

3. USCIRF Annual Report, 2020

Prelims Syllabus: International Policies & Schemes

Mains Syllabus: GS-II Important International Institutions, Agencies and fora- their structure, Mandate.

Why in News?

- The **U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF)** has downgraded India to the lowest ranking, “countries of particular concern” (CPC) in its 2020 Report.

About the News:

- The report, released in Washington by the federal government commission that functions as an advisory body, placed India alongside countries, including China, North Korea, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. India was categorised as a “**Tier 2 country**” in last year’s listing.
- Tier II countries are those in which violations engaged in or tolerated by government are serious and characterized by at least one of the elements of systematic, on-going, and egregious (horrible).
- Tier II list also means the violations meet one or two, but not all three, of the elements of the systematic, ongoing, egregious test for CPC status.
- This is the first time since 2004 that India has been placed in this category.
- According to the report, India took a sharp downward turn in 2019, which included specific concerns about the Citizenship Amendment Act, the proposed National Register for Citizens, anti-conversion laws and the situation in Jammu and Kashmir.

Reasons Cited by the Panel:

- The national government used its strengthened parliamentary majority to institute national-level policies violating religious freedom across India, especially for Muslims.”
- The panel said that the CPC designation was also recommended because “national and various State governments also allowed nationwide campaigns of harassment and violence against religious minorities to continue with impunity, and engaged in and tolerated hate speech and incitement to violence against them.

Response by Indian Government:

- Government of India reacted sharply to the USCIRF report, terming it “biased and tendentious” and rejected its observations.

- Its biased and tendentious comments against India are not new. But on this occasion, its misrepresentation has reached new levels.
- It has not been able to carry its own Commissioners in its endeavour. We regard it as an organisation of particular concern and will treat it accordingly.

Significance of the Report:

- In its Annual Report, USCIRF unflinchingly describes threats to religious freedom around the world and recommends to the State Department countries for designation as “countries of particular concern” (CPCs) for engaging in or tolerating “systematic, ongoing, egregious violations.”
- USCIRF also recommends to the State Department that non-state actors cited for similarly severe violations be designated as “entities of particular concern” (EPCs).

Way Forward:

- India saw an “overall deterioration of religious freedom conditions in recent years”.
- India is facing declining religious freedom, apart from increased securitisation and politicisation of religion.
- It is increasingly becoming difficult to separate religion and politics. It is a tactic which is sometimes intended by those who seek to discriminate against certain religious communities.
- Over the last decade Minorities conditions have deteriorated in country. The reason is attributed to extremist groups, anti-conversion laws, cow-protection groups, mob lynching, concerns that millions from Assam will be incorrectly left out of NRC (National Register of Citizen) and a denying international NGOs registration.
- Further deterioration in the Religious freedom may put India on various sanctions by the World Countries and may severely affect India’s emerging economy. So Indian Government has to take some preventive steps against the religious freedom of the people.