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PERSECUTION OF RELIGIOUS MINORITIES IN INDIA

QUARTERLY REPORT
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Indian American Muslim Council (IAMC) is a Washington, DC based advocacy organization established in 2002 by Muslim Americans of Indian descent, with chapters across the United States.

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IAMC's core values are as follows:

- To defend the fundamental and civil rights of all
- To preserve the pluralistic and democratic ethos enshrined in the constitutions of the United States and the Republic of India
- To facilitate increased interfaith and inter-community understanding in the United States with the goal of safeguarding American society and institutions from infiltration by divisive and hate-filled ideologies
- To increase awareness about India in order to improve cultural and trade relations between the United States and the Republic of India

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

India is known for its diverse culture and traditions, but since Prime Minister Narendra Modi led Hindu supremacist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government has come to power, it has also become a country where religious minorities, particularly Muslims and Christians, face systematic persecution and discrimination in various forms.

The first quarter of 2023 has witnessed an alarming increase in incidents of communal violence and targeted attacks on religious minorities. Overall the attacks on Muslims and Christians, cow vigilante violence, hate speech, demonization through conspiracy theories like love jihad, illegal demolitions of homes and places of worship, weaponization of Hindu festivals, and human rights abuses in Jammu and Kashmir remained some top highlights in the first quarter.

The impunity enjoyed by the perpetrators of these attacks and the lack of accountability remained pervasive throughout the country. Cow vigilantism, a phenomenon where self-proclaimed protectors of cows running armed militia units attack Muslims for their alleged consumption or transportation of beef, has contributed immensely to the violence and growing insecurity and fear among Muslim communities. The government has failed to effectively address this issue and take action against cow militia units operated by various Hindu militant groups like Bajrang Dal and Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP).

Additionally, the fabricated and dangerous narrative of “love jihad” used to target Muslim men in interfaith relationships has resulted in violence and discrimination against innocent individuals. This narrative is being used to fuel hate and division.

The state and non-state Hindu supremacist actors used illegal demolitions and evictions, housing discrimination, and Hindu festivals to persecute religious minorities. These practices are discriminatory and violate the fundamental human rights of minorities. The government must take immediate steps to address these issues and provide justice and compensation to the victims of illegal and discriminatory practices.

Activists, journalists, protesters, and critics have been prosecuted under fabricated counterterrorism and sedition laws, while civil rights groups are shut down using foreign funding regulations and unfounded allegations of financial irregularities.

Furthermore, the human rights abuses remained widespread in Jammu and Kashmir especially the crackdown against journalists. The government must immediately lift the restrictions on media and release all political prisoners, activists, and journalists and ensure accountability for all human rights violations in the region.

The government of India must take immediate and effective steps to address these issues and ensure the protection of the rights and freedoms of religious minorities, including taking measures to address hate speech, ensure accountability for acts of violence, provide protection and compensation to the victims of cow vigilantism and stop illegal demolitions and evictions. The US Department of State must accept the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom(USCIRF) recommendation to designate India as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) for its severe violations of human rights and religious freedoms.

PERSECUTION & DISCRIMINATION AGAINST MUSLIMS

On January 3rd, a college student in Khandwa, Madhya Pradesh, was verbally berated and then brutally attacked by a group of people belonging to extremist Hindu groups, including the Hindu Jagran Manch and the Hindu Student Army over the allegations of “love jihad.” Merely a week after this incident, a similar attack by a group of Hindu supremacist men took place against two Muslim youths in Khandwa. There was no sense of urgency or immediate action taken by law enforcement—it took over two weeks for the police to arrest the first group of attackers.¹ Even then, this only happened due to a video of the incident being posted and going viral on social media.

On January 6th, a Muslim boy was beaten up for being friends with a Hindu girl in the Dakshina Kannada district of Karnataka after meeting her on Instagram. The victim was picked up from the bus

stand, after which he was taken to an isolated location, brutally beaten up, and threatened at knifepoint. A complaint was filed, leading to an FIR against 12 people connected to the attack.²

In another horrifying incident that took place on January 14th, a Muslim brass trader was beaten up and stripped naked by two men on the Padmavat Express train allegedly for not chanting ‘Jai Shri Ram’ slogans while he was returning from Delhi to Moradabad, Uttar Pradesh.³ The attackers boarded the train at Hapur station and demanded that Asim chant the slogan, and when he refused,



¹ maktobmedia.com/india/kerala-state-school-arts-festival-inaugural-skit-portrays-muslims-as-terrorists

² timesnownews.com/mirror-now/crime/karnataka-muslim-youth-beaten-up-for-befriending-hindu-girl-in-subramanya-12-booked-articles-96793997/amp

³ <https://zeenews.india.com/india/up-muslim-trader-brutally-beaten-stripped-naked-for-not-chanting-jai-shri-ram-in-delhi-moradabad-express-train-2561614.html/amp>

they beat him with a belt until he became unconscious and even stripped him of his clothes. Asim managed to reach home and later filed a complaint after a video of the incident went viral on social media.

On January 22nd, a group of Muslim men were assaulted and detained by Bajrang Dal militants while attending a Hindu friend's birthday party in the Indore district of Madhya Pradesh. The mob condemned the Muslim men



of committing 'love jihad,' or wooing Hindu women to force them to convert to Islam. A video of the incident showed the assailants attacking the Muslim men⁴ while shouting slogans of "Jai Shri Ram." According to reports, the girl told the police that there was

no "love jihad" angle in this case and that she was simply celebrating her birthday with friends, including the Muslim men. Later, police took Muslim friends into preventive custody, yet no action was taken against the Bajrang Dal militants—a pattern that is by now familiar throughout India.

This is no isolated occurrence. In fact, Hindu militant groups like the Bajrang Dal have been targeting interfaith couples and accusing Muslim men of engaging in "love jihad." Furthermore, since 2020, several states ruled by the Bharatiya Janata Party, including Madhya Pradesh, have enacted laws against religious conversion that effectively criminalize interfaith relationships and marriage.

In the city of Lucknow in Uttar Pradesh on February 8th, following a verbal altercation, a group of men attacked a Muslim MBA student and his roommate while they were eating.⁵ Six to seven attackers, led by Siddharth Singh, also fired several rounds inside the dhaba in an attempt to kill him. The victim

⁴ maktobmedia.com/india/muslim-men-assaulted-by-bajrang-dal-detained-for-joining-hindu-friends-birthday-party-in-indore

⁵ muslimmirror.com/eng/muslim-student-attacked-by-miscreants-at-eatery-in-up

managed to save himself by hiding under the tables.

