INDIA

TIER 2

KEY FINDINGS

In 2018, religious freedom conditions in India continued a downward trend. India has a long history as a secular democracy where religious communities of every faith have thrived. The constitution guarantees the right to religious freedom, and the nation's independent judiciary has often provided essential protections to religious minority communities through its jurisprudence. Yet, this history of religious freedom has come under attack in recent years with the growth of exclusionary extremist narratives—including, at times, the government's allowance and encouragement of mob violence against religious minorities—that have facilitated an egregious and ongoing campaign of violence, intimidation, and harassment against non-Hindu and lower-caste Hindu minorities. Both public and private actors have engaged in this campaign. In 2018, approximately one-third of state governments increasingly enforced anti-conversion and/or anti-cow slaughter laws discriminatorily against non-Hindus and Dalits alike. Further, cow protection mobs engaged in violence predominantly targeting Muslims and Dalits, some of whom have been legally involved in the dairy, leather, or beef trades for generations. Mob violence was also carried out against Christians under accusations of forced or induced religious conversion. In cases involving mobs killing an individual based on false accusations of cow slaughter or forced conversion, police investigations and prosecutions often were not adequately pursued. Rules on the registration of foreign-funded nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) were discriminatorily implemented against religious minority groups. Religious freedom conditions varied dramatically from state to state, with some states continuing to be relatively open and free for religious minorities, while others—if taken on their own—had "systematic, ongoing, egregious" violations of religious freedom. In 2018, the Supreme Court of India highlighted the deteriorating conditions for religious freedom in some states, concluding that certain state governments were not doing enough to stop violence against religious minorities and, in some extreme instances, impunity was being granted to criminals engaged in communal violence. Prime Minister Narendra Modi seldom made statements decrying mob violence, and certain members of his political party have affiliations with Hindu extremist groups and used inflammatory language about religious minorities publicly. Victims of large-scale attacks in recent years have not been granted justice, and reports of new crimes committed against religious minorities were not adequately accounted for or prosecuted. India's substantial population both complicates and limits the ability of national and state institutions to address these issues.

Based on these concerns, in 2019 USCIRF again places India on its Tier 2 for engaging in or tolerating religious freedom violations that meet at least one of the elements of the "systematic, ongoing, egregious" standard for designation as a "country of particular concern," or CPC, under the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA). While the Indian government repeatedly has denied USCIRF access to India, the Commission welcomes the opportunity to openly and candidly engage with the government—including the chance for a USCIRF delegation to visit India—to discuss shared values and interests, including international standards of freedom of religion or belief and related human rights.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE U.S. GOVERNMENT

- Press the Indian government to allow a USCIRF delegation to visit the country and meet with stakeholders to evaluate conditions for freedom of religion or belief in India;
- Work with the Indian government to create a multiyear strategy to ebb the flow of hate crimes targeting religious minorities, including by:
  - Pressing state governments to prosecute religious leaders, government officials, and media personalities who incite violence against religious minority groups through public speeches or articles, as was recommended by the National Minorities Ministry in July 2014;
  - Strengthening the training and capacity of state and central police to prevent and punish cases of religious violence, while also protecting victims, witnesses, and houses of worship and other holy sites;
  - Encouraging passage of the Protection of Human Rights (Amendment) Bill, 2018 to establish national and state human rights commissions and human rights courts; and
  - Assisting the Ministry of Law and Justice to work with state prosecutors to increase the rate of prosecutions for hate crimes and online hate speech targeting religious minorities;
- Increase the U.S. Embassy's focus on religious freedom and related human rights through continued visits to regions impacted by religiously motivated violence and dialogue with religious communities, local governmental leaders, and police; and
- Advocate for the Indian central government to ensure that the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act is not used discriminatorily to target international missionary and human rights groups, and to press states with anti-conversion and anti-cow slaughter laws to do the same.

COUNTRY FACTS

FULL NAME
Republic of India

GOVERNMENT
Federal Parliamentary Republic

POPULATION
1,210,193,422

GOVERNMENT-RECOGNIZED RELIGIONS/FAITHS
Secular Constitution

RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY*:
79.80% Hindu
14.2% Muslim
2.3% Christian
1.7% Sikh
0.7% Buddhist
0.4% Jain
0.7% Other (including Zoroastrians, Jews, Baha'is, and tribal religions)
0.2% Religion Not Stated

*Estimates compiled from the 2011 Census of India (15th census)

BACKGROUND

As the world's largest democracy, India is not only a leader in South Asia, but also a unique power with a prominent position in the global economy. Its standing is underpinned by a vibrant and uninterrupted parliamentary system of democracy, which includes an active and independent judiciary and a federal constitutional system that limits some powers of the central government and grants a great deal of policymaking power to the states.

