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India

International Religious Freedom Report 2006

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The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. However, the Government sometimes did not act swiftly enough to counter effectively societal attacks against religious minorities and attempts by some leaders of state and local governments to limit religious freedom. This resulted in part from legal constraints on national government action inherent in the country's federal structure and from shortcomings in its law enforcement and justice systems, although courts regularly upheld the constitutional provision of religious freedom. Despite Government efforts to foster communal harmony, some extremists continued to view ineffective investigation and prosecution of attacks on religious minorities, particularly at the state and local level, as a signal that they could commit such violence with impunity, although numerous cases were in the courts at the end of the reporting period.

While the National Government took positive steps in key areas to improve religious freedom, the status of religious freedom generally remained the same during the period covered by this report. The United Progressive Alliance (UPA) continued to implement an inclusive and secular platform based on respect for the country's traditions of secular government and religious tolerance, and the rights of religious minorities. Terrorists attempted to provoke religious conflict by attacking Hindu Temples in Ayodhya and Varanasi. The Government reacted in a swift manner to rein in Hindu extremists, prevent revenge attacks and reprisal, and assure the Muslim community of its safety. The Government also quelled religious violence in Vadodara, Gujarat, after protests over the demolition of a Muslim shrine threatened to spark Hindu-Muslim violence. The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) continued monitoring ongoing legal battles surrounding the 2002 Gujarat riots.

Despite the Government's 2005 action to withdraw controversial textbooks espousing a Hindu nationalist agenda, continuing problems with biased textbooks in some states led the Government to take further action by recommending the formation of a National Textbook Council to ensure such books no longer appear in the curriculum.

Despite the UPA Government's rejection of "Hindutva," the ideology that espouses politicized inculcation of Hindu religious and cultural norms above other religious norms, the ideology continued to influence governmental policies and societal attitudes in some regions at the state and local levels. However, "Hindutva"-based policies could not be implemented without passing court review to determine whether they were consistent with the principles enshrined in the country's secular constitution.

In March 2006, the Government of Rajasthan passed an anti-conversion bill. However, by the end of the period covered by this report, it had not taken effect, since it was not approved by the governor and continued to await presidential review.

In August 2005, the Nanavati commission, tasked with conducting a re-inquiry into the anti Sikh riots of 1984, released its report. The report cited several prominent Congress party leaders for complicity in the violence and implicated law enforcement personnel in the deaths, accusing them of refusing to perform their duty to maintain law and order. Minister Jagdish Tytler and Member of Parliament Sajjan Kumar were indicted in the report for purportedly leading the rioters. After the report's release, Tytler resigned from his post in the Ministry of Overseas Affairs and Kumar resigned from the Delhi Rural Development Board, but no formal punishment had been handed down by the end of the period covered by this report. The Government also set up two committees to disburse financial compensation promised by Prime Minister Singh to the victims' families. The Government approved an extra \$158 million (7 billion INR) in compensation: \$7,800 (350 thousand INR) for every family member killed and \$2,800 (125 thousand INR) for those injured.

A formal judicial resolution to the 2002 Gujarat violence remained uncertain. However, there were significant developments during the period covered by this report, most notably convictions in the Best Bakery case. In February 2006, a Mumbai court gave life sentences to nine persons convicted for their role in the death of fourteen persons who took refuge in the bakery. All nine were among twenty-one individuals acquitted by a Vadodara fast-track court almost three years ago. Of the remaining twelve, eight were acquitted and four were "in hiding". In response to a supreme court mandate, in February 2006, the Gujarat police stated that it would reinvestigate 1,600 of the approximately 2,000 cases that were filed and closed in 2002. In March 2006, the Banarjee Commission report stated that the Godhra train fire was an accident.

The vast majority of Indians of every religious faith lived in peaceful coexistence; however, tensions between religious groups were a problem in some areas. While the Government took some steps, violence directed against minorities by both state and non-state actors occurred in several states.

Terrorists continued deadly attacks against religious targets. In July 2005, they attacked the Ram Hindu temple complex in Ayodhya. In October 2005, terrorists attacked markets throughout Delhi on the eve of the Hindu festival of Diwali and the Muslim Eid festival. In March 2006, terrorists also bombed Delhi's Jama Masjid mosque, injuring five, and a prominent Hindu temple in Varanasi, killing at least twenty-one and injuring sixty-two others. Terrorists also killed thirty-five Kashmiri Hindus in two massacres in May 2006.

Hindu-Muslim tension continued over disputed places of worship claimed by both groups to be sacred sites. There were instances of politically-manipulated religious tension in Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh and Vadodara, Gujarat in early 2006. Police and state authorities took appropriate steps to end the violence and curb mob actions.

Conversion continued to be a highly contentious issue. Some Hindu organizations and others frequently alleged that Christian missionaries lured converts, particularly from the lower castes, with offers of free education and healthcare, and equated such actions with forced conversions. Some Christian groups alleged that Hindu groups forcibly "reconverted" those who had embraced Christianity. Several state governments, most recently the Government of Rajasthan, enacted laws to criminalize coerced and/or fraudulent conversions. Some nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) claimed some state governments used these laws to restrict voluntary conversions and to harass religious minorities.

The U.S. government discussed religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy and its consulates promoted religious freedom in their discussions with the country's senior leadership, as well as with state and local officials, and supported initiatives to encourage religious and communal harmony. During meetings with key leaders of all significant religious communities, U.S. officials discussed reports of ongoing harassment of minority groups, converts, and missionaries, explained U.S. government policies around the world, and endeavored to better understand Indian religious attitudes towards the United States. Embassy officers continued to investigate and discuss religious freedom incidents of concern such as violence in Gujarat, the implementation and reversal of anti-conversion legislation, attacks on places of worship, caste-based discrimination, and the plight of internally displaced Hindu Kashmiris.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 1.3 million square miles and a population of 1.03 billion. According to the 2001 Government census, Hindus constituted 80.5 percent of the population, Muslims 13.4 percent, Christians 2.3 percent, Sikhs 1.8 percent, and others, including Buddhists, Jains, Parsis (Zoroastrians), Jews, and Baha'is, 1.1 percent. Slightly more than 90 percent of Muslims were Sunni; the rest were Shi'a. Buddhists included followers of the Mahayana and Hinayana schools, and there were both Roman Catholic and Protestant Christians. Tribal groups (members of indigenous groups historically outside the caste system), which in government statistics generally were included among Hindus, often practiced traditional indigenous religions (animism). Hindus and Muslims were spread throughout the country, although large Muslim populations were found in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Maharashtra, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Kerala, and Muslims were the majority in Jammu and Kashmir. Christians were concentrated in the northeast, as well as in the southern states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Goa. Three small northeastern states (Nagaland, Mizoram, and Meghalaya) had large Christian majorities. Sikhs were a majority in the state of Punjab.

The country's 200 million dalits (formerly called "untouchables"), constituted 21-25 percent of the population. However, it was difficult to accurately determine how many Indians fell within this category, since the Indian census did not ask respondents for caste status. Over the years, many lower caste Hindus, dalits, and non-Hindu tribal groups converted to other faiths to escape widespread discrimination and achieve higher social status. However, those from lower castes and dalits often continued to be viewed by both their new coreligionists and by Hindus through the prism of caste. Converts were regarded widely as retaining the caste of their ancestors, and caste identity, whether or not acknowledged by a person's own religion, had an effect on marriage prospects, social status, and economic opportunity. Historical stratification structures in the country also affect Muslims, Christians, and Sikhs, resulting in discrimination between coreligionists based on caste.

Immigrants, primarily from Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal, practiced various religions and tended to concentrate in the border regions near these countries.

According to the Catholic Bishop's Conference of India, there were approximately one hundred registered foreign Christian missionaries (both Catholic and Protestant) in the country, most over the age of seventy. Buddhist, Muslim, and Hindu missionaries also operated. Foreign rabbis also regularly visited and participated in religious ceremonies for the very small Jewish population, estimated at fewer than 5 thousand individuals.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the National Government generally respected this right in practice; however, some state and local governments restricted this freedom.

The country is a secular state with no official religion. The country's political system is federal, according state governments exclusive jurisdiction over law enforcement and the maintenance of order, which has limited the national government's capacity to deal directly with abuses of religious freedom. The country's national law enforcement agency, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), cannot investigate a crime committed in a state without the state government's permission. However, the national government's law enforcement authorities, in some instances, have intervened to maintain order when state governments were reluctant or unwilling to do so.

The opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) held power in eight states. Its political platform called for the construction of a Hindu temple on the site of a mosque in Ayodhya destroyed by a Hindu mob in 1992; the repeal of Article 370 of the constitution, which grants special rights to the state of Jammu and Kashmir, the country's only Muslim majority state; the enactment of a Uniform Civil Code that would apply to members of all religious groups; and the enactment of state-level anti-conversion legislation in all states in the country. The BJP was one of a number of offshoots of the Rastriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a Hindu nationalist organization. The BJP, the RSS, and other affiliated organizations (collectively known as the Sangh Parivar) claimed to respect and tolerate other religious groups; however, the RSS in particular opposed conversions from Hinduism and believed that all citizens, regardless of their religious affiliation, should adhere to Hindu cultural values. The RSS has been implicated in incidents of violence and discrimination against Christians and Muslims.

The NHRC and the National Commission for Minorities (NCM) are governmental bodies created to investigate allegations of discrimination and make recommendations for redress to the relevant local or national government authorities. Although NHRC recommendations do not have the force of law, central and local authorities generally follow them.

In January 2006, in an effort to build bridges with minority communities, the UPA Government set up a Ministry for Minority Affairs and appointed former Maharashtra Chief Minister, A. R. Antulay, as its first minister. The ministry's charter included overall policy planning, coordination, evaluation and review of the Government's regulatory and developmental programs intended to benefit minority communities.

The NCM and NHRC intervened in several high profile cases, including the 2002 anti-Muslim violence in Gujarat and other instances of communal tension, the enactment of anti-conversion legislation in several states, and incidents of harassment and violence against minorities.

Although religious groups were not required to register with the Government, all foreigners, including missionaries, must register with the local police station before working in the country.

A number of federal and state laws regulate religious life in the country. These include the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) of 1976, several state anti-conversion laws, the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act of 1967, the Religious Institutions (Prevention of Misuse) Act of 1988, India's Foreigners Act of 1946, and the Indian Divorce Act of 1869.

The Government may ban religious organizations that provoke intercommunity friction, have been involved in terrorism or sedition, or have violated the FCRA, which restricts the disbursement of foreign funds to missionaries and religious organizations, both foreign and local. Some organizations complained that the FCRA prevented them from properly financing humanitarian and educational activities.

The states of Arunchal Pradesh, Chattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, and Orissa have laws against forcible conversions. Gujarat and Tamil Nadu have inactive anti-conversion laws or bills awaiting accompanying regulations needed for enforcement. In 2006, the Rajasthan state assembly passed a law against forcible conversion, which is pending approval by the governor and cabinet. However, the National Government can intervene to prevent states from taking action if it determines that such moves pose a threat to national integrity and communal harmony or violate the spirit of the constitution.

The Orissa Freedom of Religion Act of 1967 requires the state government to submit a monthly report specifying the number of conversions that have taken place in the state. It also requires that potential converts inform the district magistrate of pending conversions and that local police officers conduct an inquiry to determine whether a proposed conversion is legitimate and submit a report to state authorities. There were no reports of district magistrates denying permission for conversions or of convictions under OFRA during the period covered by this report.

Under current provisions in Chattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh, a conversion offense is punishable with imprisonment for a maximum of two years, and a maximum fine of \$220 (10 thousand INR).

The Gujarat anti-conversion law prohibits conversion by force or allurement; however, the law had not been implemented by the end of the period covered in this report.

On March 26, 2006, the Rajasthan State Assembly passed an anti-conversion bill, which continued to await approval by the state governor and ratification by the state cabinet. At the end of the reporting period, the bill could not be implemented since the governor had sent the bill to the president of the country for comment. The proposed law prohibits "conversion from one religion to another by the use of force or allurement or by other fraudulent means," and defines allurement as "any gift or gratification, either cash or kind."

Reportedly, there were approximately twenty arrests in Madhya Pradesh under the state's anti-conversion law during the reporting period. There were no convictions and all those arrested were released on bail. There were no available official figures for other states; however, reports from faith-based NGOs and the media indicated that there were four arrests in Andhra Pradesh, fourteen in Chhattisgarh, twenty-eight in Madhya Pradesh, two in Orissa, and one in Uttar Pradesh during the period covered by this report.

