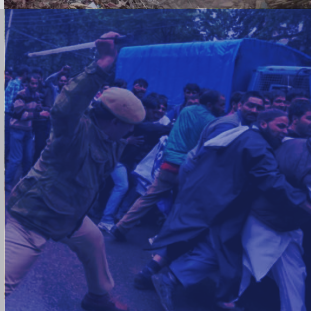




**Indian American
Muslim Council**

STATE OF RELIGIOUS MINORITIES IN INDIA



October - 2022
www.iamc.com

Introduction

On 2nd October, India and the world celebrated the International Day of Non-Violence on the birthday of Indian Independence leader Mahatma Gandhi. Despite the role of non-violence during the country's independence movement and the legacy of peace and tolerance that Gandhi left, India has continued to erode the basic freedoms of religious minorities this month.

The Hijab ban was upheld by the Supreme Court after the two-person bench could not come to a unanimous verdict. While Karnataka students wait for a larger bench to be set up by the court, they continue to be forced to choose between their religion and right to education, and many have stopped attending schools and colleges.

Indian-Muslim culture has continued to be repressed by the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) state governments in Karnataka and Assam, and there was a rise in hate speech from party politicians who continuously used the euphemism 'Jihadis' when referring to Indian Muslims. Perhaps more concerning was the use of genocidal rhetoric; BJP politicians in Delhi called for boycotts of Muslim businesses.

'Bulldozer Justice' continues to prevail throughout the country, not only against Indian Muslims over allegations that they are involved in communal clashes, but against those whose businesses are perceived to be a threat to Hindu rivals. More homes, businesses and religious buildings were demolished in Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat, and Christians in Tripura had their Prayer Hall demolished. In all the cases, there was no legal recourse provided to the victims, as they did not have the time to consult lawyers or wait for a court verdict before the demolitions took place.

Once again, anti-Conversion laws have been used by the BJP government and Bajrang Dal militants to stop Indian Christians from being able to freely practice their religion, with allegations of conversion leading to arrests and the stopping of Christian school functions by the police.

In Jammu and Kashmir, the basic freedoms of journalists, Muslim clerics and activists have been eroded by the India's federal government, as they continue to use the draconian Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) and Public Safety Act to arrest and detain prominent Kashmiris.

Outside of India, the divisions created and perpetuated by the BJP and their polarising Hindutva ideology are visible in the diaspora, particularly in the United States. In the aftermath of the Edison Independence Day Parade, the Teaneck Democratic Municipal Committee took steps to disavow India's human rights record and the continued abuses of civil rights for minorities, as well as the threats posed by the Hindu supremacist groups to peace and pluralism in the US.

Violence and Discrimination Against Muslims

On the 2nd October, Muslim merchants were forced to remove their stalls from a temple in Indore, Madhya Pradesh. At Bijasan Hindu temple, members of the Hindu Jagaran Manch, a right-wing group, started to check the identity cards of the shopkeepers, before finding Mohammed Saleem. Upon learning Saleem's name, he was asked to leave. Shortly after, other Muslim shopkeepers followed Saleem out of the temple.¹ The demand for ID cards demonstrates the impact the Citizenship Amendment Act and National Register of Citizens in Assam have had at the grass roots level, as Muslims, regardless of their citizenship status are perceived as foreign and a threat.



On 3rd October, in Karnataka, Hindu supremacists started a campaign for Hindus to boycott Halal meat during Navratri, a Hindu festival. Traditionally, meat is offered to ancestors during the celebrations, and in south Karnataka,

people dine on meat dishes. Mune Gowda, one Hindu supremacist, explained that



this year they were campaigning for Hindus to purchase meat from Hindu shops. This is not the first year the campaign was launched, and Gowda noted that it was previously successful as 'Hindus have awakened.'²

On the 4th October, plain clothed police officers in Undhela village, near Kheda, Gujarat, publicly flogged Muslim men accused of throwing stones at a Garba event. The Muslim men had already been arrested by the police for the alleged attack, but were taken the next day to the site of the Garba event, held against a telephone pole, and beaten by the police.³ They were also forced to apologise to a large group of people by the police. After the video of the men went viral on social media, the Gujarat police said they would investigate the officers involved. Nonetheless, Harsh Sanghavi, Gujarat Minister of state for

¹ <https://www.siasat.com/mp-muslim-shopkeepers-forced-to-remove-stalls-from-indore-temple-2425705/>

² <https://muslimmirror.com/eng/fts-halal-vs-jhatka-cut-in-ktaka-hindu-activists-give-call-to-buy-meat-from-hindu-shops/>

³ <https://thewire.in/communalism/gujarat-garba-event-attacked>

home, thanked them for doing a ‘nice job’, and keeping people safe during the festivities.⁴