On February 12th, clashes broke out between two communities in the Dubey Colony of Madhya Pradesh's Khandwa district. According to reports, a far-right mob led by former councilor candidate Ravindra Avhad allegedly broke into a Muslim man's home, placed an idol of a Hindu god, and began performing religious ceremonies resulting in clashes. Police have injuries in the incident.⁶

On February 17th, a wage laborer named Muhammad Qadeer died after being severely beaten while in the custody of Medak police in Telangana.⁷ Qadeer was being treated for his injuries at Gandhi Hospital in Hyderabad. The police had picked him up on suspicion of stealing gold ornaments. Qadeer's wife, Siddeshwari, claimed that police had beaten her husband so severely he could not stand. Qadeer was released on February 3rd after his non-involvement was confirmed but unfortunately did not survive. After Qadeer's death,

a group of Muslims gathered in his village to protest and demand that the responsible police officers be held accountable.



On February 19th, the official residence of Hyderabad Member of Parliament and All India Majlis-E-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) chief Asaduddin Owaisi was vandalized by unknown persons on Ashoka Road in New Delhi. This marks the fourth time since 2014 that his residence has been targeted.⁸ In 2021, members of the Hindu Sena had also vandalized Owaisi's residence. Owaisi shared a video on Twitter, showing the damages caused by the attackers, including broken windows, and

⁶ thequint.com/news/india/right-wing-mob-muslim-man-house-in-khandwa-installs-hanuman-idol

⁷ maktoobmedia.com/india/muslim-man-arrested-mistakenly-killed-due-to-brutal-custodial-torture-in-hyderabad

⁸ maktoobmedia.com/india/asaduddin-owaisis-residence-attacked-again-fourth-incident-since-2014/

expressed concern that the attack happened in a supposed “high security” zone. He has demanded immediate action by the Delhi Police to apprehend the culprits.

On February 21st, a 30-year-old man named Jahirul Islam was illegally apprehended from his house by Border Security Force (BSF) personnel and brutally tortured while in their custody at the Purba Sahebganj Border Out Post, Battalion number 129 in Sahebganj, West Bengal. The victim’s family filed a complaint with the Sahebganj Police Station, but no case was registered against the perpetrators.⁹

On February 23rd, a mob lynching occurred in Deeha village under Belaganj police station of Gaya, Bihar, resulting in the death of one man and severe injuries to two others.¹⁰ Syed Sharim Ali, a former administrator of the Bihar Minority Commission and social activist, who resides in the same locality as the incident, alleged that the police have failed to control theft and apprehend the

real culprits, while three innocent youths were unjustly attacked by the mob. He further suggested that the victims’ religion could have played a role in the lynching, stating that anti-Muslim groups may have been involved.



On March 7th, a group of Hindu extremists beat a 47-year-old Muslim man named Naseeb Qureshi to death in Chhapra, Bihar, after claiming he was carrying beef. Firoz Qureshi, who was with Naseeb Qureshi at the time, reported that they were on their way home when a mob attacked them. While Firoz managed to flee, Naseeb was caught and beaten with bricks and wooden sticks. He was

⁹ maktoobmedia.com/india/bengal-bsf-personnel-brutally-torture-muslim-man-in-custody-rights-activist-moves-nhrc

¹⁰ indiatomorrow.net/2023/02/24/one-killed-and-two-muslim-youths-injured-in-gaya-mob-lynching

¹¹ maktoobmedia.com/india/muslim-man-beaten-to-death-by-hindu-nationalists-in-bihar

rushed to the hospital but died on the way to Patna.¹¹ Naseeb's family has demanded justice and assurance from the district administration that such incidents would not happen again. Naseem's younger brother Ashraf has accused the policemen of Rasoolpur and Daraunda police stations of negligence, which led to Naseem's death.



On the same day, in Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh, a young man named Shahrukh Khan was brutally beaten and tortured by a mob. A video of the incident went viral on social media, showing the mob abusing and tonsuring Khan, and accusing him of theft.¹² The video was also posted on Facebook by Aastha Ma, a self-proclaimed female Hindu

religious leader. She wrote a post taking responsibility for the incident. While the Ghaziabad Police said that the incident does not have any communal angle, Aastha Ma has a history of inciting violence against minorities and Muslims but has not faced any action yet.

Several people were detained in the Haveri district of Karnataka state for allegedly attacking a mosque and Muslim residences. The incident occurred on March 14th, during a motorcycle rally conducted to unveil the statue of



Sangolli Rayanna, a 19th-century military chief. As per the police reports, around 150 people

¹² clarionindia.net/female-hindutva-leader-claims-brutal-assault-on-muslim-youth-in-ghaziabad-five-arrested

¹³ news9live.com/state/karnataka/karnataka-stones-pelted-at-mosque-muslim-houses-during-rally-in-haveri-several-detained-au21-2075275

participating in the rally took an unexpected turn towards Rattihalli village and began pelting stones at the mosque and nearby houses, damaging almost 8-10 homes and two vehicles.¹³

On March 24th, in a disturbing incident reported from Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh, a group of Bajrang Dal militants allegedly beat up a young Muslim youth, identified as Amir Khan, for sitting with a girl in a park. The Bajrang Dal militants claimed that the incident was a case of ‘love jihad’ and took Amir and the girl to a nearby police station. The girl, who is reportedly already married, refused to lodge an FIR and said that they were just friends. Despite this, Amir had to spend the night in police custody.¹⁴

On March 26th, tensions erupted in Rajasthan’s Tala village of Jamwa Ramgarh district after a large number of Bajrang Dal militants took out a rally in the area carrying saffron flags and creating chaos. Muslim men who were offering prayers at that time objected, resulting in stone pelting.¹⁵ Reports

suggest that the participants in the Bajrang Dal rally were raising abusive slogans against Muslims.

On the same day, a disturbing incident occurred at a mosque in Anwa village in Maharashtra, where an Imam was attacked by unidentified individuals. The attackers demanded that the Imam,



Zakir Sayyed Khaja, chant ‘Jai Shri Ram.’ When the Imam refused, he was beaten up and had his beard cut off. The attackers also used a chemical-laced cloth to knock him out. He was found lying outside the mosque in an unconscious state and was taken to a government hospital for treatment. After the incident came to light, security was tightened in the village, and police personnel were deployed to maintain peace in the area.¹⁶

¹⁴ freepressjournal.in/ujjain/viral-video-spotting-a-youth-with-a-girl-in-ujjain-park-bajrang-dal-wokers-ask-for-aadhaar-and-beat-him-up-alleging-love-jihad

¹⁵ siasat.com/rajasthan-hindu-rally-disturbs-namaz-time-stones-pelted-12-held-2557263

¹⁶ indiatoday.in/india/story/maharashtra-imam-beaten-beard-cut-off-for-refusing-to-chant-jai-shri-ram-2352292-2023-03-28



Cow Vigilantism

On February 16th, two Muslim men from Rajasthan were attacked and abducted by a cow vigilante militia unit allegedly linked to the Bajrang Dal in BJP-ruled Haryana state. The Muslim men were set ablaze and burned to death while they were inside their car, in what is being described as another brutal case of cow vigilantism.¹⁷ Rajasthan's Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot has condemned the killings and directed the police to take strict action in the case. The incident has sparked outrage and renewed concerns about the deadly cow vigilante violence against Muslims in India.