In November 2004, the Government amended the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) of 1967 to correct excesses contained in the controversial Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA), often criticized by Muslim groups as a tool used to target them. Despite its 2004 repeal, POTA contains a sunset feature, which gives the Central POTA Review Committee a year to review all existing POTA cases. This clause allows the Government to make new arrests if they are tied to existing POTA cases. The Government can issue a new indictment on a case opened years ago under POTA, even against a person never previously associated with the case. It can also extend the one-year limit for reviews. The UAPA empowers the Government to ban religious organizations that provoke intercommunity friction, have been involved in terrorism or sedition, or violated the 1976 FCRA. The UAPA was applied intermittently and no religious organizations were banned under UAPA during the reporting period.

The Religious Institutions (Prevention of Misuse) Act of 1988 makes it an offense to use any religious site for political purposes or to harbor persons accused or convicted of crimes.

Since 2000, Uttar Pradesh's "Religious Buildings and Places Bill" has required a permit endorsed by the state government before the construction of any religious building.

Legislation in West Bengal requires a district magistrate's permission before the construction of a place of worship.

The Tamil Nadu Government continued to actively work to strengthen Hindu institutions. In 2005, Chief Minister Jayalalithaa extended the government-aided free meal program to include Christian churches. Previously, it was limited to Hindu temples and mosques.

There is no national law barring a citizen or foreigner from professing or propagating religious beliefs; however, speaking publicly against other beliefs is deemed dangerous to public order and is prohibited by the country's Foreigners Act. This act strictly prohibits visitors on tourist visas from religious preaching without permission from the Ministry of Home Affairs. The Government forbids foreign missionaries of any faith from entering the country without prior clearance, and expels those who perform missionary work without the correct visa. Long-established foreign missionaries generally can renew their visas, but the Government has not admitted new resident foreign missionaries since the mid-1960s.

A number of cable and satellite television networks dedicated to religious programming operated in the country without difficulty.

In an attempt to combat communal violence, the Government introduced the Communal Violence (Prevention, Control and Rehabilitation of Victims) Bill of 2005 on November 26. If passed, the bill would double fines and prison terms, allocate funds for rehabilitation, and provide compensation to victims.

On May 5, 2005, to prevent communal forces from upsetting peace and harmony, parliament amended the Code of Criminal Procedure, Section 144 to allow district magistrates to ban the use of trishuls in any procession or gathering. In 2003, the Congress-led government in Rajasthan banned trishul distribution, while allowing their use in religious places and functions.

The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act of 1989 lists offenses against disadvantaged persons and provides for stiff penalties for offenders; however, this act has had only a modest effect in curbing abuse due to victims' fears of retaliation if they accused high-caste members of committing atrocities. Intercaste violence was especially pronounced in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Andhra Pradesh, and reportedly claimed hundreds of lives. Human rights NGOs alleged that caste violence, which crossed religious lines, remained at prior years' levels.

Article 17 of the constitution outlawed untouchability in 1950 and the Government continued to implement "reservations" for dalits in public sector employment and education. There were more than 50 percent "reservation" in

some areas.

According to a 2004 NCM report, 24 percent of government jobs were reserved for members of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, including dalits. Benefits accorded dalits were revoked once they converted to Christianity or Islam, but not to Buddhism or Sikhism.

Christian groups filed a court case demanding that converts to Christianity and Islam enjoy the same access to "reservations" as other dalits. The case was appealed to the supreme court, which had not ruled by the end of the period covered by this report.

On January 4, 2006, the supreme court upheld an earlier high court decision to provide a five percent quota for Muslims in education and government jobs in Andhra Pradesh. The new "reservations" increased the number of reserved jobs and positions in educational institutions to 51 percent and excluded Muslims who had already benefited from "reservations" or who were successful in their own right. Previously, the state had added Muslims to its list of backward classes, which included castes and classes not included in the constitution that, while not subject to systematic caste discrimination, have less social mobility and economic advantages than other castes. This category included former untouchables who converted from Hinduism to other religions, nomads, and tribes people.

Although the constitution specifies that the Buddhist, Jain, and Sikh faiths are different from the Hindu religion, interpretations by Hindu nationalist groups have defined them as Hindu sects. Such interpretations have been contentious, particularly for the Sikh community, many of whose leaders viewed Sikhism as a unique religion, distinct from Hinduism. Sikhs have sought a separately codified body of law to recognize this distinction legally and preclude ambiguity. The supreme court rejected the inclusion of Jains under the NCM Act, stating that the practice of adding new religious groups as minorities should be discouraged, although the NCM in May 2006 stated again that Jains and Kashmiri Pandits should be accorded minority status. The court decreed that increasing social divisions along religious lines would be detrimental, and the country, which was already heavily stratified by class, should attempt to move away from such separation.

There are different personal status laws for the various minority religious communities, and the legal system accommodates religion-specific laws in matters of marriage, divorce, adoption, and inheritance. Muslim personal status law governs many non-criminal matters, including family law and inheritance.

On May 2, 2005, in response to concerns about the improper use of the *triple talaq* (the ability of a husband to divorce his wife by repeating, "I divorce thee" three times), the All-India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB) adopted new *talaq* guidelines, stating that men should use a reversible single *talaq* followed by a three-month waiting period known as the *iddat*. The guidelines also call for the husband to pay compensation to the wife's family in case of divorce, equality in property rights, protection against physical and emotional abuse of wives by their husbands, and assurances that remarried women will be able to maintain contact with their families.

In April 2006, the supreme court overruled a *fatwa* (decree) issued by local clerics which demanded that, against their will, a couple live separately after an inebriated husband gave *talaq* to his wife. The Jamiat ul Ulema (religious leaders) threatened to excommunicate the couple if they remained together, and criticized the supreme court for hurting Muslim religious sentiments after it intervened in the case.

The AIMPLB asserted that *fatwas* are only opinions and therefore are not binding on any person in an attempt to convince the supreme court that a legal prohibition against the issuance of *fatwas* was not necessary.

The Indian Divorce Act of 2001 limits inheritance, alimony payments, and property ownership of persons from interfaith marriages and prohibits their use of churches to celebrate marriage ceremonies in which one party is a non-Christian. Clergymen who contravene its provisions could face up to ten years' imprisonment. However, the act does not bar interfaith marriages in other places of worship.

The Government permits private religious schools, but does not permit religious instruction in government schools. The supreme court ruled that the Government can prescribe merit-based admission for religious colleges that receive public funding, while those that do not may use their own criteria, including religious affiliation.

Many Hindu sects have established their own schools, although they did not receive aid from the state. Most Islamic madrassahs did not accept government aid, alleging that it would subject them to stringent security clearance requirements.

In 2003, the West Bengal Government brought the undergraduate and post-graduate sections of madrassahs under the higher education department of the state while promising to extend college status to the Calcutta Madrassah. The Government also decreed that the state's Public Service Commission would hire madrassah teachers and introduced new subjects like economics, computer science, and political science into their curriculum.

In the country, school textbooks were published by the Government's National Council of Education Research and

Training (NCERT) and were uniformly used in government and private schools and printed in various languages. In March 2005, the Government released new NCERT textbooks which they asserted were more accurate and restored the secular character of education.

In June 2004, an NCERT panel reviewed forty-seven new textbooks prepared by the Directorate of Education in Delhi and determined that they had poor content, shoddy presentation, and significant amounts of irrelevant information. It recommended that the books not be introduced until the defects were corrected, which, according to NCERT, would be ready by the 2007-2008 academic year. NCERT, upon a recommendation from the NCM, also withdrew four textbooks during the year for "factual distortions."

In July 2005, the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) released a report on textbooks used in schools that did not follow the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) syllabus and were not approved by NCERT. The report stated that some textbooks used in private schools affiliated with religious bodies propagated a narrow, often communal view of the world. In October 2005, the Human Resource Development Ministry proposed the creation of a National Textbook Council to monitor school textbooks produced outside of the NCERT system. By the end of the reporting period, the council had not been formed.

On December 16, 2004, parliament passed a bill creating the National Commission for Minority Education Institutions to resolve disputes involving allegations of discrimination against minority schools. In March 28, 2006, a legislative act empowered the commission to investigate complaints regarding violations of minority rights, including the right to establish and administer educational institutions.

The Government maintained a list of banned books that may not be imported or sold in the country because they contain material that governmental censors deem inflammatory and could provoke communal or religious tensions. In March and April 2006, the Rajasthan Government banned the books *Haqeeqat* (The Truth) and *Ve Sharm Se Hindu Kahate Hain Kyon?* (Why do they say with shame they are Hindus?) because they disparaged Hinduism.

In September 2005, the Calcutta High Court lifted the ban on *Split in Two* in response to a petition by the Association for Protection of Democratic Rights (APDR).

The board continued to refuse a censor certificate to the film *Chand Buz Gaya*, featuring a character resembling controversial Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi.

The major holy days of the country's major religious groups are considered national holidays, including Good Friday and Christmas (Christian); the two Eids (Muslim); Lord Buddha's birthday (Buddhist); Guru Nanak's Birthday (Sikh); Dussehra, Diwali and Holi (Hindu); and the Birthday of Lord Mahavir (Jain).

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

No religious organizations were banned under UAPA during the reporting period. The Government renewed the ban on the Student Islamic Movement of India in February 2006 for the third time. In 2001, the Government banned the Muslim group Deendar Anjuman for "fomenting communal tension" and actions "prejudicial to India's security." In 2003, the Government extended the ban for another two years, and in 2005, extended it until 2007.

In April 2006, the Government of Gujarat refused to renew the service contract of five Catholic nuns, whose order had been caring for lepers in a government hospital for fifty-seven years.

Legislation in West Bengal requires a district magistrate's permission before construction of a place of worship. Anyone intending to convert a personal place of worship into a public one is also required to obtain the district magistrate's permission.

Unlike in previous years, there were no reports of widespread distribution of trishuls, a Hindu symbol that was sometimes used to intimidate non-Hindus. In May 2005, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and Bajrang Dal handed out approximately 500 trishuls at a ceremony in Nimapara, Orissa.

In 2005, the Kerala Bar Council's Enrollment Committee denied membership to two nuns and a priest, arguing that it could not grant membership to those in religious vocations. The Kerala High Court ruled against the committee on November 7, 2005, stating that religious vocation could not disqualify an individual from practicing law.

The Congress Party of Assam set aside thirty-four state assembly tickets for Muslim candidates during the period covered by this report. In January 2005, the Assam Congress Minority Cell demanded that the party allot at least three additional tickets to Christian candidates. Christians comprised 4 percent of Assam's population and had no "reservations."

In 2003, the Tamil Nadu Government ordered the Christian Medical College of Vellore to accept government-

sponsored candidates into 40 percent of its school seats, in violation of constitutional guarantees given to unaided minority institutions. The supreme court, while permitting the hospital to follow its prior admission policy, directed the Government of Tamil Nadu to form a committee to look into the question of admission procedures followed by privately funded minority education institutions. In 2004, the state government constituted a committee, but the supreme court had not issued a verdict by the end of the reporting period.

In January 2005, the Gujarat Charity Commissioner sent letters mainly to Christian faith-based charities asking for their financial statements from the preceding ten years, claiming that he was acting at the behest of the Government of Gujarat. The law governing charities only requires the submission of annual reports. Most charities objected to the measure and were excused.

Unlike in previous years, the Gujarat police conducted no illegal surveys of Christians during the period covered by this report.

During the period covered by this report, press reports documented the activities of Christian missionaries who entered on tourist visas and illegally proselytized. Their activities led to a public outcry and calls for the Government to enforce existing laws more rigidly. U.S. citizens accused of religious preaching while visiting the country as tourists were expelled and faced difficulties obtaining permission to return for up to a decade after the event.

On June 11, 2005, residents of a slum in a Mumbai suburb assaulted four missionaries leading a vacation Bible school. The four departed the country on June 12. No formal charges were filed for the assault or against the missionaries for violating the FCRA. On June 13, four other missionaries with tourist rather than missionary visas were deported for conducting religious activities.

On October 18, 2005, the Times of India reported that a mob attacked two Americans in the Anantnag district of Kashmir who were preaching Christianity. Police intervened and rescued them.

