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QUARTERLY REPORT
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PERSECUTION OF RELIGIOUS MINORITIES IN INDIA





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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- 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

During the second quarter of 2023, India experienced a distressing escalation in communal violence, targeted attacks, and hate speech directed against religious minorities. Muslims and Christians were particularly affected by these incidents, deepening the existing climate of persecution and discrimination faced by minority communities in the country. This rise in violence and intolerance has raised significant alarm.

Additionally, there has been a surge in cow vigilantism, where self-proclaimed cow protectors have been attacking Muslims under the pretext of preventing beef consumption and cattle transportation. Moreover, there has been an increase in the illegal demolition of homes and religious structures, leading to the displacement of entire communities in regions like Manipur.

In the region of Jammu and Kashmir, human rights violations have persisted with widespread abuses continuing unchecked. The crackdown on journalists, political activists, and the local population indicates a troubling trend of suppressing dissent and restricting fundamental freedoms in the region.

Urgent attention from both national and international human rights bodies is imperative to address these grave concerns and ensure accountability and justice for the victims. Addressing these issues effectively is absolutely vital to fostering democracy, tolerance, and respect for human rights in India.

PERSECUTION & DISCRIMINATION AGAINST MUSLIMS

On April 3rd, over 50 members of the Bajrang Dal militia in Haldwani, Uttarakhand, disrupted special Ramadan evening prayers at a local mosque.¹ The mob assaulted the



imam, as well as mosque attendees. A case was filed against those opposing the prayers under Indian Penal Code for rioting, voluntarily causing hurt, and criminal intimidation. This was among dozens of reported incidents of Muslim prayers being interrupted since the beginning of the holy month of Ramadan in 2023.

In Jharkhand, two young Muslim men aged 21 and 25 died under

suspicious circumstances in two separate incidents on April 7th.² The first, named Wasim Sajjad, was allegedly beaten by a police inspector when returning from a visit to his grandmother. However, the police said he'd had an accident while smuggling sand. Sajjad succumbed to his injuries in the hospital. The second incident involved Wajid Ansari, labeled a thief, who was tied to a tree by a mob of at least 14 people and



beaten up. Authorities did not file a report nor consider this a case of mob lynching.

¹ scroll.in/latest/1046805/hindutva-mob-stops-muslims-from-offering-namaz-in-uttarakhands-haldwani-attacks-imam

² newsroom.in/muslim-youth-jharkhand-mob-lynching-police-brutality

On April 9th, in Chhaigoan Devi village of Madhya Pradesh, a Muslim youth named Sheikh Firoz was beaten to death over suspicion of theft.³ He was found unconscious in a drainage channel, with multiple stab wounds and bruises on his body. He later passed away while being treated at the district hospital. Allegedly, Firoz was caught stealing chickpeas and was then brutally attacked and lynched by eight to ten local residents.



In Sonapat, Haryana, a small mosque was attacked by an armed mob during the evening prayer on April 9th. Over a dozen men with weapons barged into the mosque, causing chaos and violence.⁴ The police have arrested 16 of the 19 people accused in the case. Charges include rioting, unlawful assembly, promoting



enmity between different groups on religious grounds, and criminal intimidation. In the aftermath, some members of the local Hindu community apologized and emphasized the need for peace and brotherhood between the Muslim and Hindu communities. However, members of the Hindu militant groups like Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS) refused to take accountability, instead asserting that the mobbers were innocent and that the Tablighi Jamaat—an Islamic missionary organization—were to blame. The incident has left Muslim residents shocked and fearful as they witnessed unprecedented violence in their village.

On the same day in the Kashi Ram area of Uttar Pradesh, 28

³ maktobmedia.com/latest-news/muslim-youth-lynched-in-madhya-pradesh-over-suspected-theft

⁴ theprint.in/india/day-after-attack-chaos-at-mosque-in-sonapat-village-allegations-of-conspiracy-add-to-tensions/1509786

Muslims were charged with rioting and criminal trespass for installing loudspeakers and conducting mass prayers on government property. The complaint was lodged by local Hindu right-wing leader Ramgopal Pandey in response to a viral video showing people offering prayers in the building complex. According to Pandey, the praying folk had encroached upon a vocational school meant for children, which caused offense to religious sentiments.⁵



In Ranchi on April 10th, a 20-year-old Muslim youth named Wajid Ansari was fatally beaten by a Hindu mob on suspicion of theft.⁶ After eating his suhoor meal before beginning fast, he left the house around 4:30 in the morning. Villagers from nearby Mahuatoli accused him of breaking into

someone's house to steal. They tied him to an electric pole and beat him. He passed away in the hospital the following day.



On April 22nd, during the Eid Al Fitr holiday, the Uttar Pradesh Police in Kanpur booked over 1,700 Muslims for offering prayer on the roads outside mosques in three city areas.⁷ Prior to the holiday, authorities had been instructed to ensure that prayers were not offered on roads. However, on the day of Eid, a crowd gathered on the road in front of the Eidgah mosque. An FIR was registered, targeting 1,500 unidentified individuals and members of mosque management committees in the area. Approximately 250 people were charged at two other police stations. The charges included obstructing public servants in

⁵ muslimmirror.com/eng/28-booked-for-rioting-trespass-to-offer-namaz-on-govt-property-in-up

⁶ maktoobmedia.com/latest-news/20-year-old-muslim-man-beaten-to-death-in-jharkhand-over-suspicion-of-theft

⁷ maktoobmedia.com/latest-news/1700-muslims-booked-for-offering-eid-namaz-on-roads-in-kanpur

discharging duties, danger in public way, and punishment for wrongful restraint, among others.