The remarks have garnered significant backlash; former Bombay High Court judge Abhay Thihpsay remarked ‘where is the rule of law in all of this?’ Senior advocate Sanjay Hedge said, “Publicly administered violence by state or non-state actors, in the presence and with the approval of uniformed policemen, is proof that the rule of law has ceased to work in the state concerned.” Retired Delhi High Court judge Jaspal Singh explained the wider repercussions of continuous attacks against religious minorities, remarking, ‘Such violent physical attacks and open-hatred towards Muslims may lead to disastrous social consequences.’⁵

On the 6th October, in Bidar, Karnataka, four men were arrested after a large group of people celebrating the Hindu religious festival Dussehra, forced their way into a 15th century madrasa,

chanting the nationalist slogans ‘Jai Shri Ram’ [Victory to Lord Ram] and ‘Hindu Dharam Jai’. The group also performed Hindu rituals, played loud music and beat drums on the premises of the building, which is listed as a monument of national importance. Despite the large number of people who trespassed onto the property, only 4 people have been arrested. Additionally, no one was charged with damaging the building, despite a coconut being cracked against the façade, which the Muslim community maintains damaged the structure.⁶

On the 10th October, a similar incident occurred during a Durga Puja procession outside of a mosque in Ibrahimpur village, Sultanpur district in Uttar Pradesh. The group of Hindus paused their procession outside of the mosque where local Muslims were offering namaz. Some Muslims asked for the music to be turned down, which then led to violence between the two groups. The mosque, Muslim owned businesses, and a madrasa in Ibrahimpur were all vandalised. What’s more, a police officer Amarinder Singh, addressed the crowd and incited violence, saying “We will



⁴ <https://thewire.in/government/experts-on-gujarat-flogging-video>

⁵ <https://thewire.in/government/experts-on-gujarat-flogging-video>

⁶ <https://thewire.in/communalism/karnataka-bidar-madrasa-jai-shri-ram-pooja>

punish them selectively.” Will destroy their houses.”⁷ The Muslim community also alleged that their houses were looted by the police, and set on fire. One woman, Ishrat Jahan, explained how the police asked Muslim women where the men were, and when they did not detail their whereabouts, the cops tore off their clothes.⁸ Since the unrest, the Jamiat Ulama-e-Hind has written to Chief Minister, Yogi Adityanath, explaining that the police are ‘unilaterally arresting Muslims’, and asking him to ‘instruct police officials to ensure that violence is not repeated.’⁹

In Gurugram, Haryana, a mob of 200 Hindu extremists attacked a



mosque on the 12th October. The mob assaulted those who were praying in the mosque and threatened to expel them from Gurugram. Despite the fact that an FIR was registered against multiple individuals, there have so far been no arrests, as police say they are ‘verifying the facts.’¹⁰

In Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, a 32 year old Muslim man, Zaheer Khan, was lynched by a mob. Another man, Yusuf Khan, was badly injured in the attack. The mob believed the men were robbers in the area, and attacked them with sticks. The police filed an FIR against an unidentified person, and have identified 4 people involved, but have not yet proceeded with arrests.¹¹ The lynching is yet another case of extrajudicial killings of Muslims in the state, where Hindu militias are often given impunity before the law.

On the 18th October, in Bhora Kalan Village, Gurgaon District, Haryana, Hindu nationalists banned Imams from leading prayers and teaching children if they come from outside the village.



The small Muslim population of just 400 people does not have anyone qualified to undertake these tasks, however local extremists have ordered that only a local Imam from the village and local Muslims can pray at the mosque. They also recently attacked those praying inside after believing repair works were part

⁷ <https://maktoobmedia.com/2022/10/14/jamiat-alleges-unilateral-action-against-muslims-in-sultanpur-violence-in-letter-to-yogi/>

⁸ <https://indiatomorrow.net/2022/10/14/35640/>

⁹ <https://maktoobmedia.com/2022/10/14/jamiat-alleges-unilateral-action-against-muslims-in-sultanpur-violence-in-letter-to-yogi/>

¹⁰ <https://www.ndtv.com/gurgaon-news/mob-of-200-attacks-mosque-in-gurugram-threaten-worshippers-3429250>

¹¹ <https://maktoobmedia.com/2022/10/13/up-muslim-man-lynched-another-muslim-seriously-injured-as-mob-attacks-them/>

of alleged plans to expand the building.¹²

The Supreme Court of India issued notice to the Union Government as part of a plea to act on hate speech. The court ordered Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand Police Chiefs to take immediate action against those who commit hate speech without waiting for complaints to be filed. The Court stated ‘any hesitation to act in accordance with this direction will be viewed as contempt of court and appropriate action shall be taken against the erring officers.’ The bench also remarked ‘such action will be taken irrespective of the religion that the maker of the speech or the person who commits such act belongs to, so that the secular character of Bharat... is preserved and protected’.¹³