Workers from Christian relief organizations continued to report that bureaucratic obstacles prevented them from renewing their visas.

Missionaries and foreign religious organizations must comply with the FCRA, which limits overseas assistance to certain NGOs, including ones with religious affiliations. There were no reports of religious-based relief operations related to the 2004 tsunami being hampered by the requirement.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

While the National Government has not been implicated in abuses of religious freedom, human rights activists criticized it for alleged indifference and inaction in the face of abuses committed by state and local authorities and private citizens. Weak enforcement of laws protecting religious freedom was partly due to an overburdened, outmoded, and corrupt judiciary. The legal system had many years of backlog, and all but the most prominent cases moved slowly.

A federal system in which state governments have jurisdiction over law and order within their borders contributed to the National Government's ineffectiveness in combating religiously based violence directly. The only national law enforcement agency, the CBI, is required to secure state government permission before investigating a crime in the affected state. States often delayed or refused to grant such permission.

Although discrimination based on caste is officially illegal, it remained ubiquitous, stratifying almost every segment of society. Many members of lower castes were relegated to the most menial of jobs and had little social mobility, although a segment of the lower castes had achieved success in many fields of endeavor. Some dalits and other low caste members converted in an attempt to escape caste-based discrimination.

In October 2004, Amnesty International (AI) called for the perpetrators of the 1984 anti-Sikh violence that occurred after the assassination of then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards to be brought to justice. AI stated that only a small minority of police officers responsible for the 1984 human rights violations had been prosecuted.

In 2004, persons involved in the 1984 riots were sentenced to three years' imprisonment for looting. In May 2005, a Delhi court sentenced five individuals to life imprisonment for murder and, also in May, the Delhi High Court ruled that the Government was liable for its failure to "protect the life and liberty of its citizens" and must pay \$2,860 (123,000 INR) to all persons injured during the riots, an increase from the previous amount of \$46 (2,000 INR) per victim. In another riot-related case which had not come to trial by the end of reporting period, on June 28, 2005, a Delhi city court charged five men for stabbing a Sikh policeman, his son, and another relative.

The Nanavati commission, tasked with conducting a re-inquiry into the massacre, released its report in August 2005. It cited several prominent Congress party leaders for complicity in the violence and highlighted law enforcement

culpability in the deaths due to a deliberate lack of action. It noted that only one policeman was convicted for committing atrocities during the riots. Minister Jagdish Tytler and Member of Parliament Sajjan Kumar were indicted in the report. Tytler resigned from parliament and Kumar resigned from the Delhi Rural Development Board after its release, but at year's end no formal punishment resulted from the report. The Government set up two committees to provide compensation to the victims' families. However, during the reporting period, the NCM criticized the Government for failure to open cases against Tytler, Kumar, or any police officers on duty during the riots.

The Home Ministry reported that a communal riot, which took place between May and October 2005 in Mau, Uttar Pradesh, left seven persons dead and thirty-six injured, including eight police officers. On October 17, 2005, the Uttar Pradesh Government convened a three-member committee to determine the cause of the riots. On October 19, 2005, the police filed charges against BJP politicians Mukhtar Ansari and Ramji Singh for inciting communal discord. The Government instituted a curfew on the town and directed paramilitary forces to the area to stop the violence. On November 20, 2005, the committee reported that BJP Member of Parliament Yogi Adityanath had a role in instigating the communal clashes, but no charges were filed against him by the end of the period covered by this report.

Outbreaks of politically-manipulated religious tension in Uttar Pradesh and Vadodara, Gujarat, in early 2006 did not spread after police and state authorities took timely steps to end the violence and curb mob actions.

In April 2006, communal clashes between Hindu and Muslim residents of Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh, stemming from the use of loudspeakers during a religious festival resulted in two deaths and eight injuries. An NCM investigation determined that the Uttar Pradesh administration initially did not take appropriate steps to prevent the violence. The police have launched a judicial inquiry.

On May 1, 2006, despite the Muslim community's request that authorities preserve a 300-year-old shrine in Vadodara, Gujarat, and declare it a heritage site, the Vadodara Municipal Corporation demolished the shrine, alleging that it obstructed traffic. While attempting to disperse a mob that had gathered to protest the demolition, the Gujarat police killed two Muslims. In reaction, members of the Muslim community threw stones and set four shops on fire. On May 1, 2006, the Home Ministry asked the Gujarat Government to control the situation, and deployed paramilitary forces to assist local security personnel. On May 3, 2006, the Government applied a curfew and deployed the army. The NCM urged the state government to ascertain if police firing was unavoidable and if the decision to destroy the shrine was justified. The media reported that six persons were killed and forty-two injured, sixteen as a result of police fire, and that on May 3, 2006, a crowd defying the curfew killed a Muslim man by setting him on fire.

In February 2005, activists from the Hindu nationalist Bajrang Dal attacked and beat a group of Christians in Kota, Rajasthan, while attending a Christian graduation ceremony, and subsequently set up checkpoints to harass Christians attempting to leave by bus. The victims claimed that the local government sided with the attackers, and allowed assaults against 275 persons. The district government stated it ended the harassment and arrested thirty-seven Bajrang Dal members. A two-person NCM team investigated the incident and negotiated a peace agreement.

In February 2006, members of the Bajrang Dal and Shiv Sena forced their way into a church belonging to Emmanuel Ministries International (EMI), a Christian charitable institution, in Kota, Rajasthan, and burned an effigy of its founder on the rooftop. Local Hindus alleged that EMI used monetary inducements and charity to encourage conversions and distributed the book, *Haqeeqat*, (The Truth) to denigrate Hinduism. Hindu nationalists in Rajasthan publicized the alleged connection between EMI, the offensive book, and conversions, and pressed for anti-conversion legislation in the state assembly.

EMI officials asserted that, while their library had a copy of *Haqeeqat*, they did not condone its offensive message and have since removed the book. Numerous sources in Rajasthan contradicted EMI's claim regarding the book and asserted that EMI deliberately distributed it widely. Authorities held EMI President Samuel Thomas in judicial custody from March 17 to May 2, 2006, when he was released on bail, under a law that criminalizes hurting the religious sentiments of any religion. Thomas was later charged with sedition on May 14, 2006, for the use of a map on an EMI affiliated website that did not include Jammu and Kashmir as part of the country. EMI asserted that the charges constituted ongoing harassment by the state government.

In February 2006, the Rajasthan state Government froze all EMI assets, citing the group for its failure to properly file its tax documents. However, on June 26, 2006, the Jaipur High Court overturned the state government's actions and ruled that all EMI bank accounts be opened. Human rights groups noted that such tax errors were commonplace.

Religious press outlets reported that on June 15, 2006, in Kasa, Maharashtra, policemen verbally and physically abused four tribal Christians who tried to follow up on a First Information Report (FIR) lodged on June 8, 2006. The FIR alleged that members of the local Tribal Welfare Committee assaulted Christians. Subsequently, the four were charged with breach of the peace. Following a complaint by a human rights organization, a police inquiry into the case was ordered, resulting in the removal of one police officer. No further action had been taken by the end of the period covered by this report.

Religious press outlets reported that on April 16, 2006, in Bathinda, Punjab, a group of approximately five Hindu extremists led by the RSS broke up an Easter Day event at the home of a member of the "House of Prayer," an

independent Christian denomination, warning its members not to hold further meetings and vandalizing some of the property. When the pastor attempted to register a FIR, the Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) reprimanded him for his Christian activities and told him that he required permission from the district magistrate to hold this event. On May 4, 2006, after Delhi All-India Christian Council (AICC) leaders contacted the superintendent, he recanted and permitted the services. Two Shiv Sena members and another man were arrested for the raid, but were released the same day.

In the Balmikinagar jungles bordering Nepal, police and the RSS accused missionaries and Oraon tribal Christians of "links" with the Maoist Communist Center (MCC). As a result, in June 2005, police detained and questioned two priests regarding alleged MCC ties, while ordering others to leave the area. During the previous reporting period, police detained more than one hundred Oraon tribespeople, expelling a number of them from the area. There were no reports of further detentions during the year.

There was continued concern about the failure of the Gujarat Government to arrest and convict those responsible for the widespread communal violence in 2002 following the burning in Godhra of the Sabarmati Express train, in which fifty-nine men, women, and children died. Home Ministry figures released in May 2005 indicated that, in the days following the train burning, 790 Muslims and 254 Hindus were killed, and 2,500 others were injured. Some NGOs maintained the number of Muslims killed was higher than official estimates, with figures ranging anywhere from 1,000 to 2,500 dead. There were also reports that Muslim women were subjected to rape, gang rape, and molestation. Reportedly, approximately 10 thousand families continued to be internally displaced and government-provided services remained inadequate.

In March 2006, a government-established commission headed by Justice Banerjee determined that the train fire was an accident rather than a criminal conspiracy, as alleged by the Government of Gujarat. The report categorically ruled out a Muslim conspiracy, noting that local Muslims helped douse the fire. The commission also reported that the then railway minister and the Railway Safety Commission failed to adequately investigate the possibility that the fire was accidental. The Gujarat Government rejected the report, and the VHP accused the Banerjee Commission of political bias. Legal challenges to the commission still pending in the Gujarat High Court have prevented the release of its report to parliament.

The Government of Gujarat established the Nanavati-Shah judicial commission to investigate the train fire and the subsequent violence, but the supreme court stayed its report in May and by the end of the period covered by this report, the report had not been made public.

In February 2006, in response to a supreme court inquiry, the state government ordered the reopening of 1,242 of 2,108 cases that the Government had dropped because it could not substantiate the charges. The Gujarat police pledged to reinvestigate 1,600 cases. The total number of cases registered in connection with the Gujarat violence was 4,256.

According to the Gujarat police chief, the Gujarat police registered 13 new riot-related cases and arrested 640 accused between August 2004 and February 2006. However, accused individuals were acquitted in several more cases during the reporting period because of lack of evidence or changes in testimony.

In 2005, the Government of Gujarat established "fast track" courts to overcome delays and ensure access to justice for riot victims, resulting in some convictions. On October 24, 2005, five persons were sentenced to life imprisonment for the murder of a Muslim youth in Halol and for the murder of eleven Muslims in the Panchmahal district of Gujarat during the riot period. Others were sentenced to three years' imprisonment and ordered to pay a fine of \$11 (500 INR) each. A local court acquitted 107 of 113 persons arrested for killing 2 Muslims in the post-Godhra riots and, in February 2006, a local court indicted 39 police officers for riot-related conduct.

In April 2004, the supreme court ordered the retrial of the Bilkis Bano case and Best Bakery case in Mumbai courts outside the purview of the Government of Gujarat. It also stayed the trial of ten other major cases until the two retrials were completed. There were no developments in the Bilkis Bano case during the period covered by this report and on February 24, 2006, a special court in Mumbai convicted nine persons of the murder of fourteen Muslims in the Best Bakery case and sentenced them to life in prison. The court acquitted another eight accused in connection with the case.

Many human rights groups continued to argue that, despite the Best Bakery verdict, those responsible for the 2002 Gujarat violence would go unpunished.

On June 22, 2005, Central POTA Review Committee recommended that POTA charges be dropped against many Muslims in connection with the Gujarat violence due to insufficient evidence; however, at the end of the reporting period the charges were still in effect.

Unlike in previous years, there were no reports of intimidation and harassment of witnesses during the reporting period.

In March 2005, Gujarat police detained at least 400 persons to prevent Hindu-Muslim clashes during the Shi'ite Muslim day of mourning (Muharram); the same month, Muslims called off a Muharram procession in Vadodara to prevent potential clashes with Hindus. No updates on these events were available during the reporting period.

Since an organized insurgency erupted in Jammu and Kashmir in 1989, there have been numerous reports of human rights abuses by security forces and local officials, including execution-style killings, beatings, rapes, and other physical abuse. Terrorist groups have also perpetrated atrocities against civilians, including car bombings, forced housing of terrorists, executions, and sexual assaults. Retaliatory killings by terrorists were also common. Terrorists have also routinely targeted and killed minority Hindu members of the Pandit (Hindu Brahmin) community since 1989, resulting in their mass exodus from Kashmir to refugee camps in Jammu or other parts of the country. On April 30 and May 1, 2006, terrorists rounded up and shot thirty-five Hindu residents of remote Jammu villages. The executions were allegedly punishment for the villagers' participation in the April 24, 2006, state assembly elections.