On May 7th, in Narsapur, Telangana, a Muslim named Imran Ahmed was brutally assaulted by a right-wing Hindu mob chanting ‘Jai Shri Ram.’ His mother and pregnant sister, Ayesha, tried to shield him but also got hurt in the process. Two weeks later, Ayesha gave birth to a baby who was later declared brain dead, though it is unclear if this was caused by injuries inflicted on the mother during the incident. The police only arrested Imran, releasing him on bail shortly after.⁸

On May 14th, a Kashmiri medical student in Jammu district sustained multiple head injuries and received over 10 stitches after being attacked by a Hindu student due to an altercation over the recent Islamophobic Bollywood film “The Kerala Story.” The incident took place after Hindu students posted derogatory messages against the Muslim community on college WhatsApp groups. The Muslim

students objected to the offensive messages and to the planned viewing of the film, which led to an assault by the Hindu students. During the altercation, the Kashmiri student was attacked with an iron rod, and was severely injured and hospitalized.⁹



In Kanpur city on May 21st, a student at KIT College was assaulted by a group of students on the campus.¹⁰ The victim’s family filed an FIR at Maharajpur police station, stating that the attackers also filmed the incident and posted it on social media. Allegedly, the victim, Faiz Ejaz, was sitting in the college canteen with a female student when Swaroopam Tripathi, a final-year B. Pharma student, along with around six of his friends, brutally attacked Ejaz. After knocking him unconscious, the attackers

⁸ thequint.com/amp/story/south-india/muslim-man-telangana-attacked-right-wing-mob-narsapur

⁹ news.careers360.com/gmc-jammu-clash-kashmir-mbbs-students-the-kerala-story-hindu-muslim

¹⁰ siasat.com/kanpur-muslim-student-assaulted-on-campus-accused-absconding-2594779

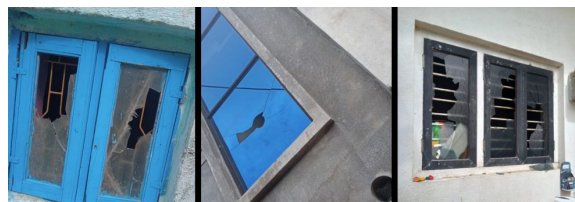
fled the scene. Faiz was later admitted to Lala Lajpat Rai Hospital in critical condition.



On May 26th, a bus carrying Hajj pilgrims in Rajasthan state, was stopped and held hostage on the Kota-Bundi Road near Menal Hotel. A violent Hindu far-right mob pelted stones at the bus, injuring several passengers, including women, children, and the bus driver. The attackers threatened the lives of the passengers and coerced them to chant “Jai Shree Ram” slogans. Some victims sustained severe injuries and were taken to the hospital. The assailants attempted to set the bus on fire and subjected the women to further abuse and harassment. Six arrests have been made in connection with the incident.¹¹

On June 4th, a Delhi-bound bus operated by Uttar Pradesh State Road Transport Corporation (UPSRTC) made an unscheduled stop in the Milak area of Rampur district to allow two passengers to offer Islamic prayer. Other passengers were upset by the delay and confronted the driver. Following a complaint, the driver and co-driver were suspended by UPSRTC for compromising the safety and security of passengers by halting the bus on highway.¹²

On June 7th, violence broke out in Kolhapur, Maharashtra, over social media posts that shared images of 18th-century Muslim rulers Tipu Sultan and Aurangzeb. Hindu far-right groups claimed that the posts were objectionable and called for a city shutdown.¹³ The protest turned violent, and a mob ransacked shops and vehicles owned by Muslims in various areas of Kolhapur.



¹¹ maktoobmedia.com/india/north-india/hajj-pilgrims-from-rajasthan-share-harrowing-accounts-from-hindutva-mob-attack

¹² maktoobmedia.com/india/up-driver-co-driver-suspended-for-halting-bus-few-extra-minutes-to-finish-islamic-prayer

¹³ scroll.in/latest/1050578/kolhapur-violence-36-arrested-for-rioting-vandalism-over-social-media-posts

Five juveniles were among the 41 taken into custody in connection with the incident. Internet services were suspended in the city, and prohibitory orders were issued banning the assembly of five or more persons until June 19th.



On June 14th, the Junagadh municipal corporation in Gujarat sent a notice to the administration of the Majewadi Gate Dargah, demanding ownership papers of the property. Fearing demolition and unnecessary police presence, local Muslims began protesting on June 16th.¹⁴ The protest escalated: over 500 people gathered around the Dargah, resulting in clashes. Police detained multiple Muslim men and publicly flogged them. One of the men who were publicly flogged was a local resident named Zakirbhai Makwana, who was

not a part of any protest but was picked up, flogged, and then beaten so brutally regardless that he was unable to stand when his family saw him at the local police station. The video of the incident went viral on social media.