On February 22nd, a 'Hindu Mahapanchayat' was organized

by Bajrang Dal and Vishwa Hindu Parishad in Hathin, Haryana in support of cow vigilante Monu Manesar, who is named in the FIR regarding the brutal killing that took place. The event saw open calls for violence against Muslims and police who tried to take action against Monu. More than 400 members and leaders of the Bajrang Dal, the VHP, and Hindu Sena from across India attended the event, with one participant calling for those who arrest cow vigilantes to be shot.¹⁸

A similar incident took place in Palwal, Haryana, where a group of cow vigilantes attacked an unknown Muslim truck driver on March 5th. The vigilantes allegedly accused the driver of transporting cattle and chased him before assaulting him. The victim, whose identity has not been disclosed, sustained injuries from the attack and was taken to a nearby hospital for treatment.¹⁹ The incident has sparked outrage and concern from various groups, who have condemned the attack and called for justice for the victim.

¹⁷ tribune.com.pk/story/2401724/two-muslim-men-killed-by-cow-vigilantes-in-india

¹⁸ thewire.in/communalism/haryana-at-second-hindu-mahapanchayat-for-monu-manesar-calls-for-anti-muslim-violence

¹⁹ cjp.org.in/cow-vigilantes-attack-muslim-truck-driver-in-palwal-haryana

On March 7th in Delhi's Anand Vihar area, it was reported that seven men, including three police officers, were booked for assaulting and robbing two meat suppliers.²⁰ The police officers demanded money from the vendors, accused them of slaughtering cows, and then confined and beat them up



The police officers were suspended, and charged with extortion and voluntarily causing hurt. The FIR, filed on March 10, stated that the vendors were confined for two to three hours and made to sign a few blank papers. It was also alleged that the attackers cut their hands with a knife and urinated on their faces.

On March 27th, several Gau Raksha Dal members, along with BJP councilor Ashok Chhabra, reportedly forced meat shops to

shut down in the Krishnapura area of Panipat, Haryana. The cow vigilantes allegedly went around the area, accompanied by minors, threatening meat shop owners and trying to enforce the closure of meat shops during the nine-day Hindu festival Navratri without any official notice.²¹

Illegal Demolitions and Evictions

The BJP state governments have continued to illegally demolish Muslim homes and places of worship across the country as part of their retributive justice policy.²² On January 4th, forty-four Muslim families residing in the Nutan Hardo village in Uttar Pradesh were asked to vacate their homes. The administration alleged that the homes were



²⁰ scroll.in/latest/1045763

²¹ muslimmirror.com/eng/haryana-cow-vigilantes-threaten-muslims-to-shut-their-meat-shops-amid-ramzan-in-panipat

²² sabrangindia.in/article/spate-demolitions-continue-44-muslim-families-asked-vacate-homes-kushinagar

constructed on “encroached land.” According to one resident, the police and some villagers vandalized their homes and shops and looted their possessions. The resident noted that the police did not target the nearest settlement occupied by Hindus, and their homes and shops remained untouched.

Five days after this incident, on January 9th, the Shahi Masjid, a 400-year-old mosque located in the Saidabad market in Uttar Pradesh’s Prayagraj, was demolished under the pretext of a road-widening



project. According to Mohammad Babul Hussain, the mosque’s imam, the matter was being heard in the lower court and scheduled for a hearing on January 16th. Despite this, the demolition was carried out. In response to the demolition, activist Mohammad Habeeb

tweeted, questioning the justification for the courts to exist if a 16th-century mosque could be destroyed for road widening while the matter was still in court.²³

Tensions arose in the Belagavi district of Karnataka following the conversion of a residential house into a mosque named ‘Fathima Masjid’ and its subsequent handover to the Waqf Board. BJP leaders, Sri Ram Sena members, and local Hindu residents have opposed establishing the mosque in a residential area. Sanjay Patil, a former BJP MLA, has reportedly organized meetings with local Hindus to voice their concerns and launched a movement to have the mosque removed. Patil has demanded that the district authorities take action against the mosque that was established illegally.²⁴

In Rampur city, Uttar Pradesh, Muslim street vendors claimed that they were removed by the administration to make way for Hindu businesses.²⁵ The vendors had been selling household items, toys, and clothes in the Jwalanagar

²³ twocircles.net/2023jan16/448005.html

²⁴ siasat.com/house-in-karnataka-converted-to-mosque-bjp-hindu-activists-raise-objections-2499270

²⁵ thewire.in/communalism/uttar-pradesh-rampur-muslim-street-vendors

area for almost three decades. They received a notice from the municipality on January 13th to fold up their shops, and on January 15th, officials from the municipal corporation and policemen arrived and destroyed the shops that were left. The vendors had paid fees to the Municipal Corporation to run the street stalls. This incident highlights the discriminatory treatment of Muslims in India, with BJP-ruled governments being accused of targeting the Muslim community through spates of demolitions and evictions.



On January 16th, the Gujarat government launched a demolition drive in the Kutch area of the state, using bulldozers to raze 36 commercial establishments

and six madrasas. Additionally, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, who is also known as ‘Bulldozer Baba’ due to his aggressive stance on demolishing Muslim properties under the pretext of illegal constructions, visited the state for election campaigning and lent his support to the BJP’s efforts. The use of bulldozers during the Gujarat election campaign had become a major talking point, with the BJP boasting about its determination to use this tactic against the so-called illegal encroachers and criminals.²⁶

Posters asking Hindus not to sell their properties to Muslims have surfaced in the Shahdara district, which is ironically a Muslim-majority area in New Delhi.²⁷ The posters, which have been attributed to a far-right Hindu group, warn that selling properties to Muslims will lead to “dire consequences” and that Hindus should “protect their religion and their land.” A resident pediatrician, Dr. Nafees Ahmed, claimed that this unofficial eviction of Muslim residents had been occurring for the “last

²⁶ muslimmirror.com/eng/gujarat-six-madrasas-demolished-in-kutch/

²⁷ thewire.in/communalism/posters-telling-hindus-not-to-sell-properties-to-muslims-surface-in-delhis-brahmpuri



four to five years, and the situation took a turn for the worse post the February 2020 [anti-Muslim] riots.” During the same month, the Archaeological Survey of India issued eviction notices to over 1,000 residents of the Bangali Colony in the Tughlakabad neighborhood of Delhi, primarily populated by residents from economically and socially marginalized communities from West Bengal and Bihar, including Hindus and Muslims living side by side.²⁸

The move follows a 2001 Public Interest Litigation that alleged the ASI had failed to preserve the Tughlakabad Fort, constructed in the 14th century, which the Bangali Colony is close to. The PIL also claimed that the fort had been occupied illegally by residents

seeking to obtain government land for residential use. Residents claimed that up to 20,000 people would be affected by the planned demolition drive, which has caused widespread concern and anxiety in the community. Ironically, the notice was not served on the property of Ramesh Biduri, a Member of Parliament from South Delhi and leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), during the recent demolition drive in the area, despite Biduri’s property being located just a hundred meters from the Tughlaqabad Fort, also in the demolition zone.