On the 22nd October, Bajrang Dal members attacked a young Muslim man in Mangaluru, for allegedly creating a fake Aadhar card. They said the card was being used as part of a Love Jihad plot, whereby a Hindu girl was being lured to Mangaluru under the guise the man was



a Hindu. The Bajrang Dal beat the man up before the police took 4 members into custody.¹⁴ In Madhya Pradesh, another Muslim youth was handed over to the police by the Bajrang Dal, after they claimed he created a fake identity card to lure a Hindu woman to a hotel room. He was taken into police custody, despite the fact that Love Jihad is not a proven phenomenon and is used by violent Hindu supremacist organisations as a conspiracy theory against Muslim men.¹⁵



On the 24th October, federal security agencies were asked to draw up ‘demographic and economic profiles’ of large Muslim populations in Rajasthan, where the state borders Pakistan. Whilst the Home Ministry insists it is a ‘routine exercise’ to ‘closely monitor the activities along the sensitive border and to ascertain

¹² <https://indiatomorrow.net/2022/10/18/haryana-hindu-radicals-dont-allow-hiring-of-a-regular-imam-to-lead-five-time-daily-prayers-attack-muslims-for-repairing-the-mosque/>

¹³ <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/sc-act-against-hate-speeches-without-waiting-for-complaint-8223940/>

¹⁴ <https://www.daijiworld.com/news/newsDisplay?newsID=1012495>

¹⁵ <https://maktoobmedia.com/2022/10/29/mp-bajrang-dal-men-nab-muslim-man-hand-him-over-to-police-citing-love-jihad/>

the presence of radical elements', there are suspicions it is being used by the BJP to polarise religious communities before the upcoming state elections in 2023. One former joint director of the Intelligence Bureau commented 'I hope it's not part of a bigger strategy of polarising people along religious lines ahead of Assembly polls.' In 2021, a similar exercise was carried out in Bengal before the state elections. Furthermore, officials refuse to confirm if Hindu majority areas of the state were also being profiled along the border.¹⁶

The Karnataka Hijab Ban

The Supreme Court announced its decision over the constitutionality of Karnataka's Hijab ban on the 13th



October. The Court panel, made up of only two judges, announced they were divided over the ban, and have left it in place until the Chief Justice sets up a larger panel to make a decision over the ban. Justice Hemant Gupta argued that the ban should allow to remain in place, stating 'secularism is applicable

to all citizens, therefore permitting one religious community to wear their religious symbols would be the antithesis to secularism.' Conversely, Justice Dhulia believes that 'asking girls to take off their hijab before they enter the school gates is first an invasion of privacy, then it is an attack on their dignity and then ultimately it is a denial to them of secular education.'

Those who have opposed the ban were disappointed by the judgement, as they will have to wait until the larger bench reaches a verdict. Last month, The People's Union for Civil Liberties published a study into the impact of the ban on Muslim women, and the ghettoization of education explored in the study is already visible in the aftermath of the Supreme Court decision. One Muslim student explained that she has elected to complete her college education 'by correspondence' and at least 5 of her friends have already stopped attending school due to the ban. The BJP continues to argue that the Hijab ban is not a politically motivated policy.¹⁷

Cultural Repression

The Tipu Express, the train running between Mysuru and Bengaluru was renamed after BJP Parliamentarian Pratap Sinha requested the railway minister implement the change. The train was originally named after Tipu Sultan, the Muslim ruler of the Kingdom of Mysore who repeatedly fought against the British East India Company in the 18th Century. The train has been renamed

¹⁶ <https://www.telegraphindia.com/india/centre-draws-up-profiles-of-border-residents/cid/1894035>

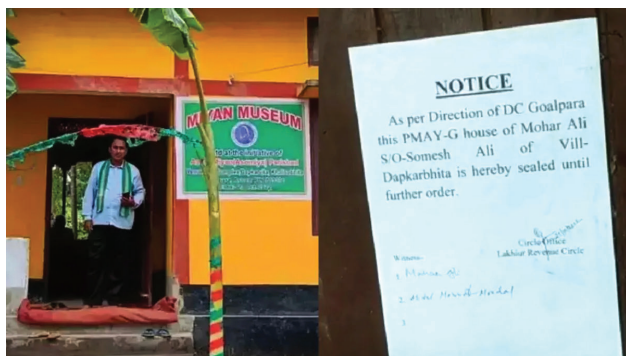
¹⁷ <https://www.reuters.com/world/india/panel-indias-top-court-split-decision-allow-hijab-classrooms-2022-10-13/>.