Cow Vigilantism

In April, there was a surge in cow vigilantism incidents in the state of Haryana, where members of extremist Hindu far-right groups attacked truck drivers transporting cattle. These attacks mostly targeted Muslim drivers, reflecting the dangerous trend of mob violence against religious minorities in India. Time and time again, the mere act of transporting cattle, suspicion of possessing or consuming beef, or even the possession of cattle carcasses have been enough to provoke a sudden lynch mob. The victims, predominantly Muslims, suffer from grievous injuries and brute violence. Despite the alarmingly high death toll, there is a lack of concrete or decisive action being taken by the government to address this issue.¹⁵

¹⁴ thewire.in/communalism/junagadh-muslims-targeted-flogged-after-protest-over-possible-dargah-demolition

¹⁵ cjp.org.in/haryana-rising-incidents-of-cow-vigilantism-reported-in-april-states-district-level-special-committee-dysfunctional

On April 1st, in Panipat, Haryana, a mob of cow vigilantes assaulted two truck drivers. A video showed the two victims sitting on the road while a mob gathered around them, protesting the transport and slaughter of cows.¹⁶ The following week on April 9th, another incident occurred in Haryana involving the Bajrang Dal-led cow vigilante group. They engaged in a high-speed chase to stop a truck carrying cattle and assaulted the drivers. The vigilante mob later uploaded pictures on social media showing the truck drivers and the burst tires of the truck, with the cow vigilantes standing alongside it.¹⁷

A similar incident was reported on the 11th of April, on the K.M.P Expressway in Haryana, where various cow vigilante militia groups, including members of Bajrang Dal, brutally attacked a Muslim driver transporting cattle.¹⁸ Photographs of police officers posing alongside the cow vigilante militia members were later uploaded onto social media in a sickening show of apathy towards the violence committed.

On June 8th, a 23-year-old man named Lukman Ansari, who was transporting cattle, was lynched in Maharashtra's Nashik district by a group of 10-15 cow vigilantes.¹⁹ The mob first tried to extort money from the three Muslim men, and then began beating them with bamboo sticks and iron rods. Ansari's two aides managed to escape, but he succumbed to the assault. The incident came to light when Ansari's body was found in a gorge in the Igatpuri area. Six individuals associated with the Rashtriya Bajrang Dal were arrested in connection with the crime on June 11th.



On June 26th, another cow-related lynching took place in Nashik district. A Muslim man was lynched to death by a group of cow vigilantes who suspected him of carrying

¹⁶ bit.ly/3pS9rrs

¹⁷ bit.ly/46YEPVK

¹⁸ bit.ly/46WrpCW

¹⁹ newindianexpress.com/nation/2023/jun/14/2584972.html

beef.²⁰ The victims, 32-year-old Afan Ansari and 24-year-old Nasir Qureshi were seriously injured in the attack. Ansari tragically succumbed to his injuries during treatment at the SMBT Hospital in the Dhamangaon area. Qureshi survived and filed a complaint, leading to the arrest of 11 individuals by the Ghoti police, who are now facing charges of murder.



In Bihar, Saran district on June 28th, a 55-year-old truck driver named Jaharuddin lost his life in a mob attack after it was discovered that he was transporting animal bones to a factory in Nagara.²¹ Due to a mechanical fault, the truck had to stop for repairs, at which point a strong smell began to emanate from the container and drew the attention of locals. The crowd began questioning

Zahiruddin about the smell, and upon spotting the animal bones, they became enraged and violently attacked him. Jaharuddin's fellow laborers and assistant managed to escape, but he himself was unable to run due to an iron rod in his leg. Allegedly, local police arrived on the scene but merely watched as he was brutally beaten to the point of death.

On June 30th in Uttar Pradesh's Ghaziabad, multiple members of the Bajrang Dal assaulted three Muslim truck drivers and cleaners who were transporting animal remains to a factory for cat and dog food.²² A video which circulated online showed one of the drivers being violently beaten by a group of men believed to be from the Hindutva militant group. This



²⁰ outlookindia.com/national/maharashtra-cow-vigilantes-lynch-man-to-death-for-transporting-meat-11-arrested-news-298031

²¹ newindianexpress.com/nation/2023/jun/29/2589782.html

²² siasat.com/up-truck-drivers-transporting-animal-remains-face-mob-violence-2629294

incident adds to a series of violent incidents around the transportation of animals during the festival of Eid-ul-Adha, where the Muslim community has been targeted in mob attacks and faced police harassment across the country.

Hate Speech, Threats, and Rallies

On April 6th, the Maharashtra Police arrested a 50-year-old Muslim man named Suleman Ahmed Shaikh in Nanded district for opposing a hate rally held by suspended BJP leader T. Raja Singh.²³ While Raja Singh, a Telangana MLA, has multiple hate speech cases against him in Maharashtra, he has not been arrested yet. Singh continues to make incendiary communal speeches at Sakal Hindu Samaj-organized events in Maharashtra state.