Also in January, the Himanta Biswa Sarma-led BJP government in the Sonitpur district of Assam continued the drive to

²⁸ twocircles.net/2023jan31/448193.html

evict approximately five hundred families, claiming that they have trespassed on forest land. Most of those who were removed against their will were Bengali speaking Muslims who lived on the 10,000-acre area that is part of the Pabha Reserve Forest. The inhabitants have stated that they were residents of the area for over twenty five years and that they were unable to salvage their possessions, resulting in a complete loss.



On the 11th of January, a huge eviction drive was initiated in the Lakhimpur district of Assam, targeting Bengali speaking Muslim communities residing on forest land.²⁹ The operation involved the deployment of 200 civic officials, over 600 police and Central Reserve Police Force members, as well as 43 excavators and 25

tractors in Mohghuli village. A total of 299 households occupying 250 hectares of land were evicted.



The affected individuals reported that they were forced to relocate without being given adequate time to collect their belongings, and that their crops were also damaged. Since September of 2021, the BJP government in Assam has been executing campaigns to evict various Muslim communities throughout the state.

On March 2nd, a mazar, or Muslim shrine, was destroyed by a group in Uttarakhand led by a far-right activist named Radha Semwal Dhoni. Dhoni claimed that the shrine was constructed on state-owned land. This is not the first instance of Dhoni resorting to violence while furthering

²⁹ maktoobmedia.com/india/assam-eviction-500-families-mostly-bengali-speaking-muslims-go-homeless

the narrative that “Hindus are in danger.” In fact, she proudly claims to have demolished over 370 mazars and makes it a point to capture her violence on her Facebook page.³⁰



Weaponization of Hindu Festivals

This year’s celebration of Ram Navami, a festival commemorating the birth of the Hindu deity Rama, took place on March 30. Extremist mobs participating in processions for the Hindu festival launched a series of systematic attacks against Muslims in at least six Indian states, including Maharashtra, West Bengal, Delhi, Gujarat, Telangana, and Uttar Pradesh since March 29th. Hindu extremists in processions passed through Muslim neighborhoods, and were seen wielding weapons

and shouting anti-Muslim slogans. This sparked a number of violent incidents, reported in various states in late March, including arson, home invasions, mob beatings, and sexual harassment of Muslim women. Established and prominent institutions such as Madrasas and mosques were vandalized and set on fire by mobs. Across the country, hundreds of people have been arrested and dozens injured in these riots. Reports and videos on various social media platforms have suggested that the violence was carried out by the militant affiliates of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), including Bajrang Dal and Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP).



Violence was reported in three areas in the state of Maharashtra.³¹

³⁰ siasat.com/uttarakhand-hindutva-goons-demolish-mazar-claim-it-was-built-on-state-land-2538388

³¹ indiatoday.in/india/story/clash-two-groups-maharashtra-chhatrapati-sambhajinagar-kiradpura-ram-temple-2353279-2023-03-30

In Aurangabad, a dispute between two men outside a Ram temple in the Kiradpura area of Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar on March 29th turned into a bigger conflict, with people throwing stones and setting vehicles on fire. Despite the police's efforts to control the situation, the mob continued to riot. At least 12 people, including 10 police officers, were injured during the clash. Unfortunately, a 51-year-old man named Shaikh Muniruddin, who was injured during the confrontation, passed away the following day while receiving medical attention.

In Malad, a clash occurred between two groups during a Shobha Yatra procession, where some individuals protested against the high volume DJ and loud music being played during the event.³² The clashes resulted in injuries to multiple individuals, including four constables, and the arrest of twenty individuals. Similarly in Jalgaon, a conflict that began over loud music being played outside a mosque resulted in injuries to four people. Following the incident, 45 individuals were arrested, and two

FIRs were registered to investigate the clash.³³



In the state of West Bengal, Hindu extremist violence was reported from several areas. During the Ram Navami procession in Kazipara, Howrah, multiple vehicles and shops were damaged.³⁴ Similarly, in Shibpur, vehicles were set on fire during a Ram Navami procession. In Dalkhola, clashes between two groups during a procession resulted in the death of one person, injuries to several others, including five to six police officers.³⁵

In Gujarat's Vadodara city, participants in Ram Navami procession threw stones and damaged property belonging to Muslims. Police were present but struggled to control the situation.

³² theprint.in/india/tension-prevails-in-mumbais-malvani-after-clash-between-two-groups/1485520

³³ indiatoday.in/india/story/people-injured-two-groups-clash-mosque-palki-yatra-maharashtra-jalgaon-several-arrested-vid-eo-2353328-2023-03-30

³⁴ indiatoday.in/india/story/stones-pelted-vehicles-torched-ram-navami-celebrations-maharashtra-gujarat-bengal-2353646-2023-03-30

³⁵ indiatoday.in/india/story/bengal-dalkhola-ram-navami-procession-clashes-dead-injured-2353714-2023-03-30

The situation was eventually brought under control, and no arrests were made.³⁶

A Hindu procession vandalized a mosque and set it on fire, as well as targeted other Muslim properties including a madrasa, in the city of Biharsharif, Bihar. Similar incidents were reported in Sasaram. There were multiple reports of stone throwing, physical attacks, and petrol bombs. Tension escalated in Biharsharif after a 16-year-old boy was killed in the crossfire.³⁷



On the same day in Karnataka state's city of Hassan, violence broke out when two groups clashed during a Ram Navami procession passing by a mosque. Four people were injured, and two of them were

stabbed. The incident occurred near Channarayapatna when Bajrang Dal militants were holding a Ram Navami rally. Another complaint was filed alleging that some people in the procession were carrying weapons and spreading anti-Muslim rhetoric. After a preliminary investigation, police termed the incident a 'minor scuffle' and arrested nine people.³⁸

In Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, violence erupted during a Ram Navami procession on March 31st. According to reports, a clash broke out between two groups during a Ram Navami procession, after a man played loud music while passing in front of a mosque. An argument broke out, resulting in stone pelting, physical assault, and destruction of property. The situation was brought under control after the police intervened. However, tensions remained high in the area after the incident.³⁹

It is unfortunately not uncommon for Hindu festivals to be used as a pretext to incite violence against Muslims, as demonstrated

³⁶ indiatoday.in/india/story/stone-pelting-at-ram-navami-procession-in-vadodara-again-police-reach-spot-2353617-2023-03-30

³⁷ indianexpress.com/article/cities/patna/ram-navami-violence-in-bihar-130-held-in-biharsharif-15-firs-registered-curbs-stay-8536342/

³⁸ indiatoday.in/india/story/ram-navami-procession-4-stabbed-after-2-groups-clash-mosque-in-karnatakas-hassan-hindu-muslim-groups-2353847-2023-03-31

³⁹ indiatoday.in/india/story/ram-navami-procession-in-front-of-the-mosque-in-lucknow-vehicle-vandalised-stone-pelted-2353755-2023-03-31

by an incident during Holi this year. Two Muslim girls, ages 6 and 7, were allegedly raped while they were playing near Panchdir Chowk in Sahebpur Kamal, Begusarai district in Bihar. The attackers were reportedly drunk during the incident and fled the scene afterward.⁴⁰



Hindutva groups in Karnataka have called for a ban on Halal meat and urged the community to consume only Jhatka meat prepared by Hindus during the Hindu festivals of Ugadi and Hosa Todaku.⁴¹ The call has been given by the Karnataka Hindu Janjagruthi Vedike (HJV), a Hindu militant group who submitted a memorandum to the Bengaluru district magistrate demanding a ban on Halal meat and certification for meat shops. Hindu activists have carried out an awareness

march and distributed handbills in Bengaluru claiming that Muslim traders are dominating through Halal cut meat shops.

