

### WORLD PRESS FREEDOM INDEX, 2021



The World Press Freedom Index, 2021, produced by Reporters Without Borders (RSF), a French non-governmental organisation, has again ranked India at 142nd out of 180 countries.

#### About:

This is despite the fact that for a year, on directions from Cabinet Secretary Rajiv Gauba, an index monitoring cell worked to improve the rankings, even holding a meeting between the Indian Ambassador to France and the RSF officials to lobby for a change in the ranking. In 2016, India's rank was 133, which has steadily climbed down to 142 in 2020. The RSF report says India is one of the world's most dangerous countries for journalists trying to do their job properly. They are exposed to every kind of attack, even police violence against reporters, ambushes by political activists, and reprisals instigated by criminal groups or corrupt local officials. The latest index released ranks 180 countries, topped, yet again, by Norway followed by Finland and Denmark, while Eritrea is at the bottom. China is ranked 177, and is only above North Korea at 179 and Turkmenistan at 178.

### AD-HOC JUDGES IN HIGH COURTS



The Supreme Court on Tuesday cleared the way for appointment of retired judges as ad-hoc judges in High Courts under Article 224A of the Constitution to deal with mounting backlog of cases.

#### About:

Termining pendency of around 57 lakh cases in High Courts as “docket explosion”, the Supreme Court activated a “dormant” constitutional provision to pave way for appointment of retired High Court judges as ad-hoc ones for a period of two to three years to clear backlog. Article 224A, used rarely, of the Constitution deals with appointment of ad-hoc judges in High Courts. It says “the Chief Justice of a High Court for any State may at any time, with the previous consent of the President, request any person who has held the office of a Judge of that Court or of any other High Court to sit and act as a Judge of the High Court for that State”. A bench of Chief Justice S.A. Bobde and Justices S.K. Kaul and Surya Kant issued a slew of guidelines pertaining to issues such as tenure, salary, perks, etc, and their role in adjudicating cases.

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## INDIA SHOULD BE A ‘COUNTRY OF PARTICULAR CONCERN’: U.S. PANEL

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), an independent bi-partisan commission, has recommended for the second year in a row that the State Department put India on a list (‘Countries of Particular Concern’ or CPCs) for the worst violations of religious freedoms in 2020.

### About:

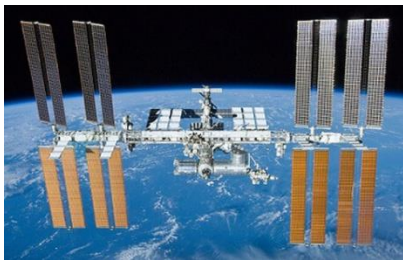


One of the 10 USCIRF commissioners presented a dissenting view. The USCIRF recommended that the administration impose targeted sanctions on Indian individuals and entities for “severe violations of religious freedom”. A second recommendation was for the administration to promote inter-faith dialogue and the rights of all communities at bilateral and multilateral forums “such as the ministerial of the Quadrilateral [the Quad]”. Another recommendation — to the U.S. Congress — was to raise issues in the U.S.-India bilateral space, such as by hosting hearings, writing letters and constituting Congressional delegations. The USCIRF recommendations are non-binding and the Trump administration had rejected the USCIRF recommendation to designate India a CPC last year, when it released its own determinations in December. The key concerns of the 2021 report include the Citizenship (Amendment) Act.

## INTERNATIONAL SPACE STATION (ISS) PROGRAMME

Russia’s space agency said it hoped to launch its own orbital station in 2025 as Moscow considers withdrawing from the International Space Station programme to go it alone.

### About:



Roscosmos chief Dmitry Rogozin said work had begun on the first module of a new station, after officials warned that Russia was considering pulling out of the ISS, one of the few successful examples of cooperation with the West. The announcement came with tensions soaring with the West. Launched in 1998 and involving Russia, the United States, Canada, Japan, and the European Space Agency, the ISS is one of the most ambitious international collaborations in human history. Russia’s Deputy Prime Minister Yury Borisov said in recent days that Moscow was considering whether to leave the ISS programme from 2025 because of the station’s age. Roscosmos said that a decision on quitting the ISS

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had not yet been made. Russia lost its monopoly for manned flights to the ISS last year after the first successful mission of U.S. company Space X. Despite its much-lauded history — Russia this month marked the 60th anniversary of Yuri Gagarin becoming the first person in orbit — the country's space programme has struggled in recent years as president Putin is more interested in military technology than space exploration.