On April 10th in Jagdalpur, Chhattisgarh, members of the BJP and VHP declared an economic boycott of Muslims and Christians following communal clashes in Bemetara district two days prior. The clashes were triggered by a fight between two school students from different communities and escalated into a larger conflict. A 23-year-old daily wage laborer was killed, and three police officials were injured during the violence. The police have arrested 11 people in connection with the communal violence. Additionally, two bodies were found near Korwai village in the same district where the violence occurred.²⁴

On April 23rd, Union Home Minister Amit Shah pledged to

²³ scroll.in/latest/1046990/muslim-man-arrested-for-asking-youth-to-oppose-hate-speech-accused-t-raj-singhs-rally

²⁴ scroll.in/latest/1047312/chhattisgarh-bjp-vhp-members-pledge-economic-boycott-of-muslims-christians-after-communal-clashes

eliminate reservations for Muslims in Telangana if the BJP gained power in the state during the upcoming elections later this year.²⁵ Speaking at a rally in Chevella near Hyderabad, Shah deemed the quotas given to Muslims in education, employment, and welfare schemes as unconstitutional. Shah's statement came a month after the BJP government in Karnataka decided to remove Muslims from the Other Backward Classes quota. In response, politician Asaduddin Owaisi criticized Shah, saying that the BJP had no vision for the state besides "anti-Muslim hate speech."



During an event organized by the RSS's media wing in Delhi on May 8th, Union Minister Satya Pal Singh Baghel made controversial remarks about Muslims, claiming that only a few "tolerant Muslims"

exist and that many adopt a facade in public life to attain high-status positions, only to reveal their true nature after retirement. He dismissed the idea that Mughal emperor Akbar's efforts toward unity were genuine and viewed them as mere political tactics.²⁶

On May 19th, Assam BJP Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma made a controversial statement at a natural farming convention, warning against the use of fertilizers in farming.²⁷ He claimed that there was a rise in heart and kidney diseases in the state due to excessive fertilizer use, referring to this as "fertilizer jihad." The statement raised concerns and targeted the largely Bengali-Muslim vegetable growers in the state's Kharupetia-Bechimari-Balugaon belt. These farmers, who constitute most of Assam's Muslim population, felt unfairly accused and denied involvement in a sinister plot. They argued that commercial farming was impossible without using chemicals and that stopping their use would severely impact crop production. While excessive

²⁵ scroll.in/latest/1047887/amit-shah-vows-to-scrap-muslim-quota-in-telangana-if-bjp-comes-to-power

²⁶ scroll.in/latest/1048807/basic-structure-of-india-is-hindu-rashtra-says-union-minister-sp-singh-baghel

²⁷ scroll.in/article/1050445/why-assams-farmers-are-furious-at-himanta-biswa-sarmas-fertiliser-jihad-jibe

chemical use is indeed a genuine problem, activists criticized the lack of state action to tackle this issue and suggested that Sarma's statements were politically motivated to create animosity and spread hate.

On June 4th, days after an attempt by two men to abduct a minor girl was foiled, threatening posters appeared on shops owned by Muslim traders in Purola town, in Uttarakhand, a state ruled by BJP, threatening Muslims to leave immediately. Some Muslim shops were ransacked and marked with cross signs.²⁸ Hindu far-right groups created a climate of ethnic cleansing, prompting many Muslim families to leave the town.²⁹

Since June 2022, when the BJP established their government in Maharashtra, Muslims in the state have been facing increased religious polarization and violence. Rallies promoting anti-Muslim hate and bigotry have been taking place continuously in different parts of the state with impunity. Recent clashes have resulted in

stone-pelting, businesses being targeted, and arrests, which further exacerbates social tensions.³⁰



Civil rights groups view this as a tactic by the BJP to create a perception of Hindus being under threat and gain votes for the upcoming general elections. State-wide rallies and protests, organized by far-right Hindu groups, have had a cascading effect, emboldening right-wing groups at the village level, leading to increased hostility against Muslims in their daily lives. Disturbing incidents have been reported from several rural areas in Maharashtra, where Muslims have been targeted for no reason, even while praying inside mosques.

These incidents indicate the rising communal tensions and the dangerous consequences of

²⁸ timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/in-uttarakhand-towns-muslims-wake-up-to-marked-shops-and-quit-notices/articleshow/100872675.cms

²⁹ deccanherald.com/amp/national/north-and-central/threatening-posters-appear-on-shops-owned-by-muslims-in-uttarakhand-town-after-bid-to-abduct-minor-1225356.html

³⁰ indiatomorrow.net/2023/06/09/maharashtra-muslims-at-receiving-end-with-polarisation-at-its-peak-since-bjp-formed-government-in-june-2022

religious polarization in the state. The situation has created an atmosphere of fear and insecurity for the Muslim community, who now face a heightened risk of discrimination and violence in their own neighborhoods and places of worship.