Over the last decade, conditions for religious minorities in India have deteriorated. A multifaceted campaign by Hindu nationalist groups like Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sang (RSS), Sangh Parivar, and Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) to alienate non-Hindus or lower-caste Hindus is a significant contributor to the rise of religious violence and persecution. Those targeted by this campaign—including Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, and lower-caste Hindus—face challenges ranging from acts of violence or intimidation, to the loss of political power, increasing feelings of disenfranchisement, and limits on access to education, housing, and employment. While there is a system of affirmative action for education, housing, and employment that is constitutionally mandated to assist historically disenfranchised groups, especially lower-caste Hindus, some have called its efficacy and fairness of implementation into question.

In 2017, the Indian government's criminal data collection agency, the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), reported that communal violence increased significantly during 2016. However, in 2018, minority rights groups criticized the NCRB's methodology for failing to include more categories on mob violence or lynching. Accordingly, the NCRB delayed its 2018 report to collect data on nearly 30 new crime categories, which will include hate crimes, lynching, and crimes based on fake news.

In 2018, religious minorities remained concerned with their safety and security. In February 2018, Minister of State at the Ministry of Home Affairs Hansraj Ahir reported to parliament that 111 people were murdered and 2,384 injured in 822 communal clashes during 2017 (as compared to 86 people killed and 2,321 injured in 703 incidents the previous year). Positively, in December 2018, Union Minister for Home Affairs Rajnath Singh said that the number of communal attacks dropped 12 percent in 2018 from the high in 2017. Independent hate crime monitoring services reported that in 2018 there were more than 90 religious-based hate crimes, causing 30 deaths and far more injuries.

In addition, institutional challenges impact progress on all issues, including religious freedom. For example, Indian state and central government agencies face an immense task that has left the police and courts overwhelmed by the needs of a growing population and longstanding gaps in their capacity, training, and funding. Also, worsening income inequality has left more Indians suffering from poverty and has exacerbated historical conditions of inequality for certain religious and social minorities.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM CONDITIONS 2018

Positive Developments

Despite an overall deterioration of religious freedom conditions in 2018, there were also positive developments. Some government entities made efforts to counter increasing intolerance in the country, which led to a 12 percent decline in communal violence compared to the previous year, according to Home Minister Singh. The judiciary, exemplified by the Supreme Court of India, decided several cases during the year that protected the rights of religious minorities. In 2017, the Supreme Court called on state governments to establish mechanisms to prevent mob violence, and in June 2018 issued a follow-up call to the central and state central governments to pursue an 11-point plan, including compensation to hate crime victims, fast-tracking prosecutions, assigning senior police officers to deal with communal issues, and other provisions. The lower courts also made some progress in prosecuting mob members; for example, in March 2018 a court in the eastern state of Jharkhand sentenced 11 men to life imprisonment for lynching a Muslim man in June 2017.

In 2018, the government also invested more of its budget in minority development projects. For example, the central government granted the Ministry of Minority Affairs a 12 percent increase in its budget, and it was reported that all of the new minority development projects combined constituted a 62 percent increase for minority affairs. The National Commission for Minorities— created as a statutory body in 1992 and whose members are government nominated—continued to document and report incidents in which politicians and government officials engaged publicly in incitement to violence against religious minorities.

Some government entities made efforts to counter increasing intolerance in the country . . .

Role of Hindutva/Hindu Extremist Groups

Various nationalist groups in India have expanded the ideology of Hindutva, or "Hinduness," which has three pillars—common nation, race, and culture—and forms the basis of an oftentimes exclusionary national narrative with a singular focus on the rights of Hindus. The views espoused by individuals belonging to these groups and the activities they undertake vary widely. Nevertheless, both moderate and extreme forces within the Hindutva movement point to the rise in the Muslim population from constituting 10 percent of the national population in 1951 to 14 percent in 2011, which in their view necessitates "mitigation" against the growing Muslim community. While some Hindutva groups want greater influence of Hindu principles in the state's decision-making process, more extreme elements have stated they would like to see all non-Hindus expelled, killed, or converted to Hinduism. Some members of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have affiliations with Hindu extremist groups and have used discriminatory language about religious minorities. For example, in 2018, state-level BJP member T. Raja Singh was charged by the police for hate speech after stating that "every Hindu should carry weapons like lathis [clubs] and attack other communities' members if they said anything wrong."

