhand, Bihar, Maharashtra, and Jharkhand, two-thirds of police surveyed felt that Muslims were more prone to commit crimes than other religious communities. In Uttarakhand, 80 percent of police personnel expressed this opinion. One-third of those surveyed felt that it was natural for a mob to resort to violence in cases of cow slaughter. Almost one-third of respondents said they felt that religious minorities were not given equal treatment with police forces. Sikh individuals were most likely to hold this opinion.

In September the newly-elected Andhra Pradesh state government began implementing a Yuvajana Sramika Rythu Congress Party election pledge to provide a salary supplement of 10,000 to 35,000 rupees (\$140-\$490) a year to Hindu priests who conducted regular rituals in rural temples and a 25 percent increase in the salaries of priests working in temples with “meager revenues.” The new government also pledged an additional 15,000 rupees (\$210) to imams and muezzins, and 5,000 rupees (\$70) to Christian clergy each year.

The BJP criticized the Andhra Pradesh government’s initiative to conduct a survey of Christian clergy using state resources, stating that under its chief minister, a Christian, the government was acting in a biased manner. A journal affiliated with a Catholic church near Delhi criticized the state government, stating that it was the responsibility of religious boards and communities, and not secular state governments, to support religious activities.

On August 25, Andhra Pradesh Chief Secretary L.V. Subrahmanyam declared that non-Hindu employees working in nonreligious positions in Andhra Pradesh’s Hindu religious temples board, Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD), would be removed from their positions. He said their presence in the TTD, which manages several Hindu temples in Tirupati city in southern Andhra Pradesh, “hurts the sentiments” of Hindu pilgrims. The chief secretary stated that non-Hindu employees must not conceal their religious beliefs, and that inspections of employees’ residences would be conducted if needed to discern their religious affiliations. According to media reports, the state government decided to remove the non-Hindu employees because of public criticism that tickets given to Hindu pilgrims visiting the Tirumala temple on state-run buses had details of a Jerusalem tour on the back. The TTD stated it was not involved with producing the tickets. According to media reports, however, the TTD may have acted against the non-Hindus because of alleged Christian proselytization on temple premises in the past. The TTD had tried to remove 42 non-Hindu employees in 2018, but the Hyderabad High Court stayed the order. In the wake of the state’s August announcement, the court asked the state government to provide an explanation for the removal of non-Hindu employees working in nonreligious positions. Ultimately, no non-Hindus were removed from the TTD during the year.

In May, July, and November, the Supreme Court granted bail to all seven Christians convicted by a trial court in 2013 in the 2007 killing of VHP leader Swami Laxmanananda. The Odisha High Court had deferred bail hearings for more than two years. Christian legal aid organizations and an independent

journalist lobbied for their release on bail, stating the seven individuals were innocent and that the trial court had convicted them on “flimsy evidence.”

According to NGO sources, authorities reportedly denied three U.S. citizens entry under non-missionary visas due to concerns that they intended to engage in missionary activity, although the U.S. citizens denied that this was their intention.

An 86-year-old Spanish missionary nurse from the Daughters of Charity left the country on August 20 after the Ministry of External Affairs refused to renew her visa and informed her that she would have to depart within 10 days. She had worked among the poor in the Gajapati District of Odisha for 50 years. The ministry did not disclose the reason for the denial, but a member of parliament said the decision may have been motivated by the ministry’s “unstated policy of denying visas to foreign nationals who indulge in religious activities.”

In April Hindu Mahasabha Party (HMP) Vice President Deva Thakur called for the forced sterilization of Muslims and Christians. Media also reported that the HMP continued to operate unsanctioned “courts” based on the principles of *Hindutva* (Hindu cultural, national, and religious identity) after it unsuccessfully petitioned the prime minister in 2018 to close sharia courts around the country. The Hindu “courts” dealt with a range of issues, including interreligious relationships. A self-styled Hindu judge told the media in October that her court sought to “cleanse a girl’s mind and even get the police involved” in cases where a Hindu woman is involved with a Muslim man.

According to data compiled by news channel NDTV, there were 25 instances of public officials engaging in hate speech in December after the president signed the CAA into law, the highest number recorded in a single month since the Modi government came to power in 2014. NDTV said of the 25 instances, 23 were comments were made by BJP leaders. Formal requests to open investigations had been filed for three of those instances by year’s end. On December 15, referring to anti-CAA protesters, the prime minister said that people could make out who was spreading violence by the clothes they wore. Media outlets and editorial commentary criticized the statement for implying that individuals in Muslim attire were responsible for the violence.