Illegal Demolitions and Evictions

On April 1st, the 500-year-old dargah of Syed Abdullah urf Bhurai Shah, located on Mathura Road in New Delhi, was demolished by the Public Works Department (PWD). It was claimed that the Dargah



structure had encroached on the footpath and was deemed illegal. The authorities had sent a notice to the caretaker of the dargah a month before the demolition, asking them to vacate. The caretaker claimed that the structure existed before the



footpath was constructed and that they had agreed to move the wall back 7 feet in consultation with the district magistrate. Despite this, the demolition was carried out with a large presence of Delhi police and paramilitary personnel.³¹

On April 11th, an encroachment removal drive³² was conducted by the Land And Development Office (L&DO), Central Public Works Department (CPWD), and North Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) in New Delhi's Bengali Market. During the operation, a boundary wall of a mosque considered an illegal encroachment, was demolished. Mosque officials have accused the authorities of not providing advance notice and claimed that the operation put the students at risk as they were inside the madrasah when the demolition

³¹ thewire.in/communalism/watch-bulldozer-in-delhi-again-pwd-demolishes-mazar-citing-illegal-construction

³² muslimmirror.com/eng/delhi-without-court-order-part-of-mosque-in-bengali-market-demolished-by-ndmc

began. Chairman of the Delhi Waqf and Member Legislative Assembly, Amanatullah Khan, raised concerns that due process was not followed, and the mosque was being demolished intentionally without any court notice. The L&DO chief stated that the demolition was carried out to implement a judicial order, while mosque officials maintain that proper legal procedures should have been followed.

The 250-year-old grave of Syed Nanhe Miyan Chishti, a revered spiritual figure, was demolished at the end corner of the Shri Ram Centre for Performing Arts in New Delhi's Mandi House on April 26th. The caretaker, Syed Anwar Ali Sabri, who had looked after the shrine for over 75 years, stated he received no prior notice, leaving him devastated. Despite seeking answers from various authorities, no one claimed responsibility for the demolition. Many regular visitors were deeply affected and expressed emotional distress and even anger over the lack of accountability and the absence of

prior notice for the demolition.³³

On May 18th, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma reiterated his commitment to shut down every madrasa in Assam state.³⁴ Sarma, who had infamously introduced a controversial law in 2020, intending to convert all state-run madrasas into 'regular schools' with a general education, announced the closure of 300 madrasas. This comes in addition to the closure of 600 earlier in March 2023.



On May 20th, the Dahod city administration in Gujarat demolished a century-old mosque and seven other places of worship as part of a road widening project under the Smart City initiative.³⁵ The Masjid Trust attempted to seek relief from the Gujarat High Court, producing land records

³³ maktoobmedia.com/india/delhi-overnight-demolition-of-sufi-shrine-leaves-caretaker-regular-visitors-in-dismay

³⁴ indiatoday.in/india/story/more-300-madrasas-to-be-closed-assam-cm-himanta-biswa-sarma-2381196-2023-05-19

³⁵ muslimmirror.com/eng/gujarat-historic-mosque-3-dargahs-among-8-sites-demolished-in-dahod

and arguing that the mosque was a Waqf property and therefore, approval of the Waqf Board should have been obtained before the demolition. Their efforts were unsuccessful, and the demolition operation began in the early morning with a large police presence. After the mosque was razed, four temples and three other dargahs were also demolished. The Masjid Trust plans to approach the court to request maintenance of the status quo ante after the demolition.



On June 1st in Assam's Darrang district, around three thousand predominantly Muslim families were uprooted from their homes in the Kasem char area. The eviction drive was carried out as the second addition to the national park to create wildlife habitat and

animal corridors. Locals, who had been living in these areas and were forced to leave their cultivated lands, expressed distress and uncertainty about their future. The BJP-led Assam government has extensively carried out evictions, disproportionately impacting Muslim peasants.³⁶

On June 20th, a mosque in Bahadurpur, Alwar, Rajasthan, was set on fire by a mob, including a local BJP leader Raman Gulati, who allegedly chanted provocative slogans and made derogatory remarks against Muslims during the incident.³⁷ Police registered an FIR against 50 local men and urged both parties to avoid further changes to the structure in the aftermath of the incident. Local residents fear that communal tensions might escalate in the area and result in further incidents, as assembly elections approach.



³⁶ maktoobmedia.com/features/expansion-of-national-park-in-assam-uproots-3000-predominantly-muslim-families

³⁷ thewire.in/communalism/rajasthan-mosque-arson-bjp

PERSECUTION & DISCRIMINATION AGAINST CHRISTIANS

In BJP-ruled Manipur, on April 11th, authorities demolished three churches in Imphal East district, citing them as “illegal constructions” on government land. Among the demolished churches, one of which was built in 1974, were the Evangelical Baptist Convention Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church Manipur, and Catholic Holy Spirit Church. The demolitions occurred shortly after the Manipur high court vacated its 2020 order for status quo on an eviction drive by the BJP-led state government.³⁸

A court in Ghazipur, Uttar Pradesh on April 23rd remanded six Protestant Christians, including two pastors, into judicial custody for allegedly violating a state law that restricts religious conversion.³⁹ Among the remanded was a one-year-old girl, who was not charged but had to accompany her parents in custody. The six

accused were from Kasimabad town, and were arrested during a routine Sunday prayer service after right-wing goons claimed it was for religious conversion. The police charged them with relevant provisions of the state’s stringent anti-conversion law.