The influence of Hindutva groups goes beyond politics and government. For example, Hindutva groups have expanded the scope and size of religious schools—which often teach intolerant religious ideology in nongovernmental private educational systems—to nearly four million students, and have tried to distribute books promoting religious intolerance in public schools. Some groups have student youth wings, such as the RSS's Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), which have used intimidation and violence in colleges to silence their secular or non-Hindu classmates and shut down events that challenge their viewpoints.

In general, both the federal and state governments have done little to condemn the use of inflammatory language, even if it incites violence. And state action to rename numerous cities—such as Faizabad and Allahabad from the names that had been given during the Mughal period—has been perceived as an effort to erase or downplay the influence of non-Hindus in Indian history and as an attack on Muslims within India today.

Anti-Conversion Laws and Forced Conversion

The fundamental right to freedom of religion or belief includes the right to change one's faith to another or to no faith at all. This right includes the ability to manifest one's beliefs through expression intended to persuade another individual to change his or her religious beliefs or affiliation voluntarily. In India, state level anti-conversion laws prohibit conversion based on force, allurement, inducement, or fraud; however, some contain such broad definitions that they can be interpreted as prohibiting any kind of conversion, whether consensual or not. Anti-conversion laws have gone into effect in seven states: Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Arunachal Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, and Jharkhand. In 2018, USCIRF released a report, *Limitations on Minorities' Religious Freedom in South Asia*, which discussed the trend of anti-conversion laws in India. In some states, anyone engaged in conversion must register with local government authorities.

In 2018, anti-conversion laws were enforced predominantly against Muslims and Christians engaged in proselytization and also limited the freedom of religion or belief of others to discuss, consider, and ultimately convert to other religions. Also, religious minority leaders and adherents faced intimidation and arrest under the guise of anti-conversion laws. For example, in May 2018, authorities arrested 11 people for conducting a group prayer in a home in Jharkhand, and four others were arrested nearby after locals complained about the group conducting a Christian marriage ceremony. Two months later in the same state, 25 Christians were arrested due to accusations of induced conversion after they conducted a group prayer at the home of a Christian. While nine were released, the remaining members of the group were charged under Jharkhand's anti-conversion law and remanded to judicial custody while their charges were prosecuted; these cases were ongoing at the end of the reporting period.

In 2018, the media dedicated significant coverage to inflammatory allegations of an organized campaign to coerce Hindu women to marry Muslim men and convert to Islam. In March 2018, the Supreme Court of India set aside a 2017 decision by the High Court of Kerala that had annulled the marriage of a woman by the name of Hadiya; originally from a Hindu family, Hadiya converted to Islam and married a Muslim man in 2016. The Kerala High Court determined that she had been subject to an organized coercion campaign. The Supreme Court reversed and upheld the marriage after being satisfied that she had freely granted consent. The Hadiya case prompted the National Investigation Agency (NIA), India's national counterterrorism investigative agency, to launch an investigation into the existence of a coordinated campaign to force women to convert and marry. In October 2018, the NIA concluded, after numerous investigations, that there was no evidence of such a campaign.

Some Hindutva groups have sought to convert those born Hindu who had converted to another faith back to Hinduism through "homecoming" conversion ceremonies (*ghar wapsi*). In some cases, these conversion ceremonies reportedly involve force or coercion; however, it is often difficult to ascertain whether such conversions take place voluntarily or forcibly. There continued to be reports of such ceremonies in 2018, although their number and nature were impossible to confirm. For example, in April 2018, a Hindutva group was alleged to have physically assaulted a Dalit man in Uttar Pradesh who had recently converted from Hinduism to Islam and, according to reports, forced him to undertake *ghar wapsi* to convert back to Hinduism. Video accounts of the incident, although somewhat

> *[Some] state level anti-conversion laws . . . contain such broad definitions that they can be interpreted as prohibiting any kind of conversion, whether consensual or not.*

unclear, show a group of men removing the skull cap from the man's head and shaving off his beard. In October 2018, also in Uttar Pradesh, a family who had been Muslim for generations was reportedly forced to convert to Hinduism; 13 individuals from the family were involved.