Government forces denied allegations of excessive use of force and asserted that they targeted persons not on the basis of religion but of involvement in terrorist activity or suspicion of terrorist links. For their part, terrorists killed and otherwise attacked hundreds of Hindu and Muslim civilians, including Kashmiri Muslims and Hindus, during the period covered by this report.

It remained difficult to separate religion and politics in Kashmir; Kashmiri separatists were predominantly Muslim, and almost all the higher ranks as well as most of the lower ranks in the Indian military forces stationed there were non-Muslim. The vast majority of the Jammu and Kashmir police force of 61 thousand was Muslim. Kashmiri Hindus remained vulnerable to violence. Most lived in refugee camps outside of the valley awaiting safe return. In 2003, for the first time in fourteen years, the Jammu and Kashmir Government allowed a procession of separatist groups to mark the anniversary of the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad. It was held again in May 2004 and 2005.

Forced Religious Conversion

Four states have laws in place banning forced religious conversion. Three other states have inactive laws or bills that await accompanying regulations before they can be enforced. Some NGOs claimed state governments used these laws to restrict voluntary conversions and to harass religious minorities. The issue of conversion, especially to Christianity, was highly contentious in the country. Hindu nationalist organizations frequently alleged that Christian missionaries lured Hindus, particularly from lower castes, with offers of free education and healthcare and equated such actions with forced conversions. Christians denied this, responding that low-caste Hindus convert of their own free will and that efforts by Hindu groups to "re-convert" these new Christians to Hinduism were themselves coercive. Arrests under these laws occurred during the reporting period in several states. All arrested were Christians. The Christian community contended that the anti-conversion laws were applied in a discriminatory manner and only enforced when a person converted from Hinduism to another religion.

Religious press outlets reported that, in August 2004, Pastor Subas Samal and an associate were arrested under Orissa's anti-conversion law and spent six weeks in jail after leading a group of Christians in Orissa back to their village, from which they had been expelled by their non-Christian neighbors. The pastor claimed he had attempted to end the conflict and had never forced anyone to convert.

In February 2005, the NCM urged the Governments of Rajasthan and Maharashtra to immediately stop forced reconversions of Christians and to protect Christians and their property. The action was in response to an attack on Christians in Kota and calls by "Hindutva" supporters for a social boycott against Christians who refused to reconvert.

On May 1, 2005, the press reported that the VHP in Bargarh, Orissa, reconverted 567 Christians. The reconverted reportedly had signed affidavits declaring their intention to change their faith in keeping with the provisions of the Orissa Freedom of Religion Act. A Christian community leader in Orissa asserted that the reversion was not genuine and was staged by the VHP to keep the communal issue alive. Religious press reported that approximately 600 Christian dalit tribespeople converted to Hinduism in Bijepur, Orissa, due to VHP pressure.

On May 14, 2005, four Christian missionaries were arrested in Brajarajnagar, Orissa, and charged with forced conversion. They accused the missionaries of using offers of financial assistance to propagate Christianity. The missionaries had not received permission to perform conversions in the area, but were released the following day.

Religious press outlets reported that on July 10, 2005, police detained thirty-five members of the Gosner Evangelical Lutheran Church in Ambikapur, Chhattisgarh, for performing forced conversions. All were released on July 11, 2005, but a FIR was filed against two women.

Religious press outlets reported that on July 19, 2005, police arrested a Christian couple under the Madhya Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act (MPFRA) after their neighbors accused them of engaging in "fraudulent conversion" activities. They released the couple on bail within twenty-four hours and were awaiting trial at the end of the period covered by this report. On August 21, 2005, a mob targeting the couple injured approximately ten persons, including women and a two-year old child.

Religious press outlets reported that on September 26, 2005, the pastor and eight members of a church in Durg, Chhattisgarh, were convicted of fraudulent conversion activities for offering money to Hindus willing to convert.

Religious press outlets reported that on October 11, 2005, police arrested Sunny John under MPFRA for allegedly engaging in fraudulent conversions of children from poor Hindu families. John, who runs three schools, was accused of converting eleven children between the ages of five and ten.

Religious press outlets reported that on October 15, 2005, Hindu extremists attacked the annual convention of a church in Raipur, Chhattisgarh, alleging that the organizers had kidnapped tribespeople for conversion. Police interrogated the tribespeople, who denied the reports. Police did not press charges.

Religious press outlets reported that on November 18, 2005, police arrested Pastor Masih Das Rai under the Freedom of Religion Act for performing forcible conversions in Raipur, Chhattisgarh. Members of a Hindu extremist group attacked the pastor and twelve members of his church prior to the arrest. Despite two applications for bail, Pastor Rai remained in police custody at the end of the period covered by this report.

Religious press outlets reported that on January 16, 2006, approximately fifteen Hindu extremists attacked Pastor Kulamani Mallick, his wife, and child, and set fire to their home in Matiapada, Orissa. The extremists beat other Christians in the village and destroyed seven houses, six of which belonged to Christians. Pastor Mallick and his cousin were subsequently arrested under the Orissa Freedom of Religion Act. Five men were charged with starting the fires and destroying property.

Religious press outlets reported that on January 24, 2006, a group of up to 200 Hindu extremists assaulted Pastor Ram Prakash and a number of others for allegedly converting local persons to Christianity in Ramchandrapur, Uttar Pradesh. Prakash was arrested when he called the police to report the attack. Reportedly, he was beaten while in police custody. Prakash was released on bail, but was rearrested for encouraging communal tension.

Religious press outlets reported that on January 26, 2006, police arrested three Christian leaders belonging to the Church of the Nazarene in Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh, under MPFRA, and charged them with forced conversion of tribespeople. According to an NGO, the arrests were based on the affidavits of twenty-three non-Christian tribespeople asserting that they were forced by the leaders to attend a Christian convention. The NGO contended that the affidavits were themselves coerced by the police.

Religious press outlets reported that on March 17, 2006, a group of men interrupted a prayer meeting in Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh, reportedly questioning the participants, injuring six and "sexually molesting" female trainees. The attackers were also alleged to have destroyed Bibles and damaged property. Police detained five attackers, who were later released on bail, and registered a case against the sponsor under MPFRA.

Religious press outlets reported that on April 5, 2006, in Naudara Bridge, Madhya Pradesh, a Methodist high school was attacked by extremists who accused the staff of forced conversions after a former teacher filed a case of forcible conversion against three staff members. The Madhya Pradesh State Minorities Commission determined the accusation to be false.

Religious press outlets reported that on April 7, 2006, in Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh, extremists beat approximately twenty-five Christians protesting the arrest of seven Christians under MPFRA. The attackers reportedly injured at least seven Christians while police watched. No action was taken against the perpetrators.

The AICC reported on April 20, 2006, that police arrested two Christian women for attempting to convert persons in the Jabalpur district of Madhya Pradesh. The local superintendent of police alleged that the two women were distributing material urging Hindus to follow the Bible. The Christian press also reported that on April 18, 2006, police arrested Avinash Lal, an independent Pentecostal pastor, and six other Christian leaders in the same Madhya Pradesh district for conversion by allurement and conducting illegal religious gatherings.

Religious press outlets reported that on May 1, 2006, in Gwarighat, Madhya Pradesh, police arrested a social worker, Sunil Kumar Rao, of forcibly converting children to Christianity in violation of the state anti-conversion law. He was released on bail.

Religious press outlets reported that on May 2, 2006, in Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh, assailants attacked Pastor Andreas Soni, a Pentecostal pastor, as he distributed Christian literature. Subsequently, the police arrested him under

the state anti-conversion law. He was later released on bail.

Religious press outlets reported that on May 14, 2006, in Gaur Nadi, Madhya Pradesh, approximately fifty members of the Dharam Jagran Sena attacked a church, beat a church member who had just converted to Christianity, assaulted the pastor, and ordered him to stop converting persons to Christianity. The attackers accused the church of undertaking forcible conversions and filed a formal complaint against the pastor at the police station. He was detained under MPFRA and was released after local Christians paid his bail fee.

Religious press outlets reported that on June 18, 2006, in Kosa Nala, Chhattisgarh, approximately twenty-five members of the Dharam Jagran Sena raided the Hosanna Church during a service and physically assaulted Pastor David Raj and his wife. The assailants then took the pastor to the police station where police detained him and arrested his wife, charging them with forced conversions. The couple was released on bail but had to report regularly to the police for the duration of their case, which was still pending by the end of the period covered by this report.

Religious press outlets reported that on June 25, 2006, in Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh, a large mob threatened four Missionaries of Charity nuns distributing food to impoverished patients at the Ruya Hospital and accused them of converting persons to Christianity. Police subsequently arrested the four nuns and released them after several hours at the behest of the local diocesan bishop. A case was registered against those who threatened the nuns.

Persecution by Terrorist Organizations

Throughout the period covered by this report, Jammu and Kashmir continued to be a focus of terrorist violence. Terrorist adherents to a violent strain of Islam committed atrocities against Hindus and other Muslims, and security forces used targeted but at times excessive force to suppress them, with civilians frequently the main victims. The deaths of suspected terrorists, almost all of whom were Muslim, occurred frequently in police custody, although the government of Chief Minister Ghulam Nabi Azad was working to improve human rights practices. Islamist terrorists forced the overwhelming majority of Hindu Kashmiri Pandits to flee their ancestral homes in the Kashmir Valley in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Although 6,000 Pandits remained, more than several hundred thousand have left since violence against Hindus began in Jammu and Kashmir in the late 1980s. During the conflict, terrorists demolished ancient Hindu temples, destroyed religious artifacts, and desecrated Hindu religious sites throughout the Kashmir valley.

In May 2005, terrorists threw grenades at a Christian school in Srinagar, killing two women and wounding sixty persons, including twenty-five children.

On May 22, 2005, militants detonated bombs at two movie theaters in New Delhi, killing one and injuring sixty during the screening of the Hindi film *Jo Bole So Nihal*. Sikh groups objected to the film, stating that it negatively portrayed members of their religion. On May 31, 2005, police announced the arrest of two Sikhs in Punjab on suspicion of carrying out the attacks. Police reported that the two men were members of the Babbar Khalsa International (BKI) terrorist group.

On July 5, 2005, suspected Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (LET) terrorists attacked a makeshift Hindu temple erected amidst the ruins of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh. Indian security forces protecting the site killed all the attackers.

Terrorists bombed the Jama Masjid, the country's largest mosque located in Old Delhi, injuring approximately a dozen persons in two explosions that took place in quick succession on April 16, 2006. No group claimed responsibility.

LET terrorists killed at least thirty-five Hindus on April 30 and May 1, 2006, in Jammu and Kashmir. Terrorists struck two remote Hindu-dominated mountain villages in Doda district, some 100 miles northeast of Jammu, and shot and killed twenty-two Hindus. On the same day, the bodies of nine Hindus were recovered from neighboring Udhampur district. Police stated the dead were Hindu cattle herders reportedly kidnapped by suspected terrorists on April 30, 2006.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

During the reporting period, the UPA introduced legislation that would give New Delhi the power to intervene in states in which the Government refuses to take strong measures to end communal outbreaks. The UPA also acted to increase the powers of the human rights commission to investigate abuse cases.

The Government acted forcibly to prosecute those responsible for the Godhra attacks and win proper compensation for the victims of the Delhi anti-Sikh riots.

After the Mumbai terrorist attacks, the prime minister and others deliberately stated that it was not a case of "Muslim terrorism," told the nation to respect and protect innocent Muslims, and praised Muslims for their patriotism.

The Government acted systematically to remove "tainted" textbooks with communal bias from schools and introduce secular, more objective textbooks that seriously examine atrocities committed against minorities in the country.

In Rajasthan, opposition parties marched with Christians and Muslims to protest the BJP-sponsored anti-conversion bill, and the Government condemned it.

Speeches by the prime minister and some state government officials promoted communal harmony and the Government drafted a model comprehensive law to deal with communal violence, appointed activists to high-level positions responsible for minority concerns, created a Commission for Minority Educational Institutions to improve minority access to education, established a national commission to determine effective ways to improve the social welfare of religious minorities, and created a new Ministry for Minority affairs.

The UPA Government continued efforts to make statements and implement campaign promises to improve religious tolerance.

The NHRC and NCM continued to promote freedom of religion during the period covered by this report. Through their annual reports and investigations, they focused attention on human rights problems and, where possible, encouraged judicial resolutions.