On September 18, Telangana state lawmaker T. Raja Singh of the BJP released two videos announcing the creation of a vigilante army to “deal with traitors inside the country” and to create a Hindu *Rashtra* (nation). He stated, “Whichever traitor is

hidden inside India will be dragged out and worn down, and sent outside India – or even directly to *Jahannum* (Urdu for hellfire).”

In August a bill criminalizing “triple *talaq*,” the practice by which a Muslim man may divorce his wife instantly by saying the Arabic word for divorce (*talaq*) three times, became law. This followed a 2018 government executive order that set a fine and prison sentence for the practice, and a 2017 Supreme Court ruling that the practice was unconstitutional and inconsistent with Islamic law. Some Muslim organizations, including the AIMPLB, and Muslim politicians, including MP Asaduddin Owaisi, criticized the new law. In October the AIMPLB filed a petition in the Supreme Court challenging the new law.

Using Aligarh Muslim University as an example, the government continued its 2016 challenge to a Supreme Court ruling that recognized the minority status of Islamic educational institutions and their resulting independence in hiring and curriculum decisions. In February the chief justice referred the challenge to a seven-judge panel for action.

Unlike in 2018, no state or local jurisdiction with an Islamic-origin name was renamed during the year.

In July 49 celebrities and activists wrote Prime Minister Modi a letter asking him to intervene to stop rising incidents of attacks on minorities, misuse of religion by Hindu hardliners, and intolerance against dissent in the country. News accounts suggested the letter was timed to imply that Hindu nationalist supporters of Modi’s BJP might feel emboldened by their electoral victory in May to increase actions against religious minorities. According to HRW, Bihar state authorities filed a sedition case against the writers of the letter in October. Following a public outcry, including by 180 celebrities and activists in addition to those who endorsed the July letter, the case was closed. By year’s end, there was no reaction from the government to the letter.

### **Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom**

Hate Crime Watch, an initiative of media data project IndiaSpend, recorded a significant increase in overall religious identity-motivated hate crimes between 2014 and 2018. These included acts of communal violence, attacks on interfaith couples, and violence related to cow protection and religious conversions. According to Hate Crime Watch, 123 incidents of cow-related violence took place between 2010 and 2019 in which 50 percent of the victims were Muslim. AI’s

“Halt the Hate” report recorded 181 hate crime incidents in the first half of 2019, 121 against Dalits, 40 against Muslims, and the remainder against Christians, indigenous peoples, and other groups. The AI report showed 100 hate crime incidents over the same period in 2018. The report included 37 cases of mob attacks against Muslims in the first half of the year, including five lynchings.

Uttar Pradesh accounted for 869 of 2,008 incidents of harassment against religious minorities and Dalits between 2016 and mid-2019, according to an analysis of National Human Rights Commission data conducted by the publication *India Today*. Most of them took place in Hindu-majority areas. According to the analysis, Uttar Pradesh, the country’s most populous state with more than 200 million inhabitants, had more incidents than any other state, but such incidents had decreased in the last two years, from 42 cases in 2016-17 to 19 in 2018-19. Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Delhi, Gujarat, and Uttarakhand comprised 75 percent of incidents recorded by the commission.

On February 6, the MHA presented data in the lower house of parliament showing a 9 percent increase in incidents of religious violence nationwide from 2015 to 2017 (the most recent government yearend statistics available). In 2017 there were 822 incidents, resulting in 111 deaths and 2,384 injuries.

According to news articles, on July 30, a 17-year-old male Muslim in the Chandauli District of Uttar Pradesh died from burn injuries after he was set on fire for not chanting “Jai Shri Ram.” Police denied that he was forced to chant the religious slogan, and the Chandauli superintendent of police said the victim gave inconsistent statements, that CCTV footage was inconsistent with his statements, and that a witness had seen the victim set himself on fire.

On April 10, according to media reports and the survivors, a group of Hindu individuals from a neighboring village attacked and killed tribal Christian Prakash Lakda of Jurmu Village in Jharkhand. Three other tribal Christians sustained severe injuries. The four men were reportedly attacked for butchering an ox.

On September 22, according to media reports, individuals from Suari Village in Khunti District of Jharkhand beat three tribal Christians suspected of selling beef in the village market. One died in the hospital following the attack, while the other two sustained serious injuries. Villagers told the media that the attackers were affiliated with the Bajrang Dal. The police arrested five persons.

According to an *Asia News* report, on August 27, Parvati Devi was killed by her husband's relatives in Jharkhand because she was a Dalit and the couple had converted to Christianity.