‘Wodeyar Express’, after the Wodeyar dynasty; a Hindu royal family who ruled over Mysore. The name change is considered by many to be part of the wider BJP policy of changing Muslim names, for instance of streets or places, to Hindu names, thus removing Indian Muslim history.¹⁸ In 2021, in BJP-led Uttar Pradesh, multiple districts and cities were renamed to remove their connection to Mughal history.¹⁹

In Assam, another BJP led state, the newly inaugurated Miya Museum was closed within days of its official opening. The Miya community are Bengali origin Muslims, who were brought to Assam in the 1890s by the British colonial government. They lived in the state long before Indian independence, and have increasingly re-appropriated the

Before the Museum was closed, former BJP legislator Shiladitya Dev used hateful rhetoric to describe the Miya culture and peoples, arguing they were moved to Assam as part of a conspiracy to make the state part of East Pakistan during Partition. He went onto say ‘Miya culture cannot be the culture of Assam so the Museum cannot be built here. The country was divided for Miyas on the basis of religion and, so if they want to build any such Museum then they should build it in Bangladesh or Pakistan. We won’t have any objections then.’²⁰

The closure of the Museum, and subsequent arrest of three of its funding members, is in line with the BJP’s refusal to view Bengali-origin Muslims as Indian citizens. Equally, by questioning the legitimacy of the funding of the museum, the BJP continues to propagate the view that Indian Muslims are terrorists and a threat to the nation.²¹



pejorative term ‘Miya’ as a means of reclaiming their identity. Miya peoples have increasingly sought to celebrate their culture, but BJP Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has argued that Miya poetry and schools are a threat.

Hate Speech

There has been an uptick in the amount of Islamophobic and genocidal speech in India over the last few years, and BJP politicians, from Prime Minister Narendra Modi, all the way down to grassroots representatives have openly used hateful language to incite violence against Indian Muslims. The Secretary General of the United Nations, Antonio Guterres, stated that the country should ‘unequivocally’ condemn hate speech, and ‘protect and promote rights of all individuals including members of

¹⁸ <https://thewire.in/government/tipu-express-renamed-after-wodeyars-attempt-to-erase-legacy-of-muslim-rulers-say-activists>

¹⁹ <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/renaming-and-banning-names-galore-this-month-all-in-3-bjp-ruled-states/articleshow/85450026.cms>

²⁰ <https://www.newsclick.in/Hate-Watch-BJP-Top-Functionaries-Spew-Hate-Against-Miya-Muslims-Assam>

²¹ <https://scroll.in/article/1035962/why-has-assam-arrested-three-muslim-men-who-started-a-museum-to-showcase-their-communitys-culture>

minority communities.’²² At the recent Universal Periodic Review by the UNHRC, multiple countries urged India to prosecute those who use hate speech, and South Africa recommended India to hold public officials who freely use hate



speech accountable for their rhetoric.

BJP leader and former legislator Sangeet Singh Som, who was accused of inciting violence during the Muzzaffarnagar Riots, asked Rajputs in Meerut, Uttar Pradesh to ‘take up arms again’. The politician spoke of Indian Muslims presenting an ongoing threat to Indian society, saying ‘the way the population of a particular community is increasing, terrorism is increasing, there are talks of separatism, talks of beheading. To end all of this, along with power, weapons will also be needed in the future.’²³ Whilst he did not explicitly mention Muslims by name, he referenced fears of ‘population Jihad’, which is a conspiracy theory that the higher birth-rate of Indian Muslims means they will come to dominate the country.

Another former BJP legislator, Vikram Saini, who was jailed this month for his role in the Muzaffarnagar Riots, also used hate speech to urge Hindu women to avoid going to Muslim owned shops to have their mehndi applied. Saini argued that the mehndi shops were used as a cover for Love Jihad, saying ‘There is no need to go to the awaaras [vagabonds].’ His speech followed posters put up by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and Bajrang Dal at ‘mehndi camps’ they organised so that only Hindu women would apply the body art. The posters read ‘Our festival, employment for our people and attack on Jihad.’²⁴

In Delhi, more BJP leaders demanded



a boycott of Muslim businesses, using hate speech to address a crowd at an event organised by the VHP and Bajrang Dal following the murder of a 25-year-old man. The man, Manish, was murdered in what Police believe was an attack caused by a local rivalry. Nonetheless, speakers at the event urged Hindus to boycott Muslim businesses to ‘teach them a lesson.’ Delhi BJP Parliamentarian (MP)

²² <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/10/21/un-chief-admonishes-india-protect-rights-minorities>

²³ <https://thewire.in/politics/sangeet-som-bjp-call-to-arms>

²⁴ <https://theprint.in/politics/muslim-men-run-mehendi-shops-for-love-jihad-says-bjp-mla-convicted-in-muzaffarnagar-riots-case/1167764/>

Pravesh Verma said ‘Wherever you see them [Muslims], this is the only solution to ‘cure them’ an absolute boycott.’²⁵ The MP explicitly used polarising rhetoric that dehumanises Muslims and presents them as a threat to India. This is not the first time BJP politicians have used hate speech and genocidal rhetoric when referring to Indian Muslims. In 2019 Home Minister Amit Shah referred to Muslim immigrants from Bangladesh as ‘termites’, a term used by the Hutu

Illegal Demolition of Muslim Homes

The BJP State and Union governments have continued to illegally demolish Muslim homes across the country as part of their retributive justice policy. In Madhya Pradesh, police razed the home of 3 Muslims accused of throwing stones at a Garba venue, after a personal dispute. After the three men were booked by police following a fight



perpetrators and regime to describe Tutsi before the Rwandan Genocide.²⁶

BJP leader Nand Kishor Gujar also referred to the anti-Citizenship bill protests in 2020, saying “we have been accused of bringing 2500 people into Delhi during the riots. We were there to make them understand but they filed a case against us that we tried to kill the “jihadis”. We have killed “Jihadis” and we always will. But we won’t touch those who call India their mother, chant “Bharat mata ki Jai”, and is a descendent of Lord Ram.”²⁷

on the 2nd October near Sitamau, their homes were demolished by Police, who allege they were illegally constructed. The homes were bulldozed just two days after the initial dispute, before the men were tried by a judge for their alleged involvement in the attack on the Garba venue.