In September 2005, the NCM convened a meeting between prominent Hindu and Muslim leaders to promote communal harmony and deepen understanding and trust among their communities.

The NHRC also directed the Gujarat state Government to entrust the investigation of certain Gujarat cases to the CBI, to support NGOs working on behalf of religious minorities and to reform the police.

On May 19, 2005, the Orissa High Court commuted Dara Singh's death sentence to life imprisonment, upheld the life sentence decision for one of his accomplices, Mahendra Hembram, and acquitted the other eleven defendants in the case of the killing of Australian missionary Graham Staines and his two minor sons. Singh has been charged with three other murders and continued to face trial in those cases. In October 2005, the supreme court accepted an appeal by Dara Singh against his conviction and life sentence, and also accepted the CBI's appeal seeking capital punishment. The supreme court had not heard either appeal by the end of the period covered by this report.

In August 2005, the Government of Maharashtra amended its 2000 State Minorities Commission Bill to stipulate that the commission present its annual report to the state parliament and required parliament to report on actions taken as a result of the commission's findings.

In response to the communal violence in Vadodara, the supreme court on May 4, 2006, overturned a Gujarat High Court order directing all municipal corporations in the state to demolish places of religious worship that were obstructing roads. The supreme court's order stopped the ongoing demolitions in Vadodara in order to prevent the destruction of other mosques and the resulting communal friction. The supreme court argued that the Gujarat court had directed the police and other authorities "to take immediate steps to remove encroachments by religious structures on public space without discrimination, and submit their reports." The Government also noted that the removal of religious structures was intrinsically sensitive, and must be subjected to scrutiny and classification before demolition.

Journalists and numerous NGOs noted that the Government's response to the Vadodara violence was much improved over its 2002 post-Godhra reaction. Journalists noted that the Gujarat Government quickly appealed for peace and local BJP leaders did not make provocative statements as they did in 2002.

On August 11, 2005, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh issued an apology in parliament to the Sikh community as well as the nation for the massacre of an estimated 2,700 Sikhs during the 1984 riots following then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's assassination. Singh's apology followed the resignation of two Congress party leaders from public offices after being indicted by an official commission that probed the anti-Sikh riots that occurred twenty-one years ago.

The NHRC on May 15, 2006, ordered the Punjab Government to disburse a monetary relief of \$5,700 (250 thousand INR) each to the next of kin of forty-five persons whom the state government admitted were in police custody immediately before they were killed and illegally cremated. The Government, with the assistance of relatives and NGOs, identified 1,296 illegally cremated bodies.

The cabinet, on June 24, 2006, approved a new fifteen-point program to prevent and control communal incidents and take care of minorities' welfare and funded programs for minorities. The revised program is also designed to prevent communal riots, facilitate prosecution of communal offences, and help rehabilitate riot victims.

The Government acted to implement a National Action Plan for Human Rights Education, adopted in 2005, to promote awareness of human rights. Specific target groups include schools, colleges and universities, government officials, the

armed forces, prison officials and law officers. The Ministry of Home Affairs held five seminars at Chennai, Calcutta, Delhi, Mumbai, and Bhopal, which were attended by a large number of NGOs working in the field of human rights police officers and civil servants. The Government also introduced human rights courses as a part of the training curriculum for the Border Security Force, Central Reserve Police Force, National Police Academy, and Police Training Colleges.

Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

Despite incidents of violence and discrimination during the period covered by this report, relations between various religious groups generally were amicable among the substantial majority of citizens. Efforts at ecumenical understanding brought religious leaders together to defuse religious tensions. Prominent secularists of all religious groups made public efforts to show respect for other religious groups by celebrating their holidays and attending social events such as weddings. Muslim groups protested against the mistreatment of Christians by Hindu extremists. Christian clergy and spokespersons for Christian organizations issued public statements condemning anti-Muslim violence in places such as Gujarat.

However, animosities within and between religious communities have roots that are centuries old, and these tensions, exacerbated by poverty, class, and ethnic differences, erupted into periodic violence. The Government made some effort, not always successfully, to prevent these incidents and to restore communal harmony; however, tensions between Hindus and Muslims and between Hindus and Christians continued to pose a challenge to the concepts of secularism, tolerance, and diversity on which the country was founded.

The Home Ministry reported that during 2005, "the communal situation in the country, by and large, remained under control during the current year. No major communal incident was reported from any part of the country, except the one incident at Mau town in Uttar Pradesh on October 14, 2005, involving a confrontation over the holding of a procession and the use of loudspeakers by Hindus during the Bharat Milap programme, which claimed ten lives. The situation was, however, brought under control."

Hindus and Muslims continue to feud over mosques constructed centuries ago on sites where Hindus believed temples stood previously.

Extremist Hindu groups such as the VHP and Bajrang Dal maintained that they intended to build a Hindu temple in Ayodhya on the site of the 500-year-old Babri Mosque demolished by a Hindu mob in 1992, with or without the Government's approval. In March 2003, the supreme court denied the Government's application to rescind a ban on religious activity at the site, whereupon then Prime Minister Vajpayee promised to continue with plans to build a temple where the razed mosque had stood.

Secular groups continued to protest the Sangh Parivar's attempts over the past decade to take control of the Sufi syncretic (Hindu-Muslim) shrine known as Guru Dattatreya Baba Budan Swami Dargah at Chikmagalur in Karnataka. The centuries-old shrine is believed to have been one of the earliest centers of Sufism in the south. In recent years, Hindus have held many festivals at the site, alienating local Muslims. In October 2005, the Karnataka Government banned a controversial Hindu religious ceremony at the shrine. However, human rights groups stated that the coalition government that took office in February 2006, with the BJP as one of its partners, would continue to support attempts by Hindu groups to take control of the shrine.

In early February 2005 and 2006, Hindu-Muslim tension escalated in the town of Dhar in Madhya Pradesh after Hindus and Muslims attempted to simultaneously pray at a disputed site called "Bhojshala." Hindu worshipers resisted violent attempts by the local administration to stop them from hanging the picture of a Hindu goddess at the site. The administration then brought in police to quell the violence. Tensions died down after local police forces convinced the two groups to offer prayers at different times of the day and instituted a curfew.

A July 2004 Urdu press report highlighted the Muslim community's sensitivity to threats to their religious sites. The report claimed the National Highway Authority of India (NHAI) planned to move the Sidha Jama mosque, located on a national highway in Midnapore, West Bengal, to make way for road expansion. When the NHAI started proceedings to acquire the land under the Land Acquisition Act, local Muslims approached the West Bengal Minorities Commission to prevent the relocation. When the NHAI did not respond to commission requests for information, Muslims took the case to the Calcutta High Court, which ordered the mosque to be moved "in the public interest." In their appeal, Muslims stated that they feared the order would create a precedent allowing the relocation of mosques across the country.

The same report alleged that airport authorities in Calcutta wanted to acquire another area where a mosque, madrasah, tomb of a saint, and a graveyard were situated, to extend the airport. No action was taken on this case and it remained pending in the courts.

In the second week of September 2004, the VHP led an unsuccessful attempt to demolish the tomb of a seventeenth century Muslim warrior in Pratapgarh in Mahabaleshwar, Maharashtra. During the agitation, several Muslim families left their homes, fearing violence, but later returned. The state police moved swiftly to prevent violence and showed no

anti-Muslim bias.

Instances of Hindu-Muslim communal violence occurred during the reporting period.

Communal violence sparked by a traffic accident occurred in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, in October 2004. Police attempting to quell the violence were pelted with stones and responded with gunshots, killing one person and injuring three. There were no updates available during the reporting period.

In March 2006, the state of Goa reported the first significant instance of Hindu-Muslim violence since its inception in 1960. A group of Hindus attacked and destroyed Muslim shops and vehicles in two towns in central Goa under the pretext of protesting against the illegal construction of a mosque by recent Muslim immigrants. The small Goa police force summoned 300 riot police officers from neighboring Karnataka to contain the violence.

According to media reports, in 2006, the chief minister of Bihar ordered a probe into the 1989 Bhagalpur riots that killed more than 1,000 persons, mostly Muslims. Some of the responsible were convicted, but most of the guilty remained at large.

On October 23, 2005, a case of sexual harassment at a clothing shop led to Hindu-Muslim clashes in Agra. Police quelled the violence with no loss of life.

In Kerala, RSS activists attacked a mosque at Vallikunnam in Alleppey district on February 23, 2005, killing one Muslim man and injuring two others, including the imam.

The Indian Express reported on June 1, 2006, that the Kerala Government submitted to the high court that there was nothing unconstitutional in Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) taking an oath in the name of Allah. This was done in response to a writ petition filed by a BJP youth leader challenging the constitutional validity of eleven newly elected Muslim MLAs in Kerala who were sworn in the name of Allah and not in the name of God, or by making a solemn affirmation, as prescribed.

In July 2004, Hindus in Vadodara, Gujarat launched a two-month economic boycott against Muslims following the killing in June of a Hindu by his former business partner, a Muslim. The alleged killer's family relocated from the village.

On July 4, 2004, approximately 300 Bajrang Dal activists attacked a Muslim-owned hospital in Indore, Madhya Pradesh, destroying property and causing patients to flee. The activists were protesting the elopement of a Hindu girl with a Muslim worker from the hospital canteen. The police registered a complaint, but at the end of the reporting period, there had been no arrests.

In July 2004, in Gujarat, rioters killed two persons, injured twenty, destroyed forty houses and fifteen shops, and looted property worth thousands of dollars after an alleged incident of sexual harassment of a Hindu girl by Muslim youth. In September 2004, also in Gujarat, minor Hindu-Muslim clashes during a Hindu religious procession resulted in property damage but no injuries or deaths.

On August 27, 2004, unknown assailants threw crude bombs outside two mosques in Poorna and Jalna, Central Maharashtra, just after Friday prayers, injuring eighteen worshippers. A week later, minor riots following the blasts led to property damage but no loss of life.

The press reported on October 27, 2004, that the S.J. Dave High School, in Gujarat, had for the past six years required its students to wear patches associating them with their religion. The school agreed to stop the practice after two school trustees objected to it and the district education officer asked the school to stop. Opponents of the patch requirement expressed concern that it would enable continued discrimination against Muslims in educational institutions.

Sectarian violence in October 2004 also claimed the lives of two Muslims clerics in Orai, Uttar Pradesh. Police reported the violence was sparked by a conflict over control of a religious site.

Three persons were killed and fifteen others injured in February 2005 in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, when sectarian violence between two Muslim groups erupted over a disputed procession. The trouble started when members of one Muslim sect attempted to prevent a procession by the other from going through their area.

In August 2004, there were press reports that the Buddhist community was deeply concerned over rising incidents of harassment and persecution of Buddhist tribespeople by militants and security forces alike, particularly in the northeast. Reportedly, two separatist groups--the National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Isak-Muivah (NSCN-IM) and the National Socialist Council of Nagaland--Khaplang (NSCN-K)--demanded land belonging to Buddhists and local indigenous faiths in villages in Tirap and Changlang district. Members of both the NSCN-IM and the NSCN-K were

predominantly Christian. The press also reported that both groups were pressing Buddhists to convert to Christianity. No further related incidents were reported during the year.

In May 2005, Akhil Kumar Sahoo, General Secretary of the Orissa Buddhist Front, claimed that the state government had taken no administrative or legal steps towards recognition of the Buddhist community. Although the NCM had directed the state government to declare the birthdays of Lord Buddha and Sikhism's founder Guru Nanak as state holidays, only Guru Nanak's birthday had been recognized.

Leaders of the Tibetan Buddhist community in the southern part of the country commented during the year that relations with the Government and local residents were good and that they did not believe to be persecuted. In May 2005, a leading Buddhist monk stated that tensions between Tibetans and their largely Hindu neighbors occurred because of economic rather than religious reasons.

In a rare case of Muslim-Buddhist communal tension, members of the two communities clashed in Leh, Jammu and Kashmir in February 2006, over the alleged desecration of a Qur'an. Four houses were set on fire and an unspecified number of persons were injured. The Government deployed police and military personnel and implemented a curfew in the area. Buddhist leaders denied the desecration, which they characterized as a rumor spread by outsiders intent on disrupting centuries of communal harmony between Leh's Buddhists and Shi'as.

