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## **AZERBAIJAN PROTECTS RELIGIOUS, ETHNIC MINORITIES**

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Trend

Azerbaijan is one of less than a handful of secular Muslim-majority countries that not only has a strong multicultural heritage, but codifies the protection of its religious and ethnic minorities in its constitution, according to the article published in The Daily Caller US news and opinion website by Supna Zaidi Peery, an executive director of Muslim World Today publication.

Azerbaijans minorities include a centuries-old community of Mountain Jews, who live in the Guba district, as well as a large community of Jews in Baku whose antecedents fled the massacres of the northern Russian Empire to find refuge and security in the territory of Azerbaijan, according to the article.

Azerbaijan is home to Azerbaijanis, Lezgis, Udi Christians, Talysh, Jews, Sunni and Shia Muslim communities, among others, Peery, who is also an attorney and policy analyst specializing in human rights and foreign policy, wrote in her article.

In recent years, however, regional instability appears to be fueling extremist foreign-born interpretations of Islam in Azerbaijan, threatening the minorities of the country, the article said.

To combat this, the government of Azerbaijan takes a proactive stance to radicalization utilizing a number of tactics, including the closing of mosques that preach radical Islam to the consternation of human rights groups.

In addition, Azerbaijan's security forces have been responsible for foiling plots to bomb the Israeli and British embassies, as well as jailing and deporting those who seek to disrupt the multicultural

fabric of Azerbaijani society, the author wrote.

Azerbaijan should continue addressing social and economic problems that provide fodder for Islamist rhetoric against the secular values of the country, according to the article.

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