Since then, 5 more Muslim families were serviced eviction orders, again due to the alleged lack of ‘building permission’ for their homes. They were also fined Rs 5000 for building homes that are ‘encroaching on government

²⁵ <https://www.siasat.com/bjp-leaders-call-for-boycott-murder-of-muslims-at-event-in-delhi-2430566/amp/>

²⁶ <https://www.reuters.com/article/india-election-speech-idUSKCN1RO1YD>

²⁷ <https://www.siasat.com/bjp-leaders-call-for-boycott-murder-of-muslims-at-event-in-delhi-2430566/amp/>

lands'. One of those whose family was served the notice, Amjad Pathan, stated that the notices were served to them on Friday afternoon, 'with an intention to stop us from going to higher courts or appeal to senior officials...We can only reach out to the court on Monday, but by then the administration may demolish



our homes.'²⁸ After the initial three men were served the notices, their homes were demolished by bulldozers within just 24 hours.

Whilst the administration continues to argue the demolitions are a consequence of illegal builds, remarks made by one Uttar Pradesh police officer demonstrate the fact that bulldozing has become a means of retributive justice against the Indian Muslim community. The unidentified Police Officer was filmed promising a group of Hindu men that those who attacked a Durga Puja rally would be sent to their graves, and he would 'bulldoze their houses.'²⁹ The Policeman made the comments after communal violence broke out during a

Durga Puja immersion procession which was playing loud music during the call to prayer.

Additionally, recent demolitions across Gujarat and Delhi demonstrate how bulldozer justice is often meted out against Indian Muslims even if there have not been recent communal clashes. 25 Muslim homes were demolished during Friday prayers in Delhi this month. Again, the police claimed the buildings had to be demolished as they were built on private land, but one activist, Anupradha, remarked that 'No survey has been conducted so far. No process was followed.'³⁰ There was no legal recourse for appeal as the demolitions were carried out on a Friday and demolished before a court could rule if the homes were in fact built on private land.



In Gujarat, hundreds of demolitions took place across the state after the Gujarat Fisheries Department denied Muslim fishermen to continue to practice their trade. Homes, professional

²⁸ <https://thewire.in/communalism/mp-five-more-muslim-families-served-demolition-notices-over-dispute-at-garba-pandal>

²⁹ <https://maktoobmedia.com/2022/10/12/send-to-graves-bulldoze-houses-up-cop-swears-action-against-people-who-disrupted-puja-rally/>

³⁰ <https://www.siasat.com/25-muslim-homes-demolished-in-delhi-women-allege-police-brutality-2444789/>

structures and even religious buildings have been destroyed across the state after officials claimed they were illegally built on government land. 100 families in Gosabara, near Probandar, had their houses demolished after facing years of complaints from Hindu fishermen, backed by the VHP and Bajrang Dal, who were frustrated at the competition their businesses presented. After finally being able to secure fishing permits again, their shops, houses and religious buildings including dargahs (religious tombs) and mazars (shrines) were razed by the government.³¹

Violence and Discrimination Against Christians

A Christian Prayer Hall in Gomati, Tripura was dismantled by the police on the 3rd October, as they alleged it was built on holy land. This is yet another



example of how so called ‘bulldozer justice’ is being used by the police to demolish buildings belonging to

religious minorities, without any court approval. The building was demolished as the Hindu residents of the area argued it was constructed on government land, and had to be removed for the upcoming Ker Puja, a purification festival. Those of different faiths were advised to practice their religion outside of the area where the holy Ker [purification] has been performed. JD Mawia, head of the Jampui Hills Baptist Christian Union expressed his frustration, saying ‘We are very concerned about the incident and in any civilised society such kinds of conflicts in the name of religions should be avoided.’³²

At the end of October, a Catholic School was targeted by Hindu nationalists, who set off fireworks in protest against a play about firework safety during Diwali. St Joseph’s Convent School in Khandwa, Madhya Pradesh, showcased the play the day before Diwali started, to highlight the pollution and health threats fireworks pose. The school has maintained the play was not an attack on the religious holiday and the children wanted to focus on celebrating Diwali safely. As a consequence of the play, Hindu nationalists set off fireworks in front of the school, and ‘threatened violent consequences if the school tried to “denigrate” the holiday.’³³

Anti-Conversion Laws

This month, the Anti-Conversion Laws in a multitude of states were once again used to stop the Christian communities from being able to freely