Radical ethnic and religious groups carried out attacks on the media during the previous reporting period. In June 2005, radical Shiv Sena elements attacked the Mumbai office of the newspaper Aapla Mahanagar, assaulted the editorial staff, and damaged office equipment in response to an article written against a Hindu religious sect. In August 2005, in Mumbai, alleged Muslim fundamentalist activists attacked the editor of a Hindi language newspaper, Sajid Rashid, with knives and seriously injured him, charging that he had insulted Islam. Mumbai police filed charges in the case, but the assailants remained at large and the investigation open at the end of the reporting period.

In Christian-majority areas, there were occasional reports that Christians persecuted members of other faiths belonging to regional minorities. In Tripura, there were several reported cases of harassment of non-Christians by members of the National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT), a militant separatist group with a largely evangelical Christian membership.

According to a media report, International VHP Secretary Pravin Togadia claimed that the VHP planned to reconvert all Christians residing in BJP ruled states to Hinduism by 2005 and "expose the global Christian conspiracy of conversions."

The VHP reported in February 2005 that it considered 2004 a successful year for reconversions, in that it brought 12,857 persons back "into the fold" of Hinduism, 3,727 from Islam and 9,130 from Christianity.

In April 2006, Former BJP President L.K. Advani spoke out against religious conversions. He stated, "We strongly condemn the campaign of proselytization which poses a grave threat to Hindu society. We demand stern action against those who indulge in such activities." Advani highlighted what he described as an "organized foreign-funded conversion campaign by evangelical groups," noting that "it is bad enough that religious conversions are conducted in a systematic manner through inducements and coercions, but such activities are more ominous when they are facilitated by foreign funded organizations, ostensibly under the garb of social service for poor and under-privileged families."

Christians often held large public prayer meetings without violence or protests. For example, on May 13, 2005, a leading Christian evangelist spoke in New Delhi, and the event, attended by more than 3,000 persons, was peaceful, with a moderate police presence and no Hindu activist group protests.

In January 2005, the Government permitted the U.S.-based evangelical leader Benny Hinn to hold a rally in Bangalore, which was attended by thousands. The Government stipulated that the event must not disturb the peace and that no one should perform "divine healing." One online news service reported that, although Hinn carried out "divine healing," the Government took no action. A few Hindu groups protested the event, resulting in minor damage to property and vehicles in the area.

Another U.S.-based Christian evangelist, Pat Robertson, spoke at a prayer meeting in Delhi on May 13, 2005, attended by dignitaries such as Congress leader Subodh Kant Sahay. The event attracted approximately 3,000 persons and, with a moderate police presence, concluded peacefully. There was no agitation during the meeting. Visiting Sikh, Muslim, Buddhist, and Jewish leaders also regularly addressed their adherents without incident.

The All-India Catholic Union (AICU) expressed deep concern over growing anti-Christian violence in several BJP-controlled states following the defeat of the BJP in the national elections in May 2004. The AICU claimed that the perpetrators were members of fundamentalist groups affiliated with the RSS.

In November, the AICU reported that there were approximately 200 attacks against Christians throughout the country

in the first eleven months of 2005.

In January 2005, in Assam, a mob set fire to a newly opened Catholic school, after accusing school staff of attempting to convert Hindus. Police brought the situation under control, but could not save the school building from destruction.

On May 21, 2005, the body of K. Daniel, a preacher from Kummavadi, was found in Andhra Pradesh bearing marks suggestive of an acid attack. On June 2, 2005, police in Andhra Pradesh found the body of Pastor Isaac Raju, who had been missing since May 24. Press reported that in both cases a person called and gave precise directions on the location of the body. Church members claim the killings were planned to terrorize the Christian community. In response, the state government formed a Special Investigation Team to find those responsible for the killings and the Home Minister also offered protection to Christian missionaries living in the state. In June 2005, police arrested Kokala Govardhan for the killings. Govardhan admitted that he killed the two pastors for converting Hindus to Christianity. The Government of Andhra Pradesh disbursed \$ 6,818 (300 thousand INR) to the families of those killed as financial assistance in September 2005.

Religious press outlets reported that on December 3, 2005, a group of approximately twenty RSS members in Andhra Pradesh forcibly took Pastor Yesupadam to the local police station, where they threatened to kill him if he continued his Christian activities. The pastor reportedly received a number of telephone threats after the incident.

Religious press outlets reported that on January 12, 2006, approximately 100 persons beat pastors M. Aaron and Madhu Kumar, of the Indian Pentecostal Church, when they attempted to distribute Christian pamphlets during a convention of Bible students in Nizamabad Polytechnic School in Andhra Pradesh. Police registered a case against ten assailants, and attributed responsibility for the attack to the student wing of the BJP and RSS.

Religious press outlets reported that on January 13, 2006, in Nizambad, Andhra Pradesh, ten members of the RSS pulled Christians from their home and beat them, leaving the pastor, Nagani Swami David, unconscious and four others injured. Police arrested and charged nine men in connection with the attack. The attackers told police that Pastor David and the other Christians had torn down pictures of Hindu gods.

Religious press outlets reported that on February 28, 2006, fifteen assailants attacked Pastor Lavete Jacob and other Christians, including Jacob's wife, daughters, and a family friend in Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh. Five men were arrested and released on bail. The same group had earlier attacked Jacob on February 18, 2006.

According to Christian media reports, on March 20, 2006, approximately thirty persons attacked a group of Christians who were preaching in the Pappula bazaar of Nellore, Andhra Pradesh, resulting in the short-term hospitalization of three pastors. Local Christians claimed the group attacked them because they had converted a former RSS member to Christianity. The United Pastors' Association of Nellore and the AICC held a protest rally on March 20, 2006, and submitted a memorandum to local authorities, demanding the arrest of the attackers. A number of men were arrested and released on bail.

Religious press outlets reported that on June 8, 2006, in Rampur Thanda, Andhra Pradesh, Pastor Prem Kumar of the Church of South India was killed after being approached by a young man requesting him to lead a prayer service in the village. Police initially denied any religious motive to the killing. The case remained under investigation.

Religious press outlets reported that on June 10, 2006, in Nizamabad, Andhra Pradesh, a group of Christian workers from the organization Gospel for Asia were beaten and their equipment destroyed while showing a film on social problems such as HIV/AIDS. The Christians were not proselytizing at the time of attack, although they had earlier been involved in evangelism in the area.

Religious press outlets reported that on August 31, 2005, Hindu extremists surrounded property belonging to a Christian Gospel Society in Bihar and demanded the arrest of its director for allegedly desecrating a Hindu religious statue. On September 3, 2005, the police arrested the director, holding him for several hours, and on September 25, 2005, the attackers returned to the property and injured several Christians found there.

Religious press outlets reported that Hindu activists in Chhattisgarh converted hundreds of Christians in a ceremony in April 2005. A local newspaper reported that senior BJP leader Dilip Singh Judeo threatened Christian workers during his address at the ceremony, stating, "If Christian missionaries don't stop converting people, we will take up arms."

Religious press outlets reported that on August 14, 2005, the Dharma Sena (Army of Religion) extremist group attacked a Christian church under construction in Raipur, Chattisgarh. The group alleged that the church building encroached on land belonging to a Sena leader. The church denied this claim.

Religious press outlets reported that on September 11, 2005, the Hindu extremist group Dharma Sena attacked two

churches in Raipur, Chattisgarh, tearing a cross from one building and throwing it into a septic tank and inflicting approximately \$1,140 (50 thousand INR) worth of damage. Members of the Dharma Sena also attacked a church meeting, physically assaulting the wife and brother of a pastor, and accusing the church of conversions.

Religious press outlets reported that on December 4, 2005, a group of approximately thirty Dharma Sena members attacked five Christians in a church in Raipur, Chattisgarh, allegedly forcing them to bow before a statue at a Hindu temple. No details were known about further developments.

Religious press outlets reported that on June 25, 2006, in Bothli, Chhattisgarh, a group of approximately thirty alleged members of Dharam Jagran Sena raided a prayer meeting organized by six Christian families, beating those present. Among the main victims was an eight-month pregnant woman, who was taken to the hospital with internal injuries. Reportedly, the hospital declined to treat her and police also refused to take action against the perpetrators.

Religious press outlets reported that on October 14, 2005, a group of Hindu extremists attacked a large Pentecostal prayer meeting in Dayal Pur, Delhi, injuring five pastors and damaging church property. A local BJP MLA and his supporters purportedly prevented church members from registering a case against the attackers.

Religious press outlets reported that in October 2004, approximately thirty individuals attacked a Christian pastor and his wife as they were returning home from a prayer gathering in south Gujarat. The police filed a FIR but made no arrests.

In November 2005, Christian press reported that a group of approximately 150 high-caste Hindus attacked dalit Christians in the Kheda district of Gujarat, injuring five and allegedly sexually assaulting dalit and Christian women in the village. The report indicated that the former president of the local Congress party led the attack and that police initially refused to file a case. An investigation was ongoing.

From February 11 to 13, 2006, the VHP organized a gathering of more than 200 thousand Hindus from Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Rajasthan in the town of Subir (often referred to as "the Dangs") in Gujarat. Activists argued that the Hindu festival constituted indirect pressure for tribal Christians in the district to reconvert to Hinduism. Despite widespread anticipation that the gathering would generate immense pressure to reconvert, no such conversions were reported. However, Gujarat Chief Minister and BJP leader Narendra Modi and other speakers condemned conversion activity by Christian missionaries and exhorted tribal Christians to "return home" to Hinduism. Modi told the gathering that it was his "constitutional duty" to prevent conversions by Hindus to Christianity and RSS chief K.S. Sudarshan stated that Christians and Muslims should be "Indianized," since they "could not be thrown into the sea." The Government sent a sizable police contingent, which observers and human rights groups stated helped prevent violence and intimidation.

In April 2006, the Gujarat Government refused to renew a contract with an order of Christian nuns to work in a government leprosy hospital. The press reported that the government suspended the contract because it believed the nuns were performing religious services and conversions. The nuns and patients at the hospital denied the charges.

Religious press outlets reported that on May 21, 2006, in Dubalia, Jharkhand, a newly-converted Christian, Santosh Karmali, was forced to forfeit his right to the land of his family. Allegedly, tribal animist believers forced him to sign a document during a meeting of the village council and the Central Sarna (collective name for the tribal animist religions in Jharkhand) Committee. Karmali had belonged to a Sarna religion prior to his conversion. His wife's head was shaved, lime powder was applied to her face, and she was paraded around the village. The family was then forced out the village, and the Sarna samiti committee took possession of the family land.

The media reported the death of a twenty-five-year-old Christian pastor in Channapatana, Karnataka on February 11, 2005. Although an official autopsy determined it was a suicide, Christian groups alleged that Hindu extremists had killed him.

In May 2005, activists of the Bajrang Dal vandalized a Christian church in Channapatna, Karnataka, injuring women and children belonging to the congregation. The state police arrested six activists and registered a case against them.

On August 30, 2005, approximately fifty assailants ransacked a Christian church building in Bangalore. No further details were known.

Hindu extremists in southern Karnataka attacked a Christian church on Easter Sunday 2006 and assaulted the pastor. District police authorities arrested four persons who allegedly belonged to the Bajrang Dal.

Religious press outlets reported that on April 16, 2006, in Bataguri, Karnataka alleged Bajrang Dal members attacked two separate churches. A group of ten to fifteen men attacked the Believers' Church during Easter Sunday service and vandalized the pastor's house, beating the pastor and his wife and threatening the parishioners with further attacks should they continue meeting. On the same day, twenty five to thirty men raided another church, threatening women and children and destroying church property.

Religious press outlets reported that on June 8, 2006, in Thovarcare, Karnataka, seven members of the Bajrang Dal broke up a Christian prayer meeting, chased away two pastors, and threatened other Christians present.

Religious press outlets reported that on June 9, 2006, in Kolar Gold Field, Karnataka, extremists destroyed a church after the pastor ignored orders to cease his work and leave the area.

Religious press outlets reported that on June 11, 2006, in Namthi, Kanataka, 150 persons seized Pastor Sundar Rao after he led a prayer meeting and forcibly took him to the police station, where they and the police severely beat Rao. The next day, after his release, he was assaulted again. The attackers were arrested and released on bail.

In August 2004, a Catholic priest was killed in Kerala, during the state's annual harvest festival. Church members reported that the Catholic priest had received intimidating telephone calls threatening him with death if he did not cease to "proselytize." The Catholic Bishops Conference of India (CBCI) claimed the killing was meant to destroy inter-religious harmony in Kerala and demanded an investigation.

