

RELIGION AND FREEDOM: ON INDIA AND COMMUNAL VIOLENCE

India Must Protect Its Freedoms, And Come Down Heavily On Religious Violence

Religious freedom is of paramount importance, not because it is about religion, but because it is about freedom. The characterisation by the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) of India as a country of particular concern, in its annual report, is not entirely surprising, considering its dim and known views about sectarian violence and aggravating governmental measures over the last year. The Indian government not only repudiated the report but also ridiculed the USCIRF. The autonomous, bipartisan commission's influence over any U.S. executive action is limited and occasional but its presumption of global authority appears amusingly expansive. Whether or not the U.S. government acts on its recommendation to impose targeted sanctions on Indian government agencies and officials depends on American strategic interests. The U.S. has used arguments of freedom, democracy, tolerance, and transparency as tools in its strategic pursuits, but there is no proof of any uniform or predictable pattern of enforcement of such moral attributes. The process can be selective and often arbitrary in spotlighting countries. Mirroring this pattern, India selectively approaches global opinions on itself, embracing and celebrating laudatory ones and rejecting inconvenient ones. The frantic, and relatively successful, efforts to raise its Ease of Doing Business ranking by the World Bank is a case in point. Many of these reports have a circulatory life — the USCIRF report quotes U.N. Special Rapporteurs to buttress its point on the discriminatory outcome of the National Register of Citizens in Assam. Overall, such reports contribute to the construction of an image of a country, and the Indian government is cognisant of this pattern. In March, the Indian government told Niti Aayog to track 32 global indices and engage with the bodies that measure them, to advance reform and growth.

India advertises itself as a multi-religious democracy and as an adherent to global norms of rule of law. It also aspires to be on the table of global rule making. For a country with such stated ambitions, its record on religious freedom as reflected through events of the last one year is deeply disconcerting. The catalogue of religious violence, incitement and wrecking of the rule of law in several parts of the country remains an unsettling fact. The partisan nature of the ruling dispensation is also difficult to wish away. Reputation is important for a country's economic development and global standing but beyond that instrumental perspective, rule of law and communal harmony are essential for any functioning democracy.

Meanings of Difficult Words:

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| 1. come down on (phrasal verb) – punish, penalize, discipline (harshly). | 10. bipartisan (adjective) – involving cooperation between two (opposite & big) political parties. |
| 2. paramount (adjective) – most important; foremost, primary. | 11. influence (noun) – power, authority, sway, leverage. |
| 3. characterization (noun) – a description of the distinctive features of something. | 12. occasional (adjective) – infrequent, irregular, periodic. |
| 4. dim (adjective) – indistinct, ill-defined, unclear, vague, blurred. | 13. presumption (noun) – assumption, supposition, speculation, judgement, conclusion. |
| 5. sectarian (adjective) – denoting a sect (a group of people); factional, partisan. | 14. amusingly (adverb) – interestingly, laughably. |
| 6. aggravate (verb) – made serious/severe, worsen, compound, exacerbate, enrage. | 15. expansive (adjective) – extensive, broad, wide-ranging. |
| 7. repudiate (verb) – reject, deny, disavow, contradict, rebut. | 16. sanctions (noun) – action taken, or an order given to force a country to obey international laws by limiting or stopping trade with that country, by not allowing |
| 8. ridicule (verb) – treat with contempt, scorn, make fun of, deride, mock, laugh at. | |
| 9. autonomous (noun) – self-governing, independent, self-determining. | |