A recently report that was published by the Citizens and Lawyers Initiative titled “Routes of Wrath: Weaponising Religious Processions” calls attention to the use of religious events to perpetrate violence against the Muslim community in India.⁴² The report focuses on the sharp spike in communal violence during the Hindu festivals of Ram Navami and Hanuman Jayanti in April 2022, which involved targeting Muslim places of worship or residences. The report identifies commonalities in how religious processions have been used to incite violence against the minority community, and highlights the crisis of displacement of Muslim families in riot-hit areas, either rendered homeless by the demolitions or having been forced to flee from their homes in fear of further state harassment. Religious processions in state after state have been granted licenses or permissions to pass through the

⁴⁰ maktoobmedia.com/india/bihar-villagers-protest-as-two-minor-muslim-girls-sexually-assaulted-by-men-celebrating-holi

⁴¹ muslimmirror.com/eng/hindu-groups-call-again-to-boycott-halal-meat-during-festive-season-in-karnataka

⁴² thewire.in/communalism/new-report-finds-distinct-erie-patterns-in-hanuman-jayanti-ram-navami-rallies-in-april-2022

most congested and sensitive areas, and at least 100 people were injured in these incidents, with accidental deaths as well. The report also notes that Ram Navami processions have been taken over by militant Hindutva organizations over the years, as the figure of Ram is central to the political imagination of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). The report is an important contribution to the ongoing conversation about communal violence and the use of religion to incite violence against minority communities.

Housing Discrimination

Discrimination against Muslims in India appears to be aggressively expanding to the housing sector, with reports highlighting the difficulties Muslims face in renting or buying properties in certain areas. According to a report published on January 12th, by Fair Planet, a global human rights platform, Muslims are increasingly finding themselves excluded from certain neighborhoods and gated communities in the country.⁴³ In

some cases, landlords or real estate agents have reportedly refused to rent or sell properties to Muslims, while in other cases, Muslims have been asked to pay higher rents or deposits. Some gated communities and housing societies are accused of imposing discriminatory rules, such as banning the slaughter of animals or the wearing of traditional Muslim dress.



Hate Speech

During an event jointly organized by the Bajrang Dal and Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) in Ranapur, Madhya Pradesh on January 6th, Hindutva speaker Azad Preme Singh delivered a speech targeting religious minorities in India.⁴⁴ He not only used derogatory terms such as ‘be-dharami’ to describe Christians and Muslims, but advocated for

⁴³ fairplanet.org/story/indias-discrimination-against-muslims-expands-to-housing/

⁴⁴ sabrangindia.in/article/vhp-event-mp-speaker-terms-religious-minorities-be-dharami-urges-violence-0

violence and punishment for the minority religious groups.

On January 16th in Boisar, Maharashtra, Shankar Gaikar, a senior leader of VHP, gave a speech full of anti-Muslim sentiments, with hateful and divisive rhetoric that only served to fuel communal tensions. In his speech, Gaikar claimed that bitterness was in the blood of Muslims, made many false claims about Islamic history, and used derogatory terms to refer to Muslims, such as ‘mullayon.’⁴⁵

On January 19th, the Bajrang Dal issued an ultimatum to seek revenge for the murder of one of its workers in Assam. The organization’s convenor, Ankit Pandey, stated that the murderers were ‘jihadis,’ and warned that there will be an eye for an eye.⁴⁶ He went on to state that [the Bajrang Dal] would kill thousands, and that “these children of Babur need to be shown their place in this country.”

At an event organized by several far-right Hindu groups in Lohwat, Rajasthan on January 21st, RSS

Pracharak and Sanghatan Mantri of the VHP Ishwar Lal made several offensive statements against the Muslim minority community. During his speech, he called for the boycott of Halal products and for the conversion of 30,000 mosques into temples. Lal has a history of hate speech, including content that was reported and subsequently removed from his YouTube channel.⁴⁷

On January 22nd, well-known Hindutva figure Suresh Chavhanke delivered an anti-Muslim hate speech at an event in Nagar, Maharashtra in which he called for the establishment of a Hindu nation. In his speech, he urged people to establish a Hindu nation with him, and criticized the Supreme Court for putting pressure on the Delhi Police to take action against him. Chavhanke frequently uses his news channel, Sudarshan News, to spread such hateful rhetoric as well.⁴⁸

Pravin Togadia, president of the far-right extremist Hindutva group Antarashtriya Hindu Parishad

⁴⁵ sabrangindia.in/article/maharashtra-shaurya-path-sanchalan-event-shankar-gaikar-makes-anti-muslim-statements

⁴⁶ sabrangindia.in/article/if-you-kill-one-us-we-will-kill-thousands-yours-bajrang-dal

⁴⁷ sabrangindia.in/article/yet-again-hate-filled-speech-delivered-rss-man-ishwar-lal-rajasthan

⁴⁸ sabrangindia.in/article/chavhanke-indulges-hate-speech-again-encourages-audience-take-oath-hindu-rashtra-him

(AHP), gave a speech at a gathering in the Palwal district of Haryana on January 24, in which he called for population control and ‘love jihad’ laws, as well as the expulsion of “Bangladeshis” (used in reference to Muslims) from India. Since the early 2000s, Togadia has been known for targeting the Muslim community and advocating for such problematic and discriminatory laws.⁴⁹

In Mumbai on January 29th, several Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leaders participated in a march called the ‘Hindu Jan Akrosh Morcha.’ Although the speakers emphasized the rally’s purpose was to ensure the ‘safety of Hindu daughters and sisters,’ it soon turned into an occasion for the amplification of several far-right conspiracy theories that have gained mainstream recognition in recent years. The speeches delivered during the rally were filled with misinformation, pejorative references to the Muslim community, and hate speech.⁵⁰

During a ‘dharma sansad’ event,

held at Jantar Mantar in Delhi on February 4, a speaker named Mahamandleshwar Swami Bhakt Hari Singh urged the killing of Muslims and Christians to establish a Hindu Rashtra (meaning a full and complete Hindu state, where every Indian is Hindu).⁵¹ According to reports, the attendees at the Hindu Parliament event raised genocidal slogans against Muslims and Christians citizens. Singh urged the crowd to arm themselves and to use weapons to kill members of these communities. The dangerous rhetoric and incitement to violence have been widely criticized by politicians and civil society groups as promoting hate and intolerance.