³¹ <https://indiatomorrow.net/2022/10/24/more-of-the-gujarat-model-thousands-of-muslim-homes-demolished-under-the-garb-of-security/>

³² <https://www.eastmojo.com/tripura/2022/10/03/tripura-christian-prayer-hall-on-restricted-holy-land-dismantled/>

³³ <https://cruxnow.com/church-in-asia/2022/10/catholic-school-targeted-by-hindu-nationalists-after-staging-fireworks-safety-play-before-diwali>

practice their religion, and in many cases help their local communities. On the 4th October, a bus carrying tribal children to a Catholic school event in Khandwa, Madhya Pradesh, was stopped by VHP militants who alleged the



children we being taken to be forcibly converted. The children were heading to an event on career counselling and skill development, but the convention was shut down after the Bajrang Dal reported that the Hindu children were being taken to be converted. A Priest later clarified that only Catholic children were being taken to the event. No charges were filed by the Police, as there was no evidence of conversions taking place, however the event was stopped. Father Babu Joseph, former spokesman for the Catholic Bishop's Conference in India said: "Just because [Hindu nationalists] belong to some organizations of the majority community do they possess any extra constitutional authority to prevent fellow citizens to exercise their personal and constitutional rights?" "It is high time that the state law-and-order machinery show

these lumpen elements their rightful place or else they have the potential to create serious social disharmony. Every Indian, whether belonging to a majority or minority religious community, has the fundamental right to worship and participate in a religious gathering organized by their religious authority."³⁴

In Uttar Pradesh, 9 Christians, including 3 women, were booked by police in Meerut for allegedly forcibly converting 100 people. Two people complained about the Christians, arguing that what started as Covid relief aid during the heights of the pandemic had become forced conversions, as the group was now trying to stop Hindu locals from worshipping their own Gods. The BJP city unit secretary helped the complainants to meet the Police. However, local residents have stated that there were no attempts to convert anyone, and the makeshift church which was set up was largely unpopular in the area. They also stated that the land where the church stands has now become a prime location, and the Anti-Conversion law is being used as a bargaining chip to force the Christians to vacate the land.³⁵

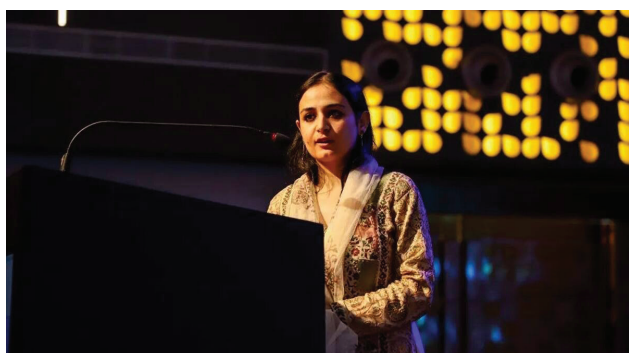
Jammu & Kashmir

In the latest government crackdown against Kashmiri journalists, the Indian government banned a Kashmiri photographer from leaving the country to receive her Pulitzer Prize. Sanna Irshad Matoo was stopped from leaving the country at New Delhi airport to receive her award in the United States. Matoo, a

³⁴ <https://cruxnow.com/church-in-asia/2022/10/students-harassed-by-hindu-nationalists-on-way-to-catholic-school-event-in-india>

³⁵ <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/City/meerut/uttar-pradesh-nine-booked-in-meerut-for-forcing-100-to-convert/articleshowprint/95173123.cms>

photographer, received the award for her work in covering the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic for Reuters India. She was pulled aside at the airport, where immigration officials stamped ‘cancelled without prejudice’ on her ticket. Mattoo had a US visa and letter of invitation to go to the event, and colleagues who



are from India but not Kashmir were allowed to board the plane.

Mattoo was previously not allowed to leave for Paris in July 2022 for another awards ceremony she was invited to. In an attempt to find out why she is not able to leave the country, Mattoo ‘wrote to many concerned departments if there is anything against me, any order’ but has never received a response, or an explanation as to why she was stopped from leaving.

Mattoo’s cases are just one example of how the Union government is cracking down on Kashmiri journalists and prominent Kashmiris from leaving the country. Amnesty International recently reported that such people had been placed on a ‘no fly list’ and so far they have found 6 Kashmiris activists,

journalists and academics who have been unable to leave the country with no explanation.³⁶

Kashmiri journalists have also been subjected to arbitrary arrests under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) and many remain in prison awaiting trial. In August, UK research firm Stoke White Investigations published their report into the systematic silencing of Kashmiri journalists, and found that they were often subjected to torture, pellet gun shootings, enforced disappearances and sexual violence.³⁷

At the end of October, four Islamic Clerics and three activists were detained under the Public Safety Act (PSA). One of those who was arrested under the act was Sarjan Barkhati, an Islamic preacher who is colloquially known as ‘azaadi chacha’ or ‘freedom uncle’ after urging Kashmiris to protest the Indian



rule in 2016. Since then, he has not taken part in any protests, and his wife Akhtar explained he ‘had stopped leading prayers in the local masjid’. Three other clerics and three activists were arrested under the PSA, which allows detention

³⁶ <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/19/world/asia/india-photographer-pulitzer.html>

³⁷ <https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/uk-based-research-firm-accuses-india-of-silencing-journalists-in-kashmir-60044>

without trial for up to 2 years.