- economic aid for that country, etc (Courtesy: VOA Learning English).
17. **strategic interest** (noun) – it is a broad term that usually requires a relationship between two parties/countries that is mutually beneficial to both of them. The benefits can come in the form of increased safety, Better Trade relations, access to financial markets etc.
 18. **tolerance** (noun) – forbearance, liberality, lack of prejudice, open-mindedness.
 19. **transparency** (noun) – clarity, straightforwardness, clearness.
 20. **pursuit** (noun) – aspiration, quest, search (for).
 21. **enforcement** (noun) – implementation, application, fulfilment, execution.
 22. **attribute** (noun) – quality, feature, characteristic, trait, element.
 23. **selective** (adjective) – critical, demanding, particular; careful, cautious.
 24. **arbitrary** (adjective) – random/casual, unpredictable, inconsistent, unmotivated/unreasonable.
 25. **spotlight** (verb) – focus attention on, highlight, draw attention to, underline, underscore.
 26. **mirror** (verb) – reflect, imitate, copy.
 27. **embrace** (verb) – welcome, accept, adapt, take up.
 28. **laudatory** (adjective) – full of praise, complimentary/admiring, congratulatory.
 29. **frantic** (adjective) – distressed, distraught, berserk/panic-stricken.
 30. **relatively** (adverb) – comparatively, proportionately, by comparison; somewhat.
 31. **case in point** (phrase) – example, instance, sample.
 32. **circulatory** (adjective) – relating to circulation or the circulatory system.
 33. **rappporteur** (noun) – a person who is officially appointed by an organization to investigate a problem or provide reports on the happenings of its meetings.
 34. **buttress** (verb) – support, strengthen, reinforce, fortify.
 35. **discriminatory** (adjective) – biased, unfair, unjust, inequitable.
 36. **construction** (noun) – forming, making, creation, establishment.
 37. **cognisant** (adjective) – aware, well informed about, familiar with.
 38. **indices** plural of **index** (noun) – measure; guide, indication.
 39. **measure** (verb) – evaluate, assess, appraise.
 40. **advance** (verb) – support, improve, promote, further.
 41. **advertise** (verb) – announce, proclaim, promote.
 42. **adherent** (noun) – follower, supporter, advocate.
 43. **rule of law** (phrase) – it is described as “a principle of governance in which all persons, institutions and entities, public and private, including the State itself, are accountable to laws that are publicly promulgated, equally enforced and independently adjudicated, and which are consistent with international human rights norms and standards.
 44. **the table** (noun) – the meeting place (to discuss & settle an issue).
 45. **stated** (adjective) – fixed, agreed, declared, determined, claimed/professed.
 46. **reflect** (verb) – indicate, show, display, represent.
 47. **disconcerting** (adjective) – discomfiting, unsettling, disturbing.
 48. **catalogue** (noun) – a series of bad/unpleasant things.
 49. **incitement** (noun) – inducement, instigation, stirring up, provocation.
 50. **wrecking** (noun) – destruction, demolition, knocking down, breaking up.
 51. **unsettling** (adjective) – disturbing, upsetting, bothering.
 52. **partisan** (adjective) – biased, prejudiced, one-sided.
 53. **dispensation** (noun) – (a political) system, organization, party.
 54. **wish away** (phrasal verb) – try to stop/eliminate something (problem) just by wishing that it did not exist.
 55. **standing** (noun) – status, ranking, position.
 56. **instrumental** (adjective) – helpful, useful; significant, important.
 57. **perspective** (noun) – outlook/prospect, viewpoint, standpoint.

BIDEN'S BID: ON THE PRESUMPTIVE DEMOCRATIC NOMINEE

Biden Has The Support Of Most Democrats, But He Must Reach Out To Other Sections Too

Hillary Clinton, the 2016 Democratic presidential nominee and former Secretary of State, has endorsed the presumptive Democratic nominee for the 2020 election, former Vice-President Joe Biden. With her endorsement Mr. Biden now enjoys unequivocal support across the spectrum of Democratic Party heavyweights, including former President Barack Obama, Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren, and Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders. The support of Mr. Sanders is especially critical to the Biden campaign. Young voters, voters of colour and a variety of other cohorts within the larger body of U.S. progressives through this year's campaign were, and possibly still are, vocal supporters of Mr. Sanders and his "democratic socialist" policy agenda for the middle class. These groups also backed Mr. Sanders in 2016, when he spoke of reining in the excesses of Wall Street, cancelling student debt, Medicare for all, expanding social security and a green new deal emphasising renewable and clean energy over traditional reliance on fossil fuels. While the then nominee, Ms. Clinton, went on to win over 65 million votes in the presidential election, her nomination campaign was hobbled by a long season of bickering with Mr. Sanders. In that regard Mr. Biden has already surpassed Ms. Clinton in securing the support of the most important voices in the Democratic pantheon.

As the nomination race draws to a close at the Democratic National Convention in August, his ground game must now move up a gear to take on incumbent U.S. President Donald Trump, with a special focus on managing the COVID-19 pandemic. On the one hand Mr. Biden's most obvious line of attack will be to highlight a series of bumbles that Mr. Trump has made in his handling of the crisis, from not heeding intelligence calls to take decisive action early enough when there were warning signs coming out of China, to playing politics with States desperately in need of medical equipment, and to making bizarre and reckless comments on untested "solutions". Yet, just like Ms. Clinton in 2016, Mr. Biden cannot win without paying heed to undecided and independent voters, especially in the swing States. If the 2016 election held any lessons for Democrats, it is to not underestimate the importance of economic issues, especially job losses. Indeed, in the context of the COVID-19 crisis, there have been numerous rallies across the U.S. where protesters have not only lashed out at Democrats for what they described as deliberate exaggeration and politicisation of the pandemic and its effects, but also appear to genuinely question the lockdowns that impact commercial activity. To win in November, Mr. Biden will have to balance his policies promoting mainstream values of his party with bipartisan outreach that brings a large swathe of the working population of middle America under the Democratic tent.