Despite appeals from Citizens for Justice and Peace (CJP), a hate event was held on February 9 in Baramati, Pune, Maharashtra. Far-right Hindu priest Kalicharan Maharaj delivered a speech promoting enmity between communities and peddling conspiracy theories. He made anti-Muslim remarks, stating that they want to convert everyone to Islam and that non-Muslims

⁴⁹ sabrangindia.in/article/hundreds-can-be-seen-repeating-communal-and-anti-muslim-oath-administered-pravin-togadia

⁵⁰ altnews.in/blatant-calls-for-violence-against-muslims-by-t-raja-singh-bjp-leaders-from-mumbai-rally

⁵¹ siasat.com/hindutva-leaders-calls-to-kill-muslims-christians-delhi-cops-send-notice-to-media-2520231/

are kaafirs who should be killed according to the Quran. He also made derogatory comments about women and encouraged the audience to watch a movie that allegedly promotes similar views.⁵²



On February 19th, Telangana legislator T. Raja Singh made derogatory remarks at the Shiv Jayanti celebrations in Latur, Maharashtra.⁵³ Singh claimed that if Chhatrapati Shivaji had not been there to lead, all Hindus would have been circumcised. He further urged Hindus to not fear police action and instead to teach a lesson to all those who engaged in ‘love jihad.’

On the 26th of February, a third ‘Hindu Jan Aakrosh Morcha’ rally was held in Vashi, a suburb of Mumbai. Organized by Sakal Hindu Samaj, a collective of several

Hindutva militant groups, organizers of the march claimed that they were protesting against ‘love jihad’ and ‘land jihad.’ During the rally, calls were made for the economic boycott and genocide of the Muslim community, with slogans to that effect being raised throughout.⁵⁴

On March 2nd, Pravin Togadia, gave an anti-Muslim speech at an event in MPS Science College in Bihar. Togadia made offensive claims against the minority community, and spoke about taking control of state power, police, and army. He encouraged the audience to join the Hindutva mission of establishing a Hindu nation. The crowd chanted “Jai Shree Ram” in response to his speech.⁵⁵



⁵² sabrangindia.in/article/kalicharan-maharaj-allowed-deliver-hate-speech-baramati

⁵³ altnews.in/teach-a-lesson-to-sons-of-afzal-says-t-raja-singh-turns-latur-shiv-jayanti-into-platform-for-incendiary-speech

⁵⁴ hindutvawatch.org/at-navi-mumbai-rally-calls-issued-for-muslim-genocide-economic-boycott-maktoob-media

⁵⁵ sabrangindia.in/article/hatewatch-inciteful-speech-given-ahp-leader-pravin-togadia-mps-science-college-bihar

The following day, a group of 300-400 saffron-clad protesters organized a rally in Maharashtra, protesting against ‘land jihad.’ The Hindu Janajagruti Samiti (HJS) led the rally along with several other Hindutva groups, alleging that historic forts in Maharashtra were being encroached upon by the Muslim community. The protesters demanded that the state government constitute a high-powered committee to address the issue. One speaker claimed that dargahs and mosques were not religious places and could be removed, unlike temples which were actually considered holy.

On March 16th, at a rally in Shivaji Maharaj Garden in Belgavi, Karnataka, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma claimed to have closed 600 madrasas in his state and announced his intention to close all of them.⁵⁷

Suresh Chavhanke, founder and editor-in-chief of Sudarshan News, addressed a crowd of four to five thousand people in a rally that took place in Nashik, Maharashtra on

March 24th. During his hour-long speech, he made multiple references to conspiracy theories on ‘love jihad’, ‘land jihad’, forcible religious conversions, and urged Muslim women to marry Hindu men over Muslim men.⁵⁸

Despite having dozens of FIRs registered against him for promoting enmity between different groups on the grounds of religion, race, and language, Chavhanke expressed no fear during his speech, stating, “After this rally in Nashik, this number will go up. But we aren’t afraid, this is the land of (VD) Savarkar.”

According to a report by Indian Express newspaper, between November 2022 and March 2023, at least 50 anti-Muslim rallies have been held across Maharashtra. Most of these rallies were organized by Sakal Hindu Samaj, an umbrella body of Hindutva and Sangh organizations.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ boomlive.in/boom-reports/hindutva-rally-mumbai-march-3-south-mumbai-hindu-janajagruti-samiti-gad-durg-rakshan-samiti-forts-maharashtra-communal-slogans-hate-speech-land-jihad-21305

⁵⁷ thewire.in/communalism/have-closed-600-madrasas-in-assam-intend-to-close-them-all-himanta-biswa-sarma

⁵⁸ hindutvawatch.org/inside-the-sakal-hindu-samaj-a-tv-anchor-an-ex-bjp-mla-and-rampant-hate-speech-the-quint

⁵⁹ indianexpress.com/article/cities/mumbai/4-months-50-rallies-in-maharashtra-one-theme-love-jihad-land-jihad-and-economic-boycott-8507077/

PERSECUTION & DISCRIMINATION AGAINST CHRISTIANS

On January 2nd, Hindu supremacists vandalized a church and attacked tribal Christian families in the Narayanpur district of Chhattisgarh. A statue of the Virgin Mary was smashed with a wooden plank. A police officer was also attacked and left bleeding.



Videos of the incident went viral, leading to police complaints filed against 40 people and the arrest of

11 individuals.⁶⁰ This attack was preceded by the forced conversion of almost a thousand Christians from marginalized tribal communities to Hinduism in December 2022, using violent methods such as physical assault, threats of displacement, and death. Christians in the area have been subjected to a series of ongoing attacks by Hindu extremists, including mob beatings, evictions, sexual assault, church vandalism, and property theft.⁶¹

In a similar incident that took place on January 7th, unidentified miscreants vandalized several crosses in the cemetery attached to St. Michael's Church in Mumbai.⁶² The pictures of the vandalized crosses have gone viral on social media, causing distress among the Catholic community in Mumbai and across the country. Clyde Crasto, the Nationalist Congress Party spokesperson, condemned

⁶⁰ thequint.com/news/india/forced-conversion-in-chhattisgarh-tribal-church-vandalised-fresh-controversy

⁶¹ [vice.com/en/article/n7zgxq/india-anti-christian-hate-extremism-hindu-mobs](https://www.vice.com/en/article/n7zgxq/india-anti-christian-hate-extremism-hindu-mobs)

⁶² thehindu.com/news/cities/mumbai/catholic-cemetery-vandalised-in-mumbai-miscreants-unknown/article66349990.ece/amp

the incident and called for the perpetrators' immediate arrest.