In February, according to a report from NGO Persecution.org, Anant Ram, a Christian, was taken from his home in Odisha and beheaded. The report stated that his family believed local Hindus attacked him because of his conversion. Police stated they believed he was killed by Maoist rebels.

Persecution.org reported that on July 14, persons affiliated with what it described as Hindu radical groups seriously injured individuals from eight Christian families in an attack in Belchori Village in Jharkhand. The incident took place after the families reportedly refused to recant their faith.

On June 22 in New Delhi, Muslim cleric Maulana Momin reportedly was told to chant "Jai Shri Ram" by three Hindus in a car. When Momin refused and started to walk off, he was hit by the vehicle. Momin suffered injuries on his head, face, and hands. The police registered a criminal complaint and searched for the alleged assailants, but the investigation was pending at year's end.

On April 7, according to an *India Today* report, attackers in Biswanath Chariali, Assam, beat 68-year-old Shaukat Ali, accusing him of selling beef. The crowd also reportedly forced Ali to eat pork. The police arrested one person.

On July 9, local media widely reported an incident involving a Muslim man from a Tamil Nadu village who posted a video of himself eating beef soup. After four young Hindu men living in the same village saw the video, they found the man and stabbed him. The assailants and the man who filmed the video were later arrested for "disturbing communal harmony."

According to an *Asia News* report, in September a crowd of 500 persons armed with knives and clubs attacked a Jesuit-run school in Jharkhand, beating several students and injuring at least two severely. They also damaged the school to such an extent that the principal said he believed he would be unable to reopen it. The attackers were reportedly motivated by rumors of forced conversions. By year's end, there were no reports of arrests or convictions in the case.

According to a *Hindustan Times* report, on June 6, a group of Muslims attacked Hindu worshipers in a temple in Rohanya, Uttar Pradesh. The report stated that the attackers arrived at the temple and asked worshipers to stop using the loudspeaker.

They reportedly said that as the next day was Eid al-Fitr, the temple should stop broadcasting devotional songs. The report further said that after the worshipers refused, the Muslim group cut the loudspeaker wire, removed religious idols, and fought with the Hindu worshipers. Five of the attackers were arrested and faced criminal charges. Police returned the idols to the temple.

On July 17, according to police, 60 to 70 individuals attacked a madrassah and pulled down its boundary wall at Behta Village in Uttar Pradesh after beef was allegedly found in the vicinity. Police filed two criminal complaints, one against a person for cow slaughter and another against the persons who attacked the madrassah.

On August 14, a court in Rajasthan acquitted six individuals accused in the 2017 mob killing of Muslim cattle trader and dairy farmer Pehlu Khan in Alwar, citing contradictions in the police investigation. On June 29, the police had charged Khan (posthumously) and his sons under the state's cow protection laws. In September the government established a special unit to carry out a fresh investigation into the case and identify lapses made by the police. In October the Rajasthan state government challenged the verdict in the state high court, which dropped the charges against Khan and his sons.

During the year, police arrested and began the prosecution of 33 individuals for killing a police officer and setting fire to the Chingrawati police station in Uttar Pradesh during a cow vigilante incident in December 2018. Those arrested were part of a crowd protesting an incident of cow slaughter. The police charge sheet said the slain police officer had tried unsuccessfully to pacify the mob, which pelted the police with stones when the latter tried to use force against them. In the clash, one villager died of a bullet wound. As of August, seven of the 33 had been released on bail, and five suspects were still at large.

According to ADF India, the helpline of the United Christian Forum recorded more than 300 cases of mob violence against Christians of all denominations in the country during the year.

The NGO Persecution Relief reported 527 incidents of persecution against Christians in its 2019 annual report, compared with 477 in 2018. Uttar Pradesh reported the highest number – 109 – followed by 75 in Tamil Nadu and 32 in Karnataka. The NGO reported that the most common forms of persecution were “threats, harassment, and intimidation,” which accounted for 199 of 527 incidents.

It also stated that the number of incidents during year was 60 percent higher than the number reported in 2016.

On August 18, members of Hindu Munnani, a Hindu nationalist organization, attacked 40 Christians near Vellore in Tamil Nadu, according to the GCIC. The Christian group was on a pilgrimage from Karnataka to the Marian shrine in Velankanni. The GCIC report stated that the attackers physically assaulted the pilgrims and destroyed their posters of Jesus and Mary. On August 19, the police identified six of the Hindu Munnani members, who were charged with rioting, attempted murder, and “disturbing religious peace,” although according to a law enforcement official, the police never placed the accused in custody to bring formal charges.