In a ‘ghar wapsi’ (religious conversion) ceremony held in Jawahar Nagar mini stadium in Durg of Chhattisgarh on April 22nd, approximately 250 people, or around 100 families, were converted from Christianity to Hinduism.⁴⁰ The drive was jointly organized by the Sarvahitakarini Manav Seva Sansthan and other various local Hindu far-right

³⁸ thewire.in/communalism/three-churches-demolished-in-bjp-ruled-manipur-for-illegal-construction-reports

³⁹ mattersindia.com/2023/04/anti-conversion-law-infant-girl-among-six-remanded-in-up

⁴⁰ sanatanprabhat.org/english/74238.html

organizations. The event was attended by chief guest and senior BJP leader Prabal Pratap Singh Judev. Under his leadership, about 3,000 people have been forcibly converted ‘back’ to Hinduism in the past year.



In Madhya Pradesh on May 13th, an unlawful raid occurred during a routine prayer gathering at a private residence in Shahdol district in Madhya Pradesh.⁴¹ Police accused the Christian group of engaging in “religious conversion activity” and seized copies of the Bible and other documents. Ten individuals were arrested and remanded under the Madhya Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act, which prohibits unlawful conversion from one religion to another

by any use of misrepresentation, force, undue influence, coercion, any other fraudulent means, and allurement.

On June 2nd, a group of 300 Hindu radicals and village chiefs gathered at a church in Farrukh Nagar of Gurugram district, Haryana, where they questioned the church team about the need for a church in the village. Hindu groups said they would not allow the church in the village.

Following this incident, on June 4th, two churches faced threats of closure in New Delhi.⁴² At St. Joseph Vaz Catholic Mission Church in Gurugram after a group of around 25 armed Hindu Sena members threatened the priest, allegedly slapped him around, and gave him two weeks to shut down the church.



⁴¹ ucanews.com/news/10-people-arrested-on-conversion-charges-in-india/101314

⁴² mattersindia.com/2023/06/hindu-radicals-threaten-to-close-two-delhi-archdiocesan-churches

On June 6th, a Catholic nun named Sister Bibha Kerketta and her family members were arrested in Balachapper village of Chhattisgarh, India, for allegedly offending religious feelings and promoting enmity between religions after hosting a Mass attended



by close family members, priests, and nuns from the locality. Shortly after the guests had left, a group of twenty or so Hindu extremist men forced their way in, verbally abused and threatened the family, and destroyed their property. The family was then arrested under various sections of the state's anti-conversion laws and held in jail until bail was granted to them over a week later.⁴³

On June 24th, around 80 people linked to Hindu militant groups

Bajrang Dal and Vishwa Hindu Parishad rampaged Shahzadpur village in Kanpur Dehat, Uttar Pradesh.⁴⁴ The mob tore down a tin sheet boundary wall, defaced walls and damaged CCTV cameras at a church's construction site, claiming that it was being illegally built. Ajeet Raj, a local leader of Bajrang Dal, threatened an even larger-scale protest if the church was not demolished.

According to a recent report by the United Christian Forum (UCF), during the first half of 2023, there were 400 reported incidents of violence targeting Christians across 23 states in India, a significant increase from the previous year's 274 incidents during the same period.⁴⁵ Uttar Pradesh had the highest number of cases, followed by Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand. The UCF report highlights concerns about the growing hostility towards the Christian community. 88 incidents were documented in June alone, which is on average almost three attacks per day. The UCF also raised issues with inadequate investigation and

⁴³ ucanews.com/news/indian-nun-mother-arrested-for-offending-religion/101596

⁴⁴ muslimmirror.com/eng/up-mob-launches-violent-attacks-at-building-site-of-indian-catholic-schoolkanpur

⁴⁵ counterview.net/2023/07/spike-in-atrocities-against-christians.html

prosecution of perpetrators and false allegations of conversions under the Freedom of Religion Act.

Violence in Manipur

Beginning in May and continuing through July, horrific violence broke out in the northeastern state of Manipur, home to a diverse range of ethnic groups, including Meiteis, who are predominantly Hindu, and Kuki-Zomi tribal communities, who are largely Christian. The Meiteis have historically held significant political and economic power, while the tribal communities collectively make up around 35.4% of the state's population and occupy approximately 90% of its geographical area. The state is currently ruled by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).



The long-standing issue of land ownership and control has been a major source of conflict between the two groups. However, in recent years, these tensions have been further exacerbated by the growing political influence of the BJP and its ideological parent Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) in the state. These Hindu nationalist organizations have been actively promoting their faith as the dominant religion in India and have utilized the Meitei community to advance their political agenda in the state.⁴⁶

The recent outbreak of violence occurred shortly after the Manipur High Court ordered the government to respond to the Meitei community's request for Scheduled Tribe status. This designation

⁴⁶ christianitytoday.com/news/2023/may/manipur-violence-churches-india-tribals-meite.html

and religious tensions, violence, and displacement—but has also witnessed alarming instances of sexual violence against women. On May 4th, in Porompat district, a hostile mob comprising both men and women stormed into a girls' hostel belonging to a local nursing institute. The mob was specifically targeting women of the Kuki tribe, leading to a horrific assault



on two Kuki students, aged 19 and 20. The two Kuki women were forcibly dragged outside the hostel onto the main road, where the mob proceeded to brutally attack the two girls, thrashing them mercilessly in public view. Women within the mob incited further cruelty, urging the men to rape the victims and dismember their bodies. Later, the women were found unconscious

on the roadside and taken to a nearby hospital. Both victims lodged separate police complaints detailing the horrifying ordeal they experienced, including the physical assault, psychological torment, and threats of sexual violence.⁴⁹

On the same day in Kangpokpi district, residents of B Phainom village were forced to flee their homes. A 44-year-old woman, the wife of the village chief, and her daughter were discovered shortly after by a mob who proceeded to kill two of their neighbors. They then brutally assaulted, stripped, and groped the two women, threatening them with rape and murder if they did not comply. The two victims were left naked in the field. While the victims did not file a complaint herself, an FIR was registered by a relative in the Saikul police station of Kangpokpi district on May 18th. The FIR mentions charges of rape and murder against “unknown miscreants.”