In Vaishali, Bihar, a Christian couple, Paul Kumar and his wife Sushmita, along with a relative Sonia, were attacked by a group of Bajrang Dal militants on January 12th. The men accused Paul of forceful conversion and began thrashing him while shouting slurs. Videos of the incident went viral on social media. According to Kumar, who is a pastor originally from Odisha, he was visiting a friend to check on her health when the incident took place. Kumar and his wife are Christians, and openly talk about their faith, but Kumar emphasized that this doesn't make them criminals. The incident has left him completely traumatized.⁶³

In Maharashtra's Dhule district on January 16th, a group of around fifteen Hindu youths assaulted a team of 42 teachers working for a Catholic NGO called Shirpur Vishwa Mandal Sevashram. Gunilal Pawara, the supervisor of the team, was attacked and hit on the head with a steel object until

he started bleeding. The attackers allegedly accused the team of attempting to convert indigenous tribal people and subjected them to both verbal and physical abuse.⁶⁴



A Christian hospital in Uttar Pradesh is at risk of being shut down due to alleged harassment by Hindutva supporters and the police over allegations of conversion.⁶⁵ The administration of the 114-year-old hospital claims that the staff, doctors, and nurses are facing constant harassment and fear due to the police action against them. On January 23rd, Kotwali police station registered three FIRs against the hospital administrative staff along with members of the Christian community in the area, accusing them of fraud conversions. The hospital and its staff were booked under several

⁶³ thequint.com/news/india/will-destroy-you-for-messing-with-ram-bajrang-dal-beats-up-christian-couple

⁶⁴ sabrangindia.in/article/hindu-mob-attacks-catholic-ngo-staff-accuses-them-indulging-religious-conversion

⁶⁵ clarionindia.net/christian-hospital-in-up-faces-closure-after-police-action-over-allegations-of-conversion/

sections of Uttar Pradesh’s draconian anti-conversion laws. Several hospital staff members were either jailed or forced to flee due to the police action against them.

On January 25th, Chhattisgarh BJP’s state secretary Prabal Pratap Singh Judev conducted a ‘ghar wapsi’ ceremony for over 1,100 members of the mostly Christian community in Basna. Judev, who has been carrying out such campaigns throughout the state, and has allegedly converted 15,000 people in the past decade, said he aims to continue the ‘ghar wapsi’ campaign indefinitely until every person who has been a “victim of conversion” returns to “Sanatan Dharma.”



It should be noted that while some Indian states have laws that criminalize religious conversion, these laws typically only apply to conversions from Hinduism to another religion, not vice versa. In fact, some states with Hindu nationalist governments have even exempted conversions to Hinduism, as they see it as a form of “homecoming” rather than a conversion. This is clearly a double standard and in violation of basic religious freedom for minorities in India.⁶⁶

On February 12th, a church in Narmadapuram district in Madhya Pradesh was vandalized. The local Christian community discovered that the window of the hall was broken and that the name of the Hindu deity Ram was inscribed on the walls.⁶⁷ Carpets, curtains, and furniture were also left charred. The incident was allegedly carried out by two Hindu friends, Akash Tiwari and Avneesh Pandey, who used Google Maps to identify several churches and shrines in Narmadapuram and Bhopal district as targets. Tiwari and

⁶⁶ sabrangindia.in/article/chhattisgarh-1100-christians-converted-hinduism-ghar-wapsi-ceremony-bjp-sec

⁶⁷ boomlive.in/boom-reports/uttar-pradesh-google-maps-plan-madhya-pradesh-church-attack-21065



Pandey were reportedly upset with the recent debate on the religious texts Ramcharitmanas.

On March 1st, a group of over 30 people attacked a stall belonging to Gideons International, a Christian non-profit, at the New Delhi World Book Fair in Pragati Maidan. The attackers, who were reportedly chanting “Jai Shri Ram,” vandalized the stall, causing chaos at the event.⁶⁸

Two churches in Kanpur were targeted by right-wing Hindutva groups, accusing members of the Christian community of forceful conversions.⁶⁹ On Saturday, March 4th, several people from the Christian community were praying in the World Mission Society,

Church of God in Kanpur’s Shyam Nagar when a group of men from Bajrang Dal and Vishva Hindu Parishad interrupted the prayer, claiming that they were “converting people to Christianity.” The following day on March 5th, the Hind Masih Mandali in Shiv Katra, Lal Bangla, Chakeri in Kanpur was reportedly attacked by members of the Bajrang Dal. The pastor and other members of the church were taken into police custody but were later released.

⁶⁸ newslaundry.com/amp/story/2023%2F03%2F01%2Fmen-chanting-jai-shri-ram-vandalise-christian-stall-at-delhi-book-fair
⁶⁹ thewire.in/communalism/kanpur-two-churches-targeted-right-wing

JAMMU & KASHMIR

In early 2023, the Indian government planned to introduce new digital IDs in Kashmir, in the form of an eight-digit code assigned to each family. While authorities say this will enhance access to social welfare programs, many Muslim Kashmiris view it as a further expansion of the government's control over their lives. The lack of federal data protection laws



and previous breaches have also made critics uneasy about data collection. The implementation of these IDs follows the revocation of

Jammu and Kashmir's autonomous status in 2019, which divided the state into two federal regions and has increased suspicion towards the government.⁷⁰

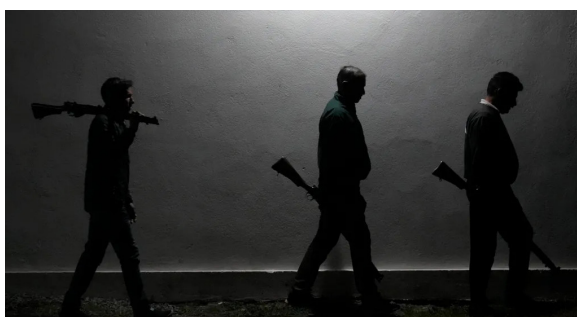
According to a study by Surfshark released on January 17th, Jammu and Kashmir experienced 24 internet disruptions in 2022, making it the region with the highest number of internet shutdowns in the world.⁷¹ It was also noted that since 2019, when Jammu and Kashmir was downgraded from an autonomous state to a union territory, the region has been facing “unprecedented internet restrictions” and that internet freedom remains unlikely for now.

Also in January, following the killing of seven Hindus in two back-to-back attacks in Kashmir's Dhangri village, the Indian government revived a government-sponsored militia called the “Village

⁷⁰ modern diplomacy.eu/2023/02/20/india-issued-new-digital-ids-in-jammu-kashmir-surveillance-concerns

⁷¹ surfshark.com/blog/internet-censorship-2022

Defense Group” to counter anti-India insurgents. The militia, which was formed in the 1990s, was previously disbanded due to allegations of brutality and human rights violations. The renewed drive has seen thousands of villagers, including teenagers, being re-armed and trained.⁷²



The decision to revive the militia comes after hundreds of residents staged angry protests across the Hindu-dominated Jammu region. The area near the highly militarized Line of Control that divides Kashmir between India and Pakistan has witnessed past attacks, which the government seeks to counter with the Village Defense Group.