On February 2, according to media reports, police arrested three BJP party workers for assaulting a Christian pastor and two other persons in Ariyalur District of Tamil Nadu. The reports stated that the BJP members forced the three Christians to lie prostrate in a Hindu temple and smeared sacred ash and vermilion on their foreheads in accordance with Hindu temple practice before releasing them. The BJP party workers circulated a video of the incident on social media.

According to a report in the *Indian Express*, in Kanpur District in Uttar Pradesh on July 28, members of the VHP youth wing allegedly beat a pastor, accused him of attempting conversion and handed him over to the police. The pastor said he had neither been beaten nor had tried to convert anyone, and that he had been called to pray for a sick individual.

According to media reports, in the Ramamurthy Nagar neighborhood near Madurai, Tamil Nadu, approximately 30 Christian families were still being ostracized for their conversion from Hinduism decades ago. The reports stated that community members were denying the Christians access to public water sources, refusing to serve them in village shops, and were boycotting Christian-owned shops and stalls. Sixty lower caste Hindu families from the area converted to Christianity in the 1980s, with approximately one-half converting back in 2018, reportedly under pressure from Hindu Munnani.

On May 5, according to media reports, Hindus and Muslims threw stones at each other in Amberpet, Hyderabad after municipal authorities demolished a mosque to widen a road, which prompted a group of Muslims to attempt to erect a temporary structure at the same location. The police used batons on protestors and prevented BJP state lawmaker T. Raja Singh from visiting the location.

On January 23, according to media reports, police in Kendrapara District, Odisha, established a curfew, imposed the relevant section of the criminal procedure code to restrict assembly of more than four persons, and suspended internet service for at least two days after Hindus and Muslims pelted each other with stones and threw Molotov cocktails in a dispute over the use of a school playground for a public meeting. Local Muslims reportedly prevented Rashtriya Suraksha Samiti, affiliated with the Hindu nationalist organization Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), from organizing a public rally to celebrate the birth anniversaries of nationalist figures Surendra Sai and Subhas Chandra Bose, who died fighting against British rule. Media reports quoted local Muslim residents as stating that the RSS had not allowed them to use the ground for a religious assembly in 2018, and in response Muslims blocked the RSS from attempting to meet on the same site a year later.

The 2019 Jehovah's Witnesses annual report listed 41 incidents of harassment around the country from January through May, including 11 instances of mobs confronting Jehovah's Witnesses and accusing them of forced conversion. The report included three cases of physical assault, with minor injuries. The report stated that in 18 of the 29 incidents reported to police, the members involved were initially detained and then released without incident. According to the report, a Jehovah's Witness house of worship was broken into in February in Rourkela, Odisha. The members filed a report with the local police, but there was no follow-up by year's end.

On August 18, a court in Pune court denied bail to two suspects arrested for the 2013 killing of Narendra Dabholkar, leader of the Committee for Eradication of Blind Faith (MANS), an anti-superstition movement.

On August 21, Mumbai police arrested three teenage boys after a Muslim motorist complained that they used religious slurs and had assaulted him in the Vikhroli neighborhood.

On August 24, police in Vadodara, Gujarat arrested three men after they assaulted a uniformed Muslim police official during his off-duty hours and reportedly insulted him regarding his faith following an interpersonal dispute.

In July four men were arrested for uploading a clip onto YouTube following complaints that it was a "hate song" targeting non-Hindus. The songwriter, Santosh Yadav, was among those arrested. Yadav denied that the song targeted

anyone and said it was only meant to express his love for Hinduism. He blamed “anti-Ram” elements in the media for his arrest. The organizers of the YouTube channel removed the clip and apologized.

In August seven persons accused of involvement in an incident of communal violence that resulted in the 2018 killing of a police inspector in Bulandshahr District in Uttar Pradesh were welcomed by their supporters with patriotic slogans and flower garlands after being released on bail. All those accused of rioting were released, but none of the individuals arrested for murder were granted bail. The violence took place on December 3, 2018, after a cow carcass was found in a field in Bulandshahr, where thousands of Muslims had gathered for a religious event.

In a May 1 editorial, the official newspaper of the Shiv Sena Hindu nationalist party urged Prime Minister Modi to ban the burqa following Sri Lanka’s decision to do so in the wake of Easter bomb attacks in Colombo. According to media reports, following public protests from Muslim leaders, the Shiv Sena spokesperson later clarified that the editorial was not the party’s official line, and the BJP spokesperson added that under PM Modi’s leadership, “India is safe,” and that a ban on face coverings therefore was not required.