In Imphal East, Manipur on May 15th, an 18-year-old girl was abducted, assaulted, and raped.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ scroll.in/article/1053038/everyone-should-know-what-happened-to-us-four-kuki-women-recount-brutal-assaults-they-survived
⁵⁰ thehindu.com/news/national/18-year-old-woman-assaulted-gangraped-in-manipur-on-may-15/article67110455.ece

Allegedly, a group of Meira Paibis women were responsible for handing her over to the armed men who abused her. In a secluded area, she was threatened, beaten, and gang-raped. After escaping from her captors, she was admitted in critical condition at a hospital in the neighboring state of Nagaland.

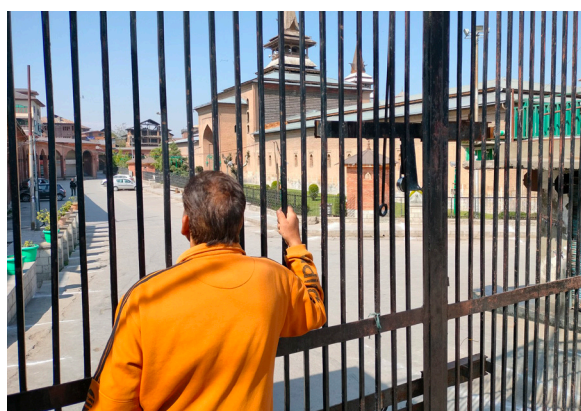


In July, Mizoram’s BJP Vice-President, R. Vanramchhuanga, resigned⁵¹ in protest against what he perceived as the center’s “indifference” towards the Christian community in the ongoing ethnic conflict between Kuki-Zomi tribals and non-tribal Meiteis. In his resignation letter, he expressed his deep hurt over the injustices being committed against the Christian communities in India, especially the demolition of churches which he said was being supported by the state and central authorities.

⁵¹ outlookindia.com/national/mizoram-bjp-vice-president-resigns-in-protest-against-attacks-on-churches-in-manipur-news-302741

JAMMU & KASHMIR

The second quarter of 2023 saw a continuing trend of state repression in Kashmir.



On April 14th, authorities disallowed congregational prayers at the historic Jamia Masjid in Srinagar, drawing criticism and raising doubts about the claimed normalcy in “Naya Kashmir.” Eyewitnesses reported that a J&K Police vehicle was stationed at the main gate of the mosque, preventing worshippers from entering for the Jumatul-Vida prayers. The mosque’s closure on such a significant day left worshippers, especially those who were elderly and traveled from

various parts of Kashmir to get to the mosque, disappointed and anguished.⁵²

On April 16th, a previously unexploded shell killed a boy in Kargil and injured two others⁵³ at the Line of Control between India and Pakistan, which remains intensely militarized. Killings, maimings, forced displacement of people, and violations of the right to travel have substantially increased since 2016, as reported by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.⁵⁴



On or around April 27th, Indian forces assaulted a pregnant woman, causing her to miscarry and lose her unborn child. A man named

⁵² thewire.in/rights/srinagar-closure-of-historic-jamia-masjid-suggests-all-is-not-well-in-kashmir-say-politicians

⁵³ kashmirilife.net/one-dead-two-injured-after-old-unexploded-shell-goes-off-315275

⁵⁴ ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Countries/IN/DevelopmentsInKashmirJune2016ToApril2018.pdf

⁵⁵ thewire.in/security/five-soldiers-killed-in-terror-attack-in-jks-poonch-army

Mukhtar Hussain Shah, who was called in for questioning regarding the Poonch terror attack case⁵⁵, died in what appeared to be a custodial killing. It was alleged that he consumed poison at his house, and passed away. Following his death, his family criticized the ordered magisterial probe by the Jammu and Kashmir administration, called it an “official cover-up,” and demanded a judicial inquiry due to discrepancies and signs of torture on Mukhtar’s body. The family further claims that their house was searched and they faced harassment by the authorities.⁵⁶

On May 7th, 26-year-old Danish Khazir Bhat from Sopore town in North Kashmir tragically lost his life in a distressing incident.⁵⁷ According to eyewitnesses, Bhat was coerced by a group of soldiers to climb an electric pole and install a camera. Tragically, he was electro-



cuted when his elbow touched a live wire, and succumbed to his injuries. The soldiers fled the scene, and an FIR was filed against them.