Meanings of Difficult Words:

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. bid (noun) – attempt, effort, endeavour/try. 2. presumptive nominee (noun) – In United States presidential elections, the presumptive nominee is a presidential candidate who is assumed to be their party's nominee, but has not yet been formally. 3. presumptive (adjective) – probable, likely, prospective, assumed. 4. reach out (phrasal verb) – contact someone to obtain/offer help/assistance/cooperation. 5. endorse (verb) – uphold, support, ratify, approve. 6. unequivocal (adjective) – without doubt, clear, undeniable, outright, unambiguous, categorical. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. spectrum (noun) – wide range, gamut, ambit. 8. heavyweight (noun) – very important person, leader. 9. cohort (noun) – group; a group/division of people 10. vocal (adjective) – vehement, vigorous, emphatic, keen, zealous. 11. democratic socialist (noun) – a person who believes in the idea of that both the economy and society should be run democratically-to meet public needs, not to make profits for a few. (democratic socialism is a call for the democratically-elected (government) to use the public sector to promote greater equality and opportunity). |
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12. **back** (verb) – support, endorse, favour, stand behind.
13. **speak of** (verb) – mention, refer to, remark on, discuss.
14. **rein** (verb) – restrain, check, curb, constrain, keep under control.
15. **excesses** (noun) – uncontrolled/unrestricted behaviour.
16. **debt** (noun) – financial obligation, outstanding payment, payment in arrears.
17. **green** (adjective) – environmentally friendly, environmentally sound, energy-efficient, energy-saving.
18. **emphasise** (verb) – draw attention to, underscore, highlight.
19. **clean energy** (noun) – renewable energy, green energy; energy generated from the natural resources (such as water, wind & solar energy).
20. **reliance** (noun) – dependence; trust/confidence on something.
21. **fossil fuel** (noun) – non renewable resources (or fossil fuels such as coal, oil and natural gas are formed from the buried /deposited organic materials).
22. **go on to** (phrasal verb) – continue, carry on, proceed.
23. **hobble** (verb) – restrict/control/limit the activity or development of something.
24. **bickering** (adjective) – disagreeing, arguing, fighting.
25. **in that regard** (phrase) – (in that) consideration, particularity, detail/fact.
26. **surpass** (verb) – be greater than, exceed, outdo/eclipse.
27. **pantheon** (noun) – a group of famous or important people.
28. **incumbent** (adjective) – current, existing, present (in power).
29. **move up a gear** (phrase) – to start to do something (energetic, vigorous, or effective) than previously.
30. **take on** (phrasal verb) – compete against, oppose, challenge, face.
31. **incumbent** (adjective) – current, existing, present (in power).
32. **bungle** (noun) – mess, mishandling, mismanagement.
33. **heed** (verb) – pay attention to, take notice of, listen to, notice.
34. **intelligence call** (noun) – appeal/demand by a government (surveillance) agency.
35. **decisive** (adjective) – resolute, firm, strong-minded, determined.
36. **desperately** (adverb) – seriously/urgently, pressing, intensely.
37. **bizarre** (adjective) – strange, unusual, unconventional/eccentric, ridiculous.
38. **reckless** (adjective) – careless, thoughtless, incautious/heedless.
39. **swing State** (noun) – it refers to any (U.S) state that could reasonably be won by either the Democratic or Republican presidential candidate by a swing in votes. “Red state” refers to states of the United States whose voters predominantly choose Republican Party (red) presidential candidates where as “blue state” refers to states of the United States whose voters predominantly select Democratic Party (blue) presidential candidates.
40. **indeed** (adverb) – in fact, actually, undeniably.
41. **context** (noun) – circumstance, condition, situation.
42. **lash out** (phrasal verb) – criticize, castigate, condemn/censure.
43. **deliberate** (adjective) – intentional, planned, purposeful.
44. **exaggeration** (noun) – overstatement, overemphasis, overplaying, magnification, amplification.
45. **mainstream** (noun) – something (certain beliefs/ideas/activities) which are accepted or recognized by most people as a normal or typical.
46. **bipartisan** (adjective) – involving cooperation between two (opposite & big) political parties.
47. **outreach** (noun) – the level of reaching out/activity/effort; involvement.
48. **swathe** (noun) – a wide area (of something).
49. **tent** (noun) – camp, base, shelter/umbrella, cover/roof