In February, the district municipal corporation, state revenue

authorities and police in Jammu and Kashmir collaborated to demolish homes and properties using UK construction equipment company JCB’s bulldozers.⁷³ Numerous residents in the districts of Srinagar, Budgam, Anantnag and Baramulla claimed that they were not notified beforehand and were denied the opportunity to prove their ownership of the properties. JCB diggers have been used in Israel’s destruction of Palestinian homes and the construction of illegal settlements.⁷⁴ JCB’s failure to prevent its equipment from being used in such activities is a breach of the company’s responsibilities under international human rights standards applicable to businesses, as reported by Amnesty International.

Since 2019, Jammu and Kashmir police have denied verification to 805 passport applicants due to “terrorism-related antecedents.” These applicants were not cleared to obtain a passport or other relevant documents required to travel. Attention was redrawn to this issue in February when the Jammu and

⁷² seattletimes.com/nation-world/india-revives-civil-militia-after-hindu-killings-in-kashmir

⁷³ amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/india-jcb-bulldozers-being-used-house-demolitions-kashmir

⁷⁴ amnesty.org/en/documents/MDE15/4985/2021/en

Kashmir high court intervened in the case of former Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti’s 80-year-old mother Gulshan Nazir.⁷⁵ Allegedly, she and her granddaughter Iltija Mufti had been denied their passport requests since March 2020 and June 2022, respectively. In 2022, Amnesty International expressed concern over the increasing use of arbitrary travel bans⁷⁶ as a “principal tactic of the Indian authorities to silence independent and critical voices in the country.”

Crackdown on Journalists and Human Rights Defenders

The ongoing repression and persecution of human rights defenders and journalists in Jammu and Kashmir under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) was highlighted by the recent arrest of journalist Irfan Mehraj by the National Investigation Agency.

On March 20th, 2023, Indian journalist Irfan Mehraj, the founding editor of *Wande Magazine*, was arrested by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) under

terrorism charges.⁷⁷ Mehraj, who writes about human rights violations in Kashmir, was arrested for his alleged collaboration with the Jammu Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society (JKCCS), directed by jailed human rights activist Khurram Parvez. The NIA has been carrying out a systematic crackdown on journalists in the Muslim-majority region.



On March 22nd, the Patiala House Court in New Delhi remanded Mehraj in NIA custody. The arrest was made under a case registered by the NIA in October 2020, which alleged non-governmental organizations (NGOs) of serious offenses, including criminal conspiracy, raising funds for, and supporting terrorist organizations.

⁷⁵ indianexpress.com/article/cities/srinagar/from-2019-22-passport-denied-to-805-in-jk-over-terror-8584745

⁷⁶ amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/10/india-authorities-must-end-alarming-rise-of-arbitrary-travel-bans-on-journalists-and-activists

⁷⁷ justiceforall.org/free-kashmir/irfan-mehraj

Mehraj has been accused of criminal conspiracy, inciting disaffection towards the government through words and signs, fundraising for terror activities, conspiracy to commit terror acts, and supporting a terrorist organization. If convicted, he could face up to 14 years of imprisonment or even the death penalty.

Kashmiri journalist and activist Fahad Shah and human rights defender Khurram Parvez also remain in prison for charges under the UAPA for their human rights work in Jammu and Kashmir.

Shah was arrested multiple times on charges related to terrorism, fake news, and incitement, firstly by local police on February 4th, 2022, under UAPA for allegedly glorifying terrorism, spreading fake news, and instigating people. He was granted bail on February 26th, but immediately rearrested on separate charges. In April 2022, Shah's home and the offices of The Kashmir Walla were raided by Kashmir police and the Security and Intelligence Agency. Despite

multiple attempts to secure bail, a National Investigation Agency court denied him bail in July of 2022. The case has drawn attention from international press freedom advocates, who have expressed concern over the treatment of journalists in Kashmir.⁷⁸

Similarly, Khurram Parvez, who is a well-known human rights defender in India, was first arrested in 2016 under the UAPA but was later released by the Jammu and Kashmir High Court. He was then arrested again in 2021 and has been in custody since then.



The latest case against Parvez is related to allegations of criminal conspiracy and terror funding against his NGO, the Jammu Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society

⁷⁸ cpj.org/2022/03/indian-authorities-arrest-journalist-nilesh-sharma-re-arrest-fahad-shah

(JKCCS). The charges against him have been widely criticized by human rights organizations and activists, who see them as part of a larger pattern of targeting dissent in India.

The UAPA has also been used to prosecute human rights defenders across the country, especially those working to protect the rights of the most marginalized populations. The Indian government has also targeted human rights organizations under the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA). Despite repeated recommendations by UN human rights experts, UPR, and other human rights mechanisms, India has refused to repeal or amend the FCRA law in line with its international human rights obligations.⁷⁹



⁷⁹ [hrw.org/news/2023/03/27/deteriorating-human-rights-situation-india-requires-urgent-attention-say-rights](https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/03/27/deteriorating-human-rights-situation-india-requires-urgent-attention-say-rights)

RECOMMENDATIONS

The persecution of religious minorities in India is a significant concern that requires immediate attention from the Indian government and international community. The increasing incidents of violence and discrimination against minorities have violated their basic human rights and have created an atmosphere of fear and insecurity.

- The government must ensure that the rule of law is upheld and perpetrators of violence are held accountable for their actions, regardless of their political affiliation. This would help to restore confidence in the justice system and send a clear message that violence against minorities will not be tolerated.
- The government should review and repeal laws that discriminate against religious minorities, including anti-conversion laws, beef ban laws, the hijab ban, and the Citizenship Amendment Act, which has been a major source of unrest in the country. The government should take steps to protect religious sites and places of worship, which are often targeted. The government must also pass a national anti-lynching bill to protect minorities from Hindu militias and cow vigilante groups.
- BJP-led state governments must uphold every citizen's right to a safe home and immediately stop bulldozing Muslim homes, livelihoods, and places of worship in the name of anti-encroachment drives.
- As signatories 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 government should engage in dialogue with civil society organizations, religious leaders, and members of minority communities to address their concerns and grievances. This would help to build trust and foster a sense of inclusion and belonging among all citizens.
- Regarding the weaponization of Hindu festivals across the country, local and state governments can take measures to increase security during festivals and other public events where communal tensions are likely to be high. This would involve deploying additional forces in sensitive areas, monitoring social media and other communication channels for hate speech and incitement to violence, and taking preventive measures to avoid any escalation of violence.
- There is a need for education and awareness-raising initiatives to promote interfaith harmony and understanding. Schools and universities should include teachings on religious diversity and tolerance in their curricula, and media outlets should promote positive portrayals of religious minorities to counter the negative stereotypes perpetuated by some extremist groups.
- The President of the U.S. can place sanctions on individuals who have committed, directly aided, or are complicit in gross human rights violations through the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act. The Biden administration should impose sanctions on leaders and members of Hindu militant groups. The U.S. Department of State should accept the USCIRF's recommendation to designate India as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) for its egregious violations of human rights and religious freedoms.