On June 24th, in South Kashmir’s Pulwama district, army soldiers forced villagers to chant ‘Jai Shri Ram’ slogans inside a mosque. Locals reported that at least ten children were detained and five beaten. The soldiers also forced the muezzin in the mosque to chant slogans during the call for prayer. This incident has led to demands for an investigation by two former J&K chief ministers.⁵⁸

Kashmiri human rights defenders and journalists continue to bear the brunt of India’s excessive use of force and repressive policies. The notable crackdown has

⁵⁶ thewire.in/rights/jk-inquiry-is-official-cover-up-says-family-of-man-who-died-of-suicide-after-he-was-summoned

⁵⁷ scroll.in/article/1050514/in-kashmir-army-unit-booked-as-young-man-dies-of-electric-shock

⁵⁸ thewire.in/rights/kashmir-army-jai-shri-ram-mosque-amit-shah

only increased. Several journalists and activists, most recently Irfan Mehraj⁵⁹ who was arrested in March of 2023, have faced harassment, intimidation, and legal action for their work, particularly when covering sensitive topics or criticizing government policies. Freedom of the press has been continuously challenged through the use of restrictive laws, including the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA).

On April 6th, a special National Investigative Agency (NIA) court in Bombay rejected human rights defender Gautam Navlakha's bail application, claiming there were reasonable grounds to believe accusations against him, including him being a member of the banned Communist Party of India. Navlakha, who was arrested on April 14th, 2020, under various sections of the IPC and UAPA, has been under house arrest since November 2022. NIA prosecutors explicitly cited Navlakha's advocacy on human rights issues relating to Kashmir in arguing for the denial of bail.⁶⁰

On April 13th, the Jammu & Kashmir High Court officially rejected journalist Fahad Shah's detention under the Public Safety Act, finding that he had been deprived of his constitutional and legal rights.⁶¹ Despite his immediate release being ordered, he continues to be detained under the draconian anti-terror law called the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA). This is one occurrence of many, exemplifying the Indian government's growing repression of the press in the Kashmir & Jammu region: decisions by local courts to free arrested journalists are often swiftly nullified by rearrests under new cases.



On April 26th, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) carried out a raid at the office of

⁵⁹ [aljazeera.com/news/2023/3/21/kashmiri-journalist-irfan-mehraj-arrested-under-terrorism-charges](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/3/21/kashmiri-journalist-irfan-mehraj-arrested-under-terrorism-charges)

⁶⁰ thewire.in/law/elgar-parishad-case-gautam-navlakha-bail-denied

⁶¹ kashmirilife.net/court-quashes-psa-against-kashmiri-journalist-315092/



imprisoned human rights activist Khurram Parvez in the Budgam district of Central Kashmir.⁶² The operation, conducted by a joint team of agencies, resulted in the seizure of some documents. Parvez, who previously held positions as the program coordinator of the Jammu and Kashmir Coalition of Civil Societies (JKCCS) and the chairperson of the Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances, was arrested by the NIA in November 2021. He was charged under various sections of the UAPA, including “criminal conspiracy,” “attempt to wage war against the government,” and “raising funds for militancy acts.” He has been imprisoned since.

⁶² tribuneindia.com/news/j-k/nia-searches-jailed-rights-activists-office-501358

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Indian government should prioritize enacting and enforcing legislation that protects the rights of religious minorities. This legislation should address hate speech, communal violence, and targeted attacks, holding perpetrators accountable for their actions. It should also guarantee the right to freedom of religion, ensuring that individuals can practice their faith without fear of persecution or coercion. By reinforcing legal protections, the government will send a clear message that any form of discrimination or violence against religious minorities will not be tolerated.

The government should take immediate action to halt violence against Kuki-Zomi tribals in Manipur. Center and state governments should enforce stringent measures to protect and ensure the safety of minorities.

To address human rights violations and ensure impartial investigations, independent oversight bodies should be established to monitor and report cases of abuse and discrimination against religious minorities. These bodies should be able to conduct investigations, prosecute offenders, and recommend measures to prevent further violations. This will demonstrate the government's commitment to upholding human rights and will help rebuild trust among religious minority communities.

The Union government must pass a national anti-lynching bill to protect religious 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.

The Indian government should support and collaborate with local

community initiatives to promote religious harmony and social cohesion. Funding projects that foster interfaith cooperation, cultural exchange, and community development can help bridge gaps between religious groups and reduce tension. Empowering local communities to address the root causes of religious discrimination and violence can lead to long-lasting positive change.

The international community should engage with the Indian government and express concern over the treatment of religious minorities. Diplomatic efforts and international pressure should encourage and incentivize India to uphold its commitment to human rights as enshrined in the Indian constitution and various international agreements. Sanctions may be considered if there is a persistent failure to address the issue.

The President of the United States can 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. The Biden administration should impose sanctions on leaders and members of Hindu militant groups.

The U.S. Department of State should accept the United States Commission for International Religious Freedom's recommendation to designate India as a Country of Particular Concern for its egregious violations of human rights and religious freedoms.

Addressing the treatment of religious minorities in India requires a comprehensive approach with legal, social, and diplomatic measures. By prioritizing the protection of minorities, promoting interfaith dialogue, enhancing law enforcement training, and empowering local community initiatives, the government can foster an environment of religious tolerance and respect. International engagement can complement domestic efforts in ensuring that the fundamental rights of religious minorities are upheld, fostering a more inclusive and harmonious society in India.