June 20, 2023

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Biden:

We write in advance of your meeting with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his upcoming visit to the United States. As the world’s oldest democracy and the world’s largest democracy, the United States and India have forged a close relationship based on strategic interests and shared democratic values. India is an important member of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (the “Quad”) and a crucial partner for stability in the Indo-Pacific. We support the trip Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin took to New Delhi earlier this month to finalize a “Roadmap for U.S.-India Defense Industrial Cooperation,” deepening our strategic partnership. Trade and investment between the United States and India continue to grow, and there is an opportunity to greatly expand our economic ties. We welcome India’s potential increased role in supporting secure supply chains for critical sectors such as semiconductors and pharmaceuticals. And robust cultural engagement lies at the heart of our friendship, underscored by the immense contributions of the Indian-American diaspora community in the United States, many of whom also still have close and extended family living in India. We trust and expect that these important dimensions of the U.S.-India partnership — strategic, economic and cultural — will be part of your discussion when you meet directly with Prime Minister Modi.

As longtime supporters of a strong U.S.-India relationship, we also believe that friends can and should discuss their differences in an honest and forthright way. That is why we respectfully request that — in addition to the many areas of shared interests between India and the U.S. — you also raise directly with Prime Minister Modi areas of concern.

You have rightly said that America must “lead not merely by the example of our power but by the power of our example.” You have once again made respect for human rights, press freedom, religious freedom, and pluralism core tenets of American foreign policy. Moreover, these tenets are necessary to the functioning of true democracy. In order to advance these values with credibility on the world stage, we must apply them equally to friend and foe alike, just as we work to apply these same principles here in the United States.

A series of independent, credible reports reflect troubling signs in India toward the shrinking of political space, the rise of religious intolerance, the targeting of civil society organizations and journalists, and growing restrictions on press freedoms and internet access. Specifically, the State Department’s 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices in India documents the tightening of political rights and expression. Similarly, the State Department’s 2022 Report on

International Religious Freedom in India details the worrisome increase of religious intolerance toward minorities and religiously motivated violence by both private and state actors.\(^2\) Further, the annual assessments compiled by Reporters Without Borders show that India, a country that has been known in the past for its vibrant and independent press, has fallen significantly in the rankings for press freedom.\(^3\) And according to Access Now, India ranks first in terms of the most internet shutdowns for the fifth year in a row.\(^4\)

Both the United States and India enshrined human rights—including free speech, freedom of the press, and religious freedom—in our constitutions. And we share a special bond through moral leaders who shaped our histories. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr, who gave his life in pursuit of building the beloved community here in the United States, was an ardent student of the teachings of the Mahatma Gandhi, known in India as the “Father of the Nation.” Both King and Gandhi had the vision of building a more perfect union among people from different backgrounds, races and faiths — Gandhi in India, and King in the United States. We share their vision.

We join you in welcoming Prime Minister Modi to the United States. We want a close and warm relationship between the people of the United States and the people of India. We want that friendship to be built not only on our many shared interests but also on shared values. We do not endorse any particular Indian leader or political party — that is the decision of the people of India — but we do stand in support of the important principles that should be a core part of American foreign policy. And we ask that, during your meeting with Prime Minister Modi, you discuss the full range of issues important to a successful, strong, and long-term relationship between our two great countries.

Sincerely,

Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator

Pramila Jayapal
Member of Congress

---


Peter Welch  
United States Senator

Judy Chu  
Member of Congress

Thomas R. Carper  
United States Senator

Jason Crow  
Member of Congress

Jeanne Shaheen  
United States Senator

Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.  
Member of Congress

Sherrod Brown  
United States Senator

Delia C. Ramirez  
Member of Congress

Ron Wyden  
United States Senator

Mike Thompson  
Member of Congress
Martin Heinrich
United States Senator

Mark DeSaulnier
Member of Congress

Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator

Maxwell Alejandro Frost
Member of Congress

Al Green
Member of Congress

Betty McCollum
Member of Congress

Bonnie Watson Coleman
Member of Congress

Jill Tokuda
Member of Congress

Suzanne Bonamici
Member of Congress

Mark Pocan
Member of Congress
Mike Levin
Member of Congress

John P. Sarbanes
Member of Congress

Anna G. Eshoo
Member of Congress

André Carson
Member of Congress

John B. Larson
Member of Congress

Becca Balint
Member of Congress

Sean Casten
Member of Congress

Robert Garcia
Member of Congress

Elissa Slotkin
Member of Congress

Emanuel Cleaver, II
Member of Congress
Raúl M. Grijalva  
Member of Congress  

Jared Huffman  
Member of Congress  

Robin L. Kelly  
Member of Congress  

Seth Moulton  
Member of Congress  

Sylvia R. García  
Member of Congress  

Valerie P. Foushee  
Member of Congress  

Mike Quigley  
Member of Congress  

Jake Auchincloss  
Member of Congress  

Tony Cárdenas  
Member of Congress  

Linda T. Sánchez  
Member of Congress