

United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) report

April 27, 2022

In news- The USCIRF Annual Report 2022 has been released recently.

Key highlights of the report-

- For the third consecutive year, the USCIRF has recommended to the US State Department to designate India as a **“Country of Particular Concern”**.
- India is among 15 countries to have been accorded the dubious honour.
- The **other countries under this category are** Afghanistan, Burma, China, Eritrea, Iran, Nigeria, North Korea, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Vietnam.
- These 15 countries are designated as such “because their governments engage in or tolerate systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations”.
- It has said that religious freedom conditions in India had “significantly worsened” in 2021, for the third year in a row.
- As per the report, in 2021 the Indian government escalated its promotion and enforcement of policies including those promoting a Hindu-nationalist agenda that negatively affect Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Dalits, and other religious minorities.
- The report touches on challenges faced by Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs), especially with regard to foreign funding. It also highlights anti-conversion laws.
- The Indian government has, previously, pushed back

against the USCIRF's grading, questioning its locus standi.

- In 2020, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar called the Commission an "Organisation of Particular Concern."

About USCIRF-

- USCIRF is an independent, bipartisan, U.S. federal government commission created by the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) that monitors the universal right to freedom of religion or belief abroad.
- It uses international standards, such as Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to monitor violations of religious freedom or belief abroad and makes policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State, and Congress.
- It is composed of private sector commissioners who volunteer their time in support of USCIRF's mandate, and the U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, who is a non-voting member.
- Commissioners are appointed by the President and Democratic and Republican leaders in the House and Senate.
- USCIRF is a congressionally created entity, **not an NGO, interest group, or advocacy organization.**