Cow Slaughter Laws and Vigilante Groups

Under article 48 of India's constitution, the slaughter of cows is prohibited. Accordingly, 21 out of 29 states in India prohibit cow slaughter in various forms, with prison sentences ranging from six months to 14 years. Since 2005, the Supreme Court of India has accepted the constitutionality of cow slaughter laws. In 2018, several state governments toughened their laws to increase the punishment for cow slaughter. While prohibitions on cow slaughter have a long history in India, "cow protection" mobs are a new phenomenon, and such groups have perpetrated more than 100 attacks since May 2015, resulting in 44 deaths and approximately 300 injured. In 2018 alone, cow protection lynch mobs killed at least 13 people and injured 57 in 31 incidents. Not only do these mobs take the law into their own hands by publicly beating or murdering individuals suspected of cow slaughter—usually with impunity—but they also harass and intimidate individuals engaged in the dairy industry without connections to cow slaughter.

[Cow protection] mobs take the law into their own hands by publicly beating or murdering individuals suspected of cow slaughter—usually with impunity . . .

In July 2018, a dairy farmer named Rakbar Khan was beaten to death in Rajasthan. While the details of his death continue to be corroborated, it appears that the police were complicit or directly involved, along with a local mob. In December 2018, in another incident in Uttar Pradesh, a mob shot and killed police officer Subodh Kumar Singh and another victim after finding cow carcasses. In response, Uttar Pradesh's Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath stated that the mob attack was an accident and generally denied the existence of lynch mob killings in his state.

In a July 2018 ruling on mob violence and cow vigilantism, the Supreme Court of India instructed the government to enact legislation to address extrajudicial and nonstate actors, particularly when their actions result in hate crimes. The ruling—which also instructed state governments to monitor mob incidents—came in response to petitions to the court regarding vigilantism against Muslims for cattle slaughter, dairy farming, and beef consumption.

Hate Crimes and Incitement to Violence against Religious Minorities

Hate crimes and incitement to violence directed at religious minority communities remained a prevalent threat in 2018. As one example of the communal violence towards Muslims, in April 2018, during an annual Hindu festival in West Bengal, Hindutva extremists taunted Muslims and used anti-Muslim rhetoric. At least four people died during the ensuing communal clashes. The police reportedly opened investigations into possible links to members of the BJP, although the case remained ongoing at the end of the reporting period.

In addition, Christians have reported threats to their safety over the past year, as well as increased discrimination and unfair treatment directly related to their religious identity. For example, various research groups affiliated with Christian churches found an increase in hate speech and hate crimes against Christians across the country, especially in northeastern states, where the Christian community has grown in recent decades. Throughout August and September 2018, authorities arrested several Christian pastors in Uttar Pradesh, some during church services and prayer meetings, while mobs attacked and threatened others. Some of the pastors arrested were accused of alleged conversions. In one set of simultaneous attacks in October 2018, Hindutva extremists issued threats against four churches in the state of Tamil Nadu. Church worshipers were subject to public hate speech, attacks on their church structures, and threats issued to the church's leadership. In December 2018, a mob attacked a small community church in Maharashtra's Kolhapur district, leaving many injured just before Christmas.

NGO Registration

Several international groups—some with missionary and human rights portfolios—have been prohibited from operating in India since the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) of 1976 was updated in 2010. Under the revision to the law, the government can shut down any internationally funded NGO engaged in "any activities detrimental to the national interest." The government has also used this provision to shut down thousands of international NGOs since 2014; some reports estimate that 20,000 NGOs have been denied licenses to operate or continue operations. The process by which NGOs have to apply for certification lacks transparency, and NGOs who have been denied operational licenses often cannot obtain explanations for the denial. The NGOs were often targeted for political reasons, however, non-Hindu religious organizations were also targeted. In November 2018, the Indian government demanded that 1,775 organizations provide further explanation for their failure to submit use of foreign funds over the last six years; these organizations included many non-Hindu religious groups, some Hindu trusts managing major temples, and secular human rights groups. USCIRF's 2018 report on limitations to religious freedom in South Asia and a 2018 Congressional Research Service report described the FCRA's impact.

Some among the Hindu population—including some Hindutva extremists—perceive Christian missionaries converting Dalits to be particularly threatening, as there are nearly 200 million Dalits in India. Many observers assert that it was this fear of mass conversion that led to the 2017 shutdown of Compassion International, a U.S.-based Christian charity, which provided services to nearly 150,000 Indian children. Compassion International remained closed at the end of the reporting period; it hopes to reopen operations in India in the future, though this may prove difficult considering the way the FCRA has been applied against Christian groups.