Police continue to claim that Barkati, along with the others arrested were ‘fuelling extremist in Kashmir’ through their cultural and religious group Jamaat-e-Islami, which was banned in February. Whilst the police maintain that innocent preachers will shortly be released, they have frequently used these draconian laws to arrest, release and then re-arrest those alleged to be ‘provoking people.’ Additionally, the Indian Express reported that 954 people were being held under the PSA in August 2021, demonstrating the overzealous ways in which the law is being used.³⁸

On the 8th August, 12 Bajrang Dal militants stormed the government ayurvedic college in Jammu, asserting that Muslim students were offering Namaz on campus. The case is similar to recent confrontations in Uttar Pradesh and Haryana, where the Hindu militia members have attacked Muslims for offering Namaz in public spaces. Whilst the students were not offering Namaz, which the college explained to the Bajrang Dal, there are no laws preventing them to do so, as unlike in UP, in Jammu and Kashmir it is often common for Muslim students to pray on campus. Whilst the incident ended quickly, a Bajrang Dal activist on social media, Balkar Singh, has continued to allege that the Namaz offering did take place at the school. He continued ‘Tomorrow, somebody can plant a bomb inside and they will not know anything.’³⁹

Global Hindutva

In October, the impact of Hindu supremacist ideology and ‘bulldozer justice’ was visible in New Jersey, as the Indian American community was divided over the Teaneck Resolution. In the aftermath of the Indian Independence Day Parade held in Edison, New Jersey, where a Bulldozer float was featured, Edison officials and Democrats sought to move forward, chastising the decision to include such a derogatory symbol of Muslim oppression. The Teaneck Democratic Municipal Committee



(TDMC) passed a resolution in response to the incident, identifying multiple American, Hindu nationalist groups which have ties to the RSS, and criticising the Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America (VHPA) for inviting Yati Narsinghanand as a keynote speaker, despite his flagrant use of genocidal hate speech. In their resolution, they asked federal agencies to investigate the organisations, Democratic representatives from New Jersey to strengthen visa restrictions for such extremists visiting the US and passed a resolution condemning India’s

³⁸ <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/2300-booked-under-uapa-in-jk-since-2019-nearly-half-still-in-jail-7438806/>

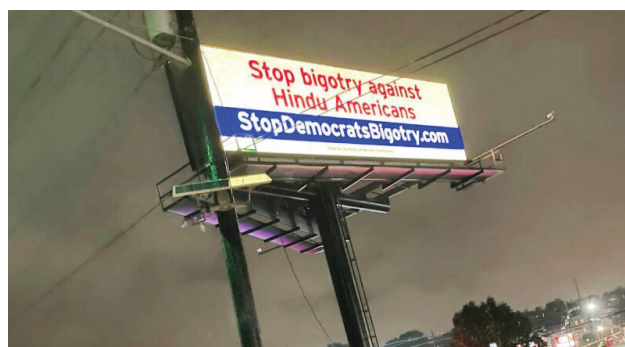
³⁹ <https://sabrangindia.in/article/bajrang-dal-storm-jammu-college-placated>

continued violation of the basic civil rights of minorities.

In response, the Coalition of Hindus of North America (CoHNA) called the resolution a means of demonising “the entire Hindu community, their activities, their beliefs, and their political participation in New Jersey.” Equally, like many Hindu nationalists in India, they reverted to painting the Muslim groups in support of the resolution as having ties to terrorism, stating many “have been indicted by the US Government for their ties to or support of terrorist

against Hindus.”⁴¹

Nonetheless, a multitude of other groups have continued to support the resolution, Selaedin Maksut, the executive director of CAIR New Jersey explained that it is helping to educate people throughout the country about Hindutva ideology. Equally, the NAACP in New Jersey explained “US-based groups that adhere to this hate-filled ideologies have been known for their connections with India’s Nazi-inspired fascist organization, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), whose



organizations and individuals.”⁴⁰

Teaneck Democrat, Representative Josh Gottheimer toed the line, arguing the resolution was ‘anti Hindu’ and around 60 Hindu American organisations signed a letter against the resolution, arguing it was introduced to ‘malign and denigrate the Hindu American community.’ Some went further; Tejal Shah, the coordinator for the Hindu Mandir Executives’ Conference (HMEC) called for the TDMC to be disbanded, and a few days later the New Jersey Democratic State Committee condemned the resolution as bigoted

offshoots and affiliates carry out mass violence against India’s religious minorities, especially Christians and Muslims, as well as lower-caste Hindus.” Furthermore, a coalition of Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, secular and Palestinian groups supported the TDMC, writing ““Hindu nationalism, also known as Hindutva, is a 100-year-old political ideology that is premised on Hindu supremacy and the exclusion of non-Hindus.”⁴²