In September 2004, also in Kerala, BJP activists attacked nuns and monks belonging to the order "Missionaries of Charity," injuring one monk and one nun and damaging a vehicle. The police arrested fourteen RSS-BJP sympathizers in connection with the attack.

In April 2005, Hindu and Muslim villagers burned down a prayer hall and physically attacked three Christian church members following a baptism ceremony in Kerala. Two days later, villagers assaulted the pastor and his assistant.

On Easter eve 2005, in Chalakud Taluna, Kerala, approximately twenty RSS activists attacked Christians viewing the film *The Passion of the Christ*, injuring one man.

There were no further developments in two incidents of anti-Christian violence in the Jhabua district of Madhya Pradesh that took place in January and March 2004. In the incidents, assailants attacked local Christians, damaging property and beating a priest following the rape and death of two Hindu minor girls. One Hindu activist was killed during the violence, allegedly by a shot fired from a church. The police charged several persons, but the cases had not come up for hearing.

Religious press outlets reported that on August 21, 2005, Hindu extremists attacked a Christian prayer meeting in Indore, Madhya Pradesh, injuring at least ten persons, including several women and a two-year-old child. The attack targeted two Christians awaiting trial on charges of forcible conversion of Hindus. Police registered a case against three men for the attack. The progress of the case was unknown.

Religious press outlets reported that on September 4, 2005, police ordered two Christians out of a church service while a large group of Hindus gathered outside. A Hindu leader allegedly then threatened to burn the two men alive if they attended another service. Subsequently, police warned the men not to attend church services.

Religious press outlets reported that on September 22, 2005, assailants attacked a Hindu man and several Christians in Jhabua, Madhya Pradesh, alleging that they had damaged a Hindu statue. One Christian was injured in the attack and another detained at the local police station for approximately thirty-two hours.

Religious press outlets reported that on November 5, 2005, Hindu extremists barred access to a new church built in Jhabua, Madhya Pradesh, assaulting the pastor and other members of the congregation. The attackers claimed the district collector had ordered the church closed.

Religious press outlets reported that on December 4, 2005, RSS activists assaulted a Christian pastor during a worship service in his home after complaining about the noise emanating from the building. Police, called by the attackers, also reportedly beat the pastor and detained him for two hours.

Religious press outlets reported that on January 25, 2006, a group of seven local police in Jhabua, Madhya Pradesh, entered a Christian home, reportedly arresting and beating two tribal pastors and ordering them to end "Christian activities" or face the consequences. The following day, police released the pastors, who were subsequently denied treatment by a local hospital. No action was taken against the police involved.

Religious press outlets reported that on January 28, 2006, at least six Christians were injured during an attack on a prayer meeting in a private home in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh. Approximately thirty persons threw stones at the building and shouted anti-Christian slogans, accused the organizers of carrying out "forced conversions," and beat the participants. The church members blamed the Hindu militant group, Bajrang Dal, for the attack.

Religious press outlets reported that on February 5, 2006, RSS members beat two Christian men for distributing Christian literature in Indore, Madhya Pradesh, reportedly injuring one. Police registered a case and were investigating the matter, but no arrests had been made by the end of the period covered by this report.

During May and June 2006, various extremist groups in Madhya Pradesh allegedly led several attacks against Christians. Father Anand Muttungal, spokesperson of Madhya Pradesh Catholic diocese, and Dr. John Dayal of the AICC charged that the district administration and the police colluded in this harassment of Christians. Police refused to intervene, even when they personally witnessed the attacks.

According to data provided by a Christian NGO, over the period of August 2005 to June 2006, more than twenty Christian activists (pastors and social workers) were taken to police stations, booked under MPFRA, and released on personal sureties of approximately \$100 (4,647 INR).

On May 28, 2006, two recent Christian converts residing in Nadia village, Madhya Pradesh, claimed that their wives were gang-raped by local Hindu villagers when they refused to reconvert to Hinduism. Indira Iyengar, the sole Christian member of the Madhya Pradesh State Minorities Commission, arranged for the couples to meet the media on June 5, 2006, in the state capital of Bhopal. After the couples had given the statements, a Bajrang Dal activist disrupted the press conference and accused Iyengar of making false rape charges. At the end of the reporting period, the two couples were in hiding. The Khargone police registered the couples' complaint of rape against four prominent villagers and sent the DNA of the accused to Calcutta for examination. According to police officials, the medical exam was inconclusive. Hindu villagers have filed counter-complaints, accusing the couples of trying to convert Hindus to Christianity. The police have not charged the couples nor arrested them.

On May 31, 2006, sixteen Christians accused in the Arjun Pal murder case were acquitted by a Madhya Pradesh district court of all charges, including murder, riot, attempt to murder, and unlawful assembly. Two had been released on bail, while fourteen had spent more than two years in jail. The case began in January 2004, when the raped body of a nine-year old Hindu girl was found inside the premises of a Catholic school in Ali Rajpur in Madhya Pradesh. Enraged Hindus then ransacked school property and attacked three churches in neighboring villages. One Hindu, Arjun Pal, was shot and killed during subsequent Hindu-Christian rioting. The case had been in the courts since 2005.

Religious press outlets reported that on April 6, 2006, in Thaiyavali Chowk, Madhya Pradesh, extremists attacked the Christ Church Boys' School, physically assaulting a teacher and threatening the headmaster. Reportedly, extremists were angry at the school's decision to not close during a Hindu festival. The school did not register a complaint with the police.

Religious press outlets reported that on June 4, 2006, in Myapuri, Madhya Pradesh, approximately fifty alleged Bajrang Dal members disrupted a prayer meeting and took all present to a nearby Hindu temple, threatening the women with rape if they should continue attending Christian activities. Subsequently, police arrested fifteen, all Christians. The pastor was released on bail while the others were interrogated and released after four hours.

In January 2005, in Ambarnath, Maharashtra, a Hindu group attacked a small convent of the Congregation of Teresian Carmelites and broke a wooden cross. The nuns locked themselves in the convent and were not harmed. The group left pamphlets ordering the nuns to leave the area. Police were investigating the attack but had made no arrests by the end of the reporting period.

Press reported that in February 2005, a Hindu priest in the Catholic village of Rajura, Maharashtra, insisted that tribal Christians turn their church into a Hindu temple or face violent consequences. A witness stated that the cleric urged Hindu villagers to kill the Christians with swords.

Numerous religious press outlets reported that in May 2005, Hindu extremists physically attacked eleven Christian families from Jamanya village, Maharashtra. The reports alleged that village officials summoned the families to a panchayat (community council of elders), which demanded that they renounce their faith. When they refused, the men were beaten with heavy sticks and chased from the village. On the following day, the mob attacked the women and children. Witnesses stated the mob also tried to disrobe the women. No arrests had been made by the end of the period covered by this report.

Religious press outlets reported that on November 26, 2005, assailants attacked three Christians in Maharashtra for distributing Christian literature. The attackers filed a report accusing the three men of engaging in unethical conversion activities. The police took the victims to a local hospital and later filed charges against the attackers.

Religious press outlets reported that on January 29, 2006, Hindu extremists attacked the inauguration ceremony of a Catholic school and hostel in Ghosale, Maharashtra. The attackers accused the staff of trying to convert persons by offering free education to their children. The police arrested eighteen persons; all were released on bail.

Religious press outlets reported that on February 26, 2006, approximately fifty Bajrang Dal activists attacked and injured three Christian pastors in Nere, Maharashtra. Police arrested the attackers, who were released on bail.

Religious press outlets reported that on April 11, 2006, in Khopate, Maharashtra, approximately fifty members of the VHP assaulted two pastors during a raid on a large-scale prayer meeting at the Living Light Fellowship Church, accusing them of converting persons to Christianity. Reportedly, five other pastors present were taken to a nearby

Hindu temple where they were beaten after refusing to worship a Hindu god. Police conducted an investigation at the behest of the police commissioner and subsequently made a number of arrests. All were released on minor charges.

Religious press outlets reported that on May 22, 2006, in Chopada, Maharashtra, alleged Hindu extremists stoned a member of the Indian Evangelical Team (IET).

Religious press outlets reported that on May 1, 2006, in Seikmaijing, Manipur, Hindu villagers burned down a church after a prominent village member converted to Christianity. Some village Christians were also physically assaulted and told to depart the village.

In February 2004, Hindu villagers in Jagatsingpur, Orissa, seized eight persons, including a local pastor and eight Christian women, and shaved their heads. Villagers accused the pastor of forcibly converting two village women; however, the women denied this. In May 2004, the local police arrested six persons in connection with the incident, and the pastor and the eight women remained in protected housing. No new information was available during the reporting period concerning these cases.

In August 2004, at least 300 persons broke into a Catholic church in Raikia, Orissa, and smashed religious statues, doors, and windows. The incident occurred after some Christians protested the removal by Hindus of fencing encircling the church. The local police brought the situation under control, but took no action against the perpetrators.

On September 15, 2004, in Orissa, a nun was seriously burned when an unidentified man threw acid on her.

In October 2004, in Baripada, Orissa, a local court ordered the arrest of five Christian preachers for "inciting communal feelings." After disrupting a Hindu ceremony, they were arrested for "uttering words with deliberate intent to wound the religious feelings of others and issuing threats of criminal intimidation to several persons."

In October 2004, approximately 300 tribal Christians were "reconverted" to Hinduism in a mass ceremony organized by the World Hindu Council in Orissa. Gauri Prasad Rath, state secretary of the council, stated it was the largest reconversion ceremony they had ever held. Christian leaders expressed shock and dismay at the news and argued that Hindu groups were able to force Christians to convert because they depend on the Hindu majority for employment.

On February 16, 2005, in Orissa, Baptist pastor Gilbert Raj was tortured and killed. Ten days later, Pentecostal pastor Dilip Dalai was stabbed to death. Christian groups claimed they were killed to stop their missionary work.

On February 27, 2005, a group of persons attacked Christian evangelist Kiran Kumar while he was returning home after holding a prayer meeting in Orissa. The police took him into custody, alleging he was attempting to forcibly convert persons. He was later released.

In February 2005, Hindu nationalists accused Christian missionaries of raping and killing a fourteen-year-old girl in the town of Dhenkanal, Orissa. The victim's mother claimed the missionaries had threatened her family if they did not convert to Christianity. The police rejected the conversion theory and were investigating the crime.

Christian press reported that in April 2005, the RSS converted approximately 300 Christians to Hinduism in the Chakapad village of Orissa without receiving permission under the state's anti-conversion law. Noting that police were present and did nothing, Christian groups argued that the Orissa anti-conversion law is discriminatory and only enforced when a person converted from Hinduism to another religion.

On June 14, 2005, Sangh Parivar activists disrupted the Indian People's Tribunal on Environmental and Human Rights hearing on the communal situation in Orissa. The activists harassed female tribunal members and threatened to rape them and parade them through the streets.

Religious press outlets reported that on November 20, 2005, fifteen houses belonging to members of the Christian community in Gajapati, Orissa, were burnt down, leaving six persons seriously injured and hospitalized, and a large number homeless. The attacks were estimated to have caused approximately \$21,730 (one million INR) worth of damage. The attacks occurred at a time when the Christian population of the village was attending church. Eight Christians and three or four Hindu extremists were arrested by police following the attacks. No further details were available about the progress of the case during the period covered by this report.

According to a church leader, on January 16, 2006, alleged Hindu extremists set fire to three houses belonging to Christians in Jajpur, Orissa. The inhabitants fled and took shelter in the local police station.

Religious press outlets reported that on January 24, 2006, in Koikonda, Orissa, Hindu villagers injured ten Christians (including four visiting Christian missionaries) during an attack on a Christian home where the participants had met

the night before. The village pastor and one of the missionaries tried to lodge an official complaint shortly thereafter, but police refused to file a case. Police arrested two men in connection with the incident, and subsequently released them on bail.

Religious press outlets reported that on March 20, 2006, arsonists targeted a church in Nandapur, Orissa. Local Christians claimed that extremists were responsible for the attack. The church leader was pursuing legal redress during the period covered by this report.

Press reported that approximately 342 Christian converts were reconverted to Hinduism in Orissa's Phulbani district during a religious conference conducted by the RSS in April 2006. RSS leader K.S. Sudarshan and VHP President Ashok Singhal attended the conference, and asked Sangh Parivar activists to monitor missionary activities, and demanded the Government stop cow slaughter and conversions.

