

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

October 16, 2026

The Honorable Marco Rubio
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Rubio,

We write with concern regarding a pattern of repression, wrongful detention, and excessive use of force by security forces during student protests in Delhi and other localities across India. We further call attention to incidents of apparent surveillance and intimidation of individuals exercising their fundamental rights on United States soil by individuals in the employ of or acting in coordination with the Indian Embassy and consulates. We ask that you prioritize these subjects in discussions with your counterparts in India.

The United States-India relationship has historically been rooted in democratic values, constitutional governance, and strong people-to-people ties. As the world's largest democracies and state parties to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the U.S. and India have an obligation to promote and defend the rights to freedom of assembly and expression. It is in this spirit of shared values and obligations that we raise the following concerns.

Widespread protests began in June following the leak and subsequent cancellation of the national medical college entrance examination. The highly competitive exam is taken by over two million students annually; more than a dozen have reportedly died by suicide since the exam paper leak in May.¹ Protesters mobilized by the Cockroach Janata Party (CJP), a youth movement named in reference to comments by India's Supreme Court chief justice comparing unemployed youth to cockroaches, sought the resignation of Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan and accountability for the mismanagement of the education system. The movement grew to give voice to a broader set of grievances including high levels of youth unemployment, government corruption, and barriers to democratic participation.

Since September 25, tens of thousands of demonstrators have taken to the streets of major cities across India to protest of the Election Commission's Special Intensive Revision (SIR), which has purged more than 130 million people from voter rolls since 2025.² While the Election Commission states that the purpose of the revision is to verify voter eligibility, U.N. human rights experts wrote the Government of India earlier this year to raise concerns that the process lacked transparency.³ They further noted that the process may introduce unreasonable or discriminatory barriers to voting that could disproportionately disenfranchise Muslims and other minority communities in a manner contrary to India's obligations under the ICCPR and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination

¹ Murali Krishnan, "[India: What's driving the intense pressure on students?](#)" *DW*, June 23, 2026.

² Manoj Kumar, "[What is fuelling India's protests over changes to voter lists?](#)" *Reuters*, October 13, 2026.

³ "[UN Special Rapporteurs raise concerns over voter roll revision in India, seek response on alleged minority disenfranchisement](#)," *Vartha Bharati*, July 10, 2026.

(CERD). These concerns have been echoed by protesters, who have called for the resignation of Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar.

Hundreds of people have been detained by police across India since October 10, including CJP movement leaders, protesters, and journalists. In Mumbai, which we understand you will visit, more than 600 demonstrators were detained.⁴ Officials have also closed public spaces that have been used as protest sites and arrested people who attempt to enter them, placing undue burden on individuals attempting to exercise their fundamental rights.⁵ Throughout the year, human rights organizations⁶ and reporters⁷ documented the use of tear gas, pellet guns, and batons by police and paramilitary forces against unarmed protesters in contravention of guidelines established by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights⁸ and India's own home ministry. The Indian government also ordered telecommunications companies to shut down mobile internet services in areas of the city in which protests were ongoing.⁹ UNESCO noted in January the human rights concerns associated with internet shutdowns, including the deprivation of individuals to exercise their rights to access information and freedom of expression.¹⁰

We have also received reports that Indian diplomatic missions in the United States hired photographers to surveil protesters on American soil. Members of American human rights organizations and the Indian diaspora who joined protests in Washington, D.C., Chicago and San Francisco in solidarity with the CJP student movement disclosed that they had been photographed by individuals who identified themselves as having been hired by the Indian Embassy and Consulates General, respectively. These incidents raise particular alarm in light of India's documented pattern of engaging in transnational repression, including through the weaponization of consular services, harassment, intimidation, and physical violence.¹¹ It is unacceptable that individuals on United States soil may not exercise their rights to freedom of expression and assembly, guaranteed to them by the U.S. Constitution and international law for fear of retribution by a foreign government.

The 2024 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices cited instances in which the Indian government "engaged in transnational repression, including against members of diaspora populations, such as civil society activists, human rights defenders, academics, and journalists." The report further documented several specific incidents within India of human rights violations arising from law enforcement responses to protests, and found that the Indian government "took minimal credible steps or action to identify and punish officials who committed human rights abuses."

We note that the Indian government has taken some steps to address the grievances of students impacted by exam leaks, with the notable inclusion of Education Minister Pradhan's resignation. However, in light of the abuses suffered by protesters in India and the reported surveillance of protesters in the United States, we urge the Department to take the following steps:

⁴ Nayanika Bose and Manish Kumar Pathak, "[Tushar Gandhi, actor Imran Khan among 600 detained in Mumbai](#)," *The Indian Express*, October 11, 2026.

⁵ Amnesty International, "[India: Release CJP leaders arrested after attempting peaceful protests at Jantar Mantar](#)," October 14, 2026.

⁶ Human Rights Watch, "[India: Excessive Force Used Against Student Protesters](#)," July 23, 2026.

⁷ Anupreeta Das et al., "[Pellet Guns, Sticks, and Tear Gas: How India's Police Halted a Youth Movement](#)," August 8, 2026.

⁸ United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, "[Guidance on Less-Lethal Weapons in Law Enforcement](#)," 2020.

⁹ "[India blocks mobile internet in central Delhi, sources say](#)," *Reuters*, July 23, 2026.

¹⁰ UNESCO, "[Statement on Internet Shutdowns](#)," January 20, 2026.

¹¹ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, "[USCIRF Deeply Concerned by India's Transnational Repression Against Religious Minorities](#)," December 15, 2023; United States District Attorney, Southern District of New York, "[Indian National Pleads Guilty To Plotting To Assassinate U.S. Citizen In New York City](#)," February 13, 2026; Human Rights Watch, "[India: Authorities Revoke Visa Privileges of Diaspora Critics](#)," March 17, 2024.

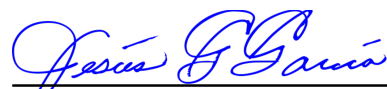
- Press the Indian government to initiate thorough, transparent, and independent investigations of alleged human rights violations connected to the law enforcement response to protests;
- Encourage the release of any individuals detained in contravention to Indian and international law for peacefully exercising the rights to freedom of expression and assembly;
- Thoroughly investigate reports that Indian diplomatic missions engaged in the surveillance and intimidation of protesters within the United States; and
- Pursuant to Section 6 of the Arms Export Control Act, assess whether India has engaged in a consistent pattern of acts of intimidation or harassment directed against individuals in the United States and is thus ineligible for arms sales.

The free exercise of fundamental freedoms and the right to vote is core to the democratic identities of both the United States and India. We ask that you use the occasion of your visit to raise these issues of great mutual concern to our two peoples. We thank you for your attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,



James P. McGovern
Member of Congress



Jesús G. "Chuy" García
Member of Congress



Rashida Tlaib
Member of Congress



Pramila Jayapal
Member of Congress



Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress



Ilhan Omar
Member of Congress