The ongoing dispute over the Teaneck Resolution demonstrates how

⁴⁰ <https://prospect.org/politics/indian-american-groups-spar-with-new-jersey-democrats/>

⁴¹ <https://prospect.org/politics/indian-american-groups-spar-with-new-jersey-democrats/>

⁴² <https://prospect.org/politics/indian-american-groups-spar-with-new-jersey-democrats/>

Hindutva ideology is not only polarising the Indian Diaspora in the US, but becoming a problem for the Democrat Party, as they are increasingly forced to confront the consequences of divisions that have been allowed to fester due to a lack of intervention.

In Maryland, Hindu supremacist organisations and individuals donated to the gubernatorial campaign for Democrat Wes Moore and Aruna Miller. Moore is known to have met with Trump supporters and held a fundraiser at the home of the founder of Sikhs for Trump, Jasdip Singh. Muslims for Trump founder, Sajid Tarar co-hosted the event, along with Dr Sudhir Sekhsaria, who has links to Overseas Friends of the Bharatiya Janata Party (OFBJP) and previously organised donations for Moore's running mate, Miller, galvanising support and money from Hindu nationalists.

The event is believed to have raised \$100,000 for the candidates, and many are concerned over the influence Hindu supremacists will have on the candidates should they win the election. Gayatri Girirajan, who works for Peace Action Montgomery, argued that "These are people who have a lot of influence, community power, money, and lobbying power to put policies in place that would have a significant effect on marginalized communities."⁴³

Whilst the Miller-Moore campaign continues to assert that they have reviewed donations, and none came from Hindu supremacists, this seems improbable given that one of the organisers of the fundraising event is a known affiliate of the OFBJP, which has had to list itself as a 'foreign agent' of BJP since 2020 .

⁴³ <https://theintercept.com/2022/10/27/maryland-governor-wes-moore-hindu-nationalism/>

Recommendations

- The Indian government and state governments must stop removing the names of prominent Indian Muslims and replacing them with Hindu names on state property. This only serves to erase the contributions Indian Muslims have made to India.
- The Government of India and State of Assam must acknowledge the Miya peoples not only as a distinct group, but as rightfully belonging to the state of Assam as Indian citizens. They must also stop repressing Miya culture and cultural institutions.
- The police and courts must stop all forms of hate speech, in particular from politicians, by prosecuting those who seek to enflame communal tensions through the use of Islamophobic, fear mongering rhetoric.
- The Indian Government, as a signatory to The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, must cease demolishing the homes, religious buildings and businesses of religious minorities. They must uphold their duty to guarantee citizens an adequate standard of living, which includes housing, and cease using demolitions to punish communities, which is not only illegal but against this International Covenant.
- As signatories of the UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, the international community as well as the Indian government has a responsibility to ensure that police effectively investigate, prosecute, and prevent instances of harassment and violence committed against Muslims and Christians.
- The increasing violence against Muslims and Christians on bogus charges of “conversion” once again stresses the need for states to repeal their “Freedom of Religion” or anti-conversion laws, which have been used to disproportionately target religious minorities and justify harassment and violence.
- The United States Department of State should accept the United States Commission for International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) recommendation to designate India as a Country for Particular Concern (CPC) for its egregious violations of human rights and religious freedoms.
- In particular, the President of the United States has the power to place sanctions on individuals who have

committed, directly aided, ordered, or are complicit in gross human rights violations through the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act. These sanctions include barring entry to the US or blocking any transactions relating to property or interests held in the United States. These sanctions could also be applicable to those responsible for or complicit in the ongoing human rights violations in Jammu and Kashmir, including the recent violations of freedom of speech and press.

- The Supreme Court should reverse the Hijab Ban, upheld by Karnataka's High Court and most recently its own bench. The Karnataka state government should amend its Education Act to ensure that uniform requirements are inclusive to all forms of cultural and religious expression. Students impacted by the ruling should receive financial relief and be allowed to sit for exams they missed.

- The draconian Public Safety Act and the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act used in Jammu and Kashmir to unlawfully target civilians, journalists, and human rights defenders should be repealed.

- Assignatories of the UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief and UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, the international community as well as the Indian government has a responsibility to ensure that police effectively investigate, prosecute, and prevent instances of harassment and violence committed against Muslims and Christians.

- The United States, United Kingdom and European Union must acknowledge the threat Hindutva ideology poses to India, as well as to the Indian Diaspora. They must take action to stop the threat of online hate speech and protect their own communities from extremist ideology.

- Facebook and Twitter must acknowledge that Hindutva ideology is an extremist and dangerous ideology. They must take action to limit the capacity of the Hindu supremacist groups to use social media to spread hate speech, conspiracy theories and to indoctrinate young people.