

Commentary

IDRF Facts & Figures

By **BELOO MEHRA**

An independent group calling itself Friends of India (FoI) has released a report *A Factual Response to the Hate Attack on the India Development and Relief Fund (IDRF)*. This report is in response to the "Foreign Exchange of Hate" (FEH) report co-authored by a team led by Biju Mathew of the Forum of Indian Leftists (FOIL).

The FoI report asserts that the FEH report does not put forward facts to make its case. Instead, FEH authors pick and choose from publicly available data to fit their biased and predetermined conclusions about IDRF. In fact, all IDRF supported NGOs accused of being "Hindu Supremacist" organizations are legitimate NGOs registered with appropriate Central or State government authorities in India.

IDRF is an independent, non-political, non-sectarian organization duly registered in the U.S. IDRF makes all the information connected to its fund raising, allocation of funds, and its affiliations public. IDRF is fully and duly audited and is in good standing with the Internal Revenue Service. The funds donated to IDRF and remitted to India represent a minuscule percentage of the total funds collected and remitted to India every year by other Indian groups, by foreign groups, and by Christian and Islamic charities around the world.

The IDRF funds many NGOs that are affiliated with what the FEH report describes as the "Sangh Parivar." The projects undertaken by these NGOs include building schools, orphanages, and homes shattered by



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earthquakes and cyclones; taking care of leprosy patients; giving slum-dwellers a chance to become successful citizens through education; and empowering women.

IDRF works with local communities in their own context. This involves constructing community cultural centers where

people can meet for secular purposes, worship in the religious or spiritual tradition of their choice, exercise, practice yoga, or meditate. According to FoI, this cannot be described as "communalizing."

The FEH report uses the terms "Hinduization" and "Saffronization" to characterize the education imparted in the Single-Teacher schools supported by IDRF. IDRF rejects such loaded language.

The FoI report asserts that just as the celebration of Christmas or Easter in American public schools is not considered "Christianization," it is simply absurd to characterize performance of plays based on the world-renowned epics — the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* in privately funded schools in India as "Hinduization."

FoI report emphasizes that the FEH report does not provide an iota of evidence for the dangerous and willful allegations it makes linking IDRF and the organizations it supports with the violence in the state of Gujarat in 2002. The one organization, which they accuse of spreading hate, is not funded by the IDRF.

Rejecting the FEH report's characterization of Hindutva as "the Hindu supremacist ideology," and a violent, fundamentalist, and sectarian movement, FoI report suggests that Hindutva is a way of life. It is a proactive ideology based in the belief that Hindus must build community solidarity, inculcate individual and collective pride, and advance a cultural renaissance among Hindus. It is not anti-Muslim, anti-Christian, or anti-minorities.