Continued Impunity for Large-Scale Communal Violence

Numerous instances of large-scale communal violence across India remain unresolved years later, without proper accountability or recompense. Investigations and prosecutions of those involved in large-scale communal violence have too often been ineffective or absent. Further, victims have complained that the government has not provided adequate assistance to rebuild destroyed neighborhoods, homes, and places of worship.

Investigations and prosecutions of those involved in large-scale communal violence have too often been ineffective or absent.

The government has also not taken sufficient steps to prevent such large-scale communal violence from recurring. The Supreme Court of India and fact-finding commissions, among other institutions, have noted common characteristics and causes of such violence, including incitement to violence against religious minorities by politicians or religious leaders. Yet failing to address those common characteristics and causes or to hold perpetrators accountable have contributed to a culture of impunity for such violence.

The case of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh, exemplifies the enduring nature of these conflicts. In 1992, after Hindutva groups destroyed the Babri Mosque, nearly 2,000 people lost their lives after months of rioting. In 2018, this tension continued as politicians and others renewed calls for a Hindu temple to be built on the mosque ruins; the Supreme Court of India in 2018 heard several pleas regarding the site.

Assam and Citizenship

In 1951, the National Register of Citizens (NRC) was instituted in Assam. The NRC was a way to keep track of all registered Indian citizens, as Assam is a border state with significant security concerns and an ever-changing migrant population. In 2015, a process began to update the NRC, for the first time since 1951. Anyone born after March 24, 1971, had to provide documentation of Indian citizenship. In July 2018, the Indian government released a draft update to the NRC, which excluded approximately four million people from the register due to their alleged inability to provide such documentation.

Since that time, individuals excluded from the draft list have lodged hundreds of thousands of objections. The final NRC list is expected to be released in July 2019; the fear and/or expectation is that anyone not on that list will be rendered stateless and considered a foreigner.

Widespread concerns have been raised that the NRC update is an intentional effort to discriminate and/or has the effect of discriminating against Muslims, and that the discretion given to local authorities in the verification process and in identifying perceived foreigners to be excluded from the draft list will be abused. For some, the exclusion of the four million people from the draft NRC affirmed those concerns. A June 2018 joint letter by four United Nations (UN) special rapporteurs—including the special rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief—explained that the citizenship registry "has generated increased anxiety and concerns among the Bengali Muslim minority in Assam, who have long been discriminated against due to their perceived status as foreigners, despite possessing the necessary documents to prove their citizenship." The UN experts reiterated their concerns in a December 2018 statement, which noted that while the exact exclusions were unknown at the time, they appeared to target "ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities." The State Department highlighted the fraught nature of the National Register of Citizens in Assam in its 2018 Human Rights Report for India, released after the reporting period.

Concerns about the targeting of Muslims through the citizenship process were separately exacerbated by the introduction and passage of the Citizenship Amendment Bill in the Lok Sabha ("lower house") of Parliament, which would provide citizenship to migrants from Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan as long as they were not Muslim. In February 2019, after the reporting period, the bill was dropped in the Raj Sabha ("upper house") of Parliament amid protests.

Women and Religious Freedom

In 2018, women and girls in India continued to be the targets of intracommunal honor killings, intercommunal violence, and sexual violence along religious lines. In a 2018 incident known as the Kathua rape case, an eight year old girl named Asifa Bano was abducted, gang-raped, and murdered as a message and threat to her Muslim nomadic community in Kashmir. The priest of a private temple, his son, and a special police officer were charged in the abduction, gang rape, and murder; several other police officers were charged with covering up the crimes. While many decried the young girl's rape and murder, several others organized in support of the men charged, including members of the BJP.

The year 2018 marked a renewed focus on and discussion of restrictions placed on women's ability to worship at certain religious sites. In September 2018, the Supreme Court of India ordered that Sabarimala temple in Kerala be opened to adult women, striking down a longstanding ban on women between the ages of 10 and 50 from taking the special pilgrimage to the temple. In response, women attempting to enter the temple were physically attacked and others who publicly stated that they would try to enter the temple received hate messages including death threats both online and in-person. Nearly five million women reportedly initiated a counter-protest movement in January 2019, after the reporting period, by forming a 385-mile human chain near the temple to protest in favor of equal access for all.