The press reported in April 2005 that VHP activists in Chandigarh, Punjab planned to start an awareness campaign concerning the conversions of Sikhs to Christianity and urge Hindus to protest "vehemently" against the practice.

Religious press outlets reported that on June 1, 2006, in Pangila, Punjab, Pastor Harbans Lal, leader of Happy Life Prosperity Church in Panglia village, was beaten unconscious by approximately fifteen to twenty persons.

In June 2005, the Jodhpur District Administration in Rajasthan rescinded permission for the Pentecostal Church of God to hold a gathering in the city after VHP and Bajrang Dal protests. Hindu activists claimed the church was converting Hindu children, prompting the Government to cancel the gathering to prevent violence. A Congress Party official claimed the administration caved to communal pressures from Hindu activists and had no right to withdraw permission for the event.

Religious press outlets reported that on August 14, 2005, Hindu extremists attacked a prayer meeting held in a private home in Banswara, Rajasthan, injuring the owner of the house and others. Reportedly, the following day, Hindu activists prevented the prayer meeting sponsors from filing charges at the local police station.

Religious press outlets reported that on October 16, 2005, Hindu extremist youths assaulted five nuns as they boarded a bus to attend a Catholic event in Udaipur, Rajasthan. No details were known about the investigation of this incident, but Christian press reported that that attack was religiously motivated.

Religious press outlets reported that on October 27, 2005, the Tribal Christian Welfare Society curtailed its three-day festival in the Banswara district, Rajasthan, after violent RSS opposition to the event. Reportedly, a large number of Christians were assaulted in the area, and the RSS attempted to block would-be participants from reaching the festival.

Religious press outlets reported that on December 23, 2005, three men assaulted two nuns as they waited at a bus stop in Rajasthan. One of the attackers had reportedly been arrested and released on bail in connection with other attacks on Christians. No details were known about the investigation of this incident.

Religious press outlets reported that on December 24, 2005, nine RSS members attacked four Catholics, including one priest, traveling to attend mass in Jambuda, Rajasthan. The four were reportedly beaten until they were unconscious.

Between January and June 2006, a number of institutions and staff of EMI, which operates various charitable foundations in Rajasthan and across the country, endured considerable harassment from extremists and the state government.

On January 25, 2006, the organization was warned to not hold the Emmanuel Seminary annual graduation ceremony, which had been the target of an attack in 2005. Following threats and harassment as well as official police notification that no security would be provided for the event, EMI leaders decided to cancel the ceremony.

On February 10, 2006, an EMI school and orphanage in Ramganjmandi, Rajasthan, were set on fire. Reportedly, local police had warned EMI leaders that they would not move to prevent the violence.

On February 14, 2006, Hindu extremists attacked EMI headquarters in Kota after a copy of the controversial book, *Haqeeqat* (The Truth) was discovered on the premises. The book, which has been banned, reportedly contains derogatory references to Hinduism. Numerous sources indicated that EMI was actively distributing the text.

Attacks on other EMI institutions also took place through February. On February 22, 2006, an EMI primary school in Sanganer was attacked, and on February 24, 2006, the Jhowara Emmanuel Secondary School and church building were vandalized.

At the end of February, the Rajasthan Government had revoked the licenses of an EMI Bible institute, orphanage, school, hospital and church. On March 3, 2006, the Department of Social Welfare of Rajasthan froze the organization's bank accounts. However, on June 27, 2006, the Jaipur High Court instructed the state government to show cause regarding the closing of the EMI property and instructed the accounts to be unfrozen on June 28, 2006.

Religious press outlets reported that in July 2005, Hindu villagers in Tamil Nadu closed down a Pentecostal church and expelled the pastor and his wife, allegedly in response to decreasing interest in Hindu festivals in the village. After the couple filed a complaint, the police began negotiating with the villagers. No further details were known.

Religious press outlets reported that on September 4, 2005, fifteen extremists disrupted a Christian worship service at Allahabad Agricultural Institute destroying, religious items and injuring several persons. No further details were known.

Religious press outlets reported that on November 6, 2005, Hindu extremists disrupted a prayer gathering of approximately 200 Christians at the home of a family in Uttar Pradesh. The extremists accused the host family of converting Hindus to Christianity.

The press reported that on April 17, 2005, in West Bengal, members of forty-five tribal families reconverted to Hinduism from Christianity in a ceremony reportedly conducted by the VHP. The local administration investigated and determined that there was no indication that the conversions were forced. Some of the reconverted were reportedly from neighboring states such as Jharkhand and Orissa. A Christian organization leader asserted that there was no proof that the reconverted were actual Christians. No new information was available regarding this case.

On December 5, 2005, the press reported that a mob ransacked a church in West Bengal and burned a Bible after priests objected to activities of a local criminal gang. The attackers destroyed furniture, stole items of value and burnt the church Bible. Police arrested two attackers. No one was injured in the attack.

Press reported that on January 16, 2006, ten were injured after the demolition of the Christ Mission Ashram church in south Calcutta, West Bengal, resulted in a clash between church members and Calcutta Metropolitan Development Authority workers.

In April 2005, NDTV reported the conversion of Hindu migrant laborers from Bihar to Sikhism in Punjab. The state has more than one million migrant laborers, largely from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, employed in agriculture and industry. Experts observed that the migrants, who are either low-caste or dalit Hindus, convert to escape widespread discrimination, and that, although they become a more accepted part of Sikh society, they remained at the lowest end of the Sikh social and caste "hierarchy."

According to the Home Ministry, from 2002 to 2003, approximately 56,246 Pandit families were driven from their homes in Jammu and Kashmir by anti-Hindu violence perpetrated by Muslim insurgents and terrorists. Of these refugees, 4,778 families still were living in 12 refugee camps in Jammu at the end of the period covered by this report, and 238 families were still in Delhi's 14 camps, with the remainder living elsewhere.

The Pandit community criticized the bleak physical, educational, and economic conditions in the camps and feared that a negotiated solution giving greater autonomy to the state's Muslim majority might prevent their return and threaten the continued survival of the Pandit community in Jammu and Kashmir.

Following the Kashmir earthquake of 2005, terrorists slaughtered nine members of two Hindu families in Bedhal tehsil in the border district of Rajouri on October 10, 2005. The terrorists, thought to be members of Hizb-ul-Mujahideen, raided a Hindu home and slit the throats of the male family members one by one, killing two children in front of their father before killing him. Soon after, the same militants killed four members of another Hindu family in a different village. Security forces launched a search for the militants.

The slaughter of cows, considered holy by Hindus, sometimes led to violence. Several state governments (including Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, and Gujarat) have passed laws prohibiting slaughter of bovine species. Hindu nationalists often forcibly implemented these laws themselves.

On July 10, 2004, a Muslim farmer tried to sell a bull at the Barghat weekly market, located approximately 20 kilometers from the town of Seoni in Madhya Pradesh. Several Shiv Sena and Bajrang Dal activists accosted him, accusing him of trying to sell his bull to a butcher and beat him to death. The district police arrested the attackers.

In March 2005, in Kota, Rajasthan, activists from the Bajrang Dal clashed with a Muslim over the possession of a cow, leaving two persons injured. One member of the Bajrang Dal was beaten up when he attempted to stop the slaughter of a cow in Kota. In retaliation, a group from the Bajrang Dal clashed with the Muslims, injuring one.

On November 5, 2005, one person was killed and thirteen injured during communal clashes resulting from the slaughter of a cow in three villages in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh. Reportedly, Hindus caught two men selling beef on

November 1 (the night of the Hindu festival Diwali) and, when no charges were filed against the vendors, attacked Muslim property and burned approximately twenty-four houses. The police station commander was suspended for dereliction of duty and the police later arrested twelve persons in connection with the violence.

Some upper-caste Hindus, fearing that conversions by Hindu tribespeople and dalits to Christianity might weaken and ultimately destroy the rigid caste hierarchy, committed acts of violence against Christians.

In 2001, Human Rights Watch reported that the practice of dedicating or marrying young, prepubescent girls to a Hindu deity or temple as "servants of god," or "Devadasis," reportedly continued in several southern states, including Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. Devadasis, who generally are dalits, may not marry. They must live apart from their families and are required to provide sexual services to priests and high caste Hindus. Reportedly, many eventually are sold to urban brothels. The Devadasi tradition is linked, to some degree, to both trafficking and the spread of HIV/AIDS. In 1992, the state of Karnataka passed the Karnataka Devadasi Prohibition of Dedication Act (KDPDA) and called for the rehabilitation of Devadasis, but this law reportedly was not enforced effectively and criminalized the actions of Devadasis. Since Devadasis are by custom required to be sexually available to higher caste men, it reportedly is difficult for them to obtain justice from the legal system if they are raped. The KDPDA does not have a provision for penalizing offenders; however the Department of Women and Child Development formed a team to review the act to provide for such a provision.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy continued to promote religious freedom through contact with the country's senior leadership, as well as with state and local officials. The embassy and consulates regularly met with religious leaders and report on events and trends that affect religious freedom.

The U.S. government supported a wide range of initiatives to encourage religious and communal tolerance and freedom. Members of the embassy community celebrated Hindu, Christian, Muslim, Sikh, Buddhist, and Jewish festivals throughout the year with members of the various religious communities.

The embassy repeatedly expressed concern over Rajasthan's anti-conversion legislation with high ranking officials of the state and national governments, including the NHRC. The mission also expressed concern over Jharkhand Chief Minister Arjun Munda's December 2005 announcement that he would propose legislation against forcible religious conversions. No legislation had been enacted in Jharkhand by the end of the period covered by this report.

Throughout the reporting period, mission officers investigated and reported on numerous cases of alleged religious persecution, the reported harassment of EMI by the Rajasthan Government, discrimination against dalits and religiously motivated attacks by militants and terrorists, including the bombings at the Jama Masjid in Old Delhi.

Mission officers also monitored the plight of internally displaced Kashmiri Hindus, known as Pandits, who fled their home areas in the valley of Kashmir starting in 1989 due to attacks on them by terrorists seeking to drive out non-Muslim minorities.

Embassy officers regularly met with the NHRC General Secretary and other Commission officers regarding actions by the state government that have been injurious to the free exercise of belief by religious minorities.

During the period covered by this report, embassy and consulate officials met with important leaders of all significant minority communities. Officers regularly met with representatives of the country's diverse Muslim community and continued an active program of outreach to explain U.S. policies around the world and to better understand Indian Muslim attitudes towards the United States. In April 2006, the Calcutta Consulate organized a conference on "Perspectives on Islamic Education in the Twenty First Century." Madrassah teachers attended the program and discussed topics including Education, Religion and Public Policy, New Directions in Madrassah Education in India, and Education and Women in Islam. In December, the Calcutta Consulate also hosted a seminar on the role of religious leaders in combating HIV/AIDS in their communities.

In March 2005, the U.S. Department of State revoked the visa of a senior level state government official under section 212 (a)(2)(G) of the U.S. Immigration and Nationality Act, which makes ineligible any foreign government official who "was responsible for or directly carried out, at any time, particularly severe violations of religious freedom."

The NGO and missionary communities in the country were extremely active on questions of religious freedom, and mission officers meet regularly with local NGOs.

The U.S. government continued to express regret over the communal violence in Gujarat in 2002, and urged all parties in Gujarat to resolve their differences peacefully. Consulate officers also met in Mumbai with a range of NGO, business, media, and other contacts, including Muslim leaders, to monitor the aftermath of the Gujarat violence. The U.S. Embassy and the Mumbai, Chennai, and Calcutta Consulates reached out to madrassahs through the special

International Visitor Madrassah programs.

The Consulate in Chennai also organized roundtables in June 2003, October 2004, and November 2005 to promote better understanding between the Hindu, Muslim, Christian, and Buddhist communities. The Chennai Consulate continued to reach out to the Muslim community. The consulate continued to provide English instruction to underprivileged Muslim children, to donate books to madrassahs in Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka, and to sponsor qualified Muslims for IV programs on "Islamic Life in the U.S." and "Religious Education in the U.S."

U.S. officials, including the ambassador, continued to engage state officials on the reversal of anti-conversion laws. Embassy officers also raised the specific case of Rajasthan's new law at senior levels of the state and national governments and with the NHRC.

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[International Religious Freedom Report Home Page](#)