Several acts of vandalism and arson targeting Christian sites and symbols occurred during the year. According to the NGO Persecution Relief, 17 church buildings were attacked around the country, including in Belgaum District, Karnataka, where a group of men set fire to a church under construction on December 17. The NGO said the pastor filed a complaint with police, but a group returned on December 22 to finish burning the building. The police provided protection to the pastor and church members after the incident. According to NGO Open Doors, on January 9, Hindus tore down a church building in Guntur District, Andhra Pradesh, because it was built in a location “which violated Hindu principles of placement and positioning.”

On July 10, in New Delhi’s historic Old Delhi area, Muslims and Hindus joined for a public feast and to install a new idol in a Hindu temple that had been vandalized the prior week during a brief period of communal tensions. According to media, a significant police presence in the area helped calm tensions. A Muslim member of the community told the media, “We don’t support such things (communal violence) and want peace in the area.”

#### **Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement**

Throughout the year, representatives from the embassy and consulates met with government officials to discuss challenges faced by religious minorities, especially Christians and Muslims, incidents of cow vigilantism, the status of religious freedom in the country, and religiously motivated violence. Embassy officials, including the Ambassador, engaged with members of parliament and politicians from the ruling and opposition parties to understand their positions on the CAA. They emphasized the need to address the legitimate concerns of the country's religious minorities, to condemn communal rhetoric, and to ensure full protection of minorities as guaranteed under the constitution. Representatives from the embassy and consulates also met with Muslim politicians, NGOs, civil society members, academics, and interfaith harmony leaders to discuss the concerns of religious minorities.

In October the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom raised concerns with senior government officials about violence and discrimination against religious and ethnic minorities. He also shared concerns he received from foreign religious leaders and religious institutions about challenges in acquiring visas. In December the Ambassador at Large used social media to express concern about the implications of the CAA and the hope that the government would “abide by its constitutional commitments, including on religious freedom.”

In August the Deputy Secretary of State conducted a roundtable with religious leaders and religious freedom experts.

In October the Ambassador at Large met with religious leaders from multiple faiths and civil society groups in New Delhi and raised concerns over the treatment of religious minorities, including cow-related lynchings, anti-conversion laws, and communal violence. The Ambassador at Large also met with the Dalai Lama in Dharamsala, where he delivered remarks at the 60th anniversary celebration of the Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts.

In July the Department of State senior bureau official for south and central Asian affairs met with religious leaders from multiple faiths and civil society interlocutors engaged in pursuing cases of religious persecution.

Throughout the year, the Ambassador routinely engaged with religious communities, including representatives of the Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, and Sikh faiths, to discuss their concerns. In late May the Ambassador hosted an iftar with leaders from the Muslim, Hindu, Christian, Sikh, and Jewish communities, journalists, and multiple political parties, at which he

stressed the importance of religious diversity and the need to demonstrate empathy and mutual respect for members of other faiths.

In March the embassy hosted the dean of religious life of a U.S. university for a five-day outreach program on religious freedom. The dean traveled to New Delhi, Varanasi, and Lucknow and highlighted the importance of religious inclusion with representatives of the Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, and Sikh faiths, as well as youth leaders, intellectuals, students, and civil society groups. Discussions centered on challenges to religious reconciliation in the country's northern areas, and also provided opportunities for members of different faiths to discuss their interests and concerns.

Embassy and consulate officers continued to meet with religious organizations, missionary communities, and NGOs of all religious backgrounds to discuss religious freedom; understand concerns related to an increase in attacks against religious minorities and the perceptions of diminishing space for religious freedom; and monitor cases involving reports of religious persecution and religiously motivated attacks. Embassy representatives specifically reached out to civil rights NGOs, media representatives reporting on minority affairs, interfaith harmony groups, Muslim religious leaders and Muslim politicians to understand their fears concerning the CAA and its likely impact on the Muslim population in the context of potential government plans to draft the National Register of Citizens. The embassy also organized roundtable discussions involving civil society representatives and visiting U.S. government officials on these subjects.

Embassy and consulate representatives continued to meet with the imam of the Jama Masjid, leaders of several other mosques, Hindu priests, and Christian and Catholic leaders, as well as with representatives of the India Islamic Cultural Center, the All India Imams' Organization, the Parsi community, and Sikh leaders.

The embassy and consulates hosted celebrations marking major religious holidays, including Ramadan, Holi, Eid al-Fitr, and Easter, to bring together leaders from different religious groups and to emphasize the importance of religious freedom and tolerance. In April the Consul General in Hyderabad hosted a Passover seder and discussed with representatives of principal faiths the need for promoting religious freedom and interfaith understanding.