U.S. POLICY

India and the United States have strengthened ties over the last several decades, with India now described as a focal partner in the Indo-Pacific region. For several decades, the United States and India have pursued a strategic relationship based on shared values of democracy and the rule of law and shared interests relating to energy, security, trade, and counterterrorism. The U.S.-India Strategic Dialogue was launched in 2009 through which the countries have discussed a wide range of bilateral, regional, and global issues such as economic development, business and trade, education, technology, counterterrorism, and the environment. Human rights and religious freedom, however, have not been emphasized.

In 2017, when Prime Minister Modi visited the United States, he and President Donald J. Trump agreed to create a 2+2 Dialogue to further deepen security and economic cooperation between the two countries. At the inaugural meeting of the 2+2 Dialogue in September 2018, Secretary of State Michael R. Pompeo and then Secretary of Defense James N. Mattis conducted a joint visit to India to negotiate terms for the multi-issue agreement. During a visit to India in June 2018, then Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley noted how the

United States and India both respect religious freedom. Similarly, when asked about how human rights and religious freedom may impact the 2+2 Dialogue between the U.S. and India, Deputy Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asia Alice Wells asserted that India respects religious freedom inside its borders.

In 2018, the U.S. Embassy and Consulates continued to engage in discussions with religious representatives and other stakeholders about religious persecution and intolerance and to promote interfaith dialogue. In December 2018, Senior Advisor for Religious Minorities in the Near East and South/Central Asia Knox Thames visited India and met with religious communities and discussed interfaith relations.

Since 2001, USCIRF has attempted to visit India in order to assess religious freedom conditions on the ground. However, on three different occasions—in 2001, 2009, and 2016—the government of India refused to grant visas for a USCIRF delegation despite requests being supported by the State Department.

INDIVIDUAL VIEWS OF CHAIR TENZIN DORJEE

While India must address issues related to religious freedom, I respectfully dissent on the views that India's religious freedom conditions continued on a downward trend, the government allowed and encouraged mob violence against religious minorities, and some states are involved in "systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom." India is an open society with a robust democratic and judiciary system.

India is a great civilization, and since ancient times she has been a country of multifaith, multilingual, and multicultural. I lived in India for over 30 years as a Tibetan refugee and mostly witnessed the best of India and sometimes worst due to intractable interreligious conflicts. Unfortunately, religious divides and power struggles not only led to the partition of India and Pakistan but often contribute to the egregious violations of religious freedom and tragedies. Despite these issues, India exists as a multifaith and secular country. His Holiness the Dalai Lama praises India greatly for religious diversity and harmony and secular values such as respect and compassion, and has committed himself to revive and promote them for global harmony among all faiths and nonfaiths.

I mostly grew up and lived in two Indian states, Karnataka and Himachal Pradesh. As a Tibetan refugee—the most vulnerable minority among all minorities there—experienced full religious freedom in India. Inside Tibet, communist China has systematically, egregiously, and continuously destroyed Tibetan religion, language, culture, and environment. However, Tibetan language, religion, and culture thrive in India due to the full support of India and Indian people. In many scholarly publications, I discussed it extensively and as a Tibetan American, I often visit India and observe abundant religious freedom and interreligious harmony there.

As I commented last year, overall, I believe religious harmony exists in India. Last year, in Budhupur, Bihar, a Muslim village donated land and money to build a Hindu temple for their Hindu families, and in a Punjab village, a Hindu temple donated land nearby, and Hindus and Sikhs helped build a mosque for Muslims of their community. Notably, in Hyderabad last year, the Hindu head priest CS Rangarajan carried a Dalit youth Aditya Parasri on his shoulders into the Chilkur Balaji Temple's inner sanctum, and a huge crowd cheered. Relatedly, in Nathowal village near Ludhiana Hindu and Sikh communities helped repair an old mosque in the village, and Muslim and Hindu communities helped work at Sikh Gurudwara Temple. People in this village reported to the *Times of India* that they celebrated together annual multifaith festivals such as Diwali, Dusshera, Rakhi, Eid, and Gurupurab. These stories speak for India's multifaith civilization, religious freedom, and interreligious harmony. I strongly appeal to the Indian leadership and people of India to continuously respect religious freedom and strive to promote India as a vibrant country of and for the multifaith people.

INDIVIDUAL VIEWS OF COMMISSIONER ANURIMA BHARGAVA

India is a rich, multi-faith, vibrant democracy that warrants close and constructive engagement with the Commission. For more than a decade, however, the Commission has not been granted the opportunity to interact nor visit India in any official capacity. As a new Commissioner, I look forward to open and productive dialogue and stronger engagement of the Commission with India in the year to come.