



Arunachal Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act, 1978

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Why in News?

The **Arunachal Pradesh** government is taking steps to implement the **Arunachal Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act, 1978**, by **framing rules for its enforcement**, nearly 46 years after its enactment.

- The move aims to address concerns related to **forceful conversions in the state**.

What is the Arunachal Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act of 1978 ?

▪ About:

- The **Arunachal Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act, 1978** was introduced to prohibit forceful religious conversions.
- The Act was introduced (in 1978) during a period of **rapid social and cultural changes** in Arunachal Pradesh, aiming to **safeguard the traditional religious practices** of indigenous communities **from external influence or coercion**.

▪ Key Provisions:

- **Definition of Indigenous Faiths:** The Act explicitly recognizes indigenous faiths as **religions, beliefs, customs**, and observances practiced by the native communities of Arunachal Pradesh. These include:
 - **Buddhism:** As practiced among the tribal groups such as **Monpas, Membas**, Sherdukpens, Khambas, Khamptis, and Singphos.
 - **Nature Worship:** Particularly the worship of **Donyi-Polo** (means “Sun and Moon”) practiced by several communities in the state.
 - **Donyi-Polo** is an indigenous religion of the Tani and other Sino-Tibetan peoples of Arunachal Pradesh and Assam in Northeast India.
 - **Vaishnavism:** As practiced by the **Noctes and Akas**.
- **Prohibition of Forced Conversion:** The Act specifically **prohibits religious conversion** from one religious faith to another, **against their will or under coercive circumstances**.
- **Punishment for Violation:** The Act prescribes a **punishment of up to 2 years** of imprisonment and a **fine of up to Rs. 10,000** for individuals found guilty of forcibly converting others or attempting to do so.
- **Mandatory Reporting:** The Act mandates that **any act of religious conversion be reported to the Deputy Commissioner (DC)** of the respective district.

▪ Push for Revival:

- The Act’s revival gained momentum after a **Public Interest Litigation (PIL)** in 2022 led to the Gauhati **High Court**'s intervention, prompting the state government to **finalize the necessary rules for its implementation**.
- It has also been supported by organizations like the **Indigenous Faiths and Cultural Society of Arunachal Pradesh (IFCSAP)** which aims to protect indigenous beliefs, especially as some districts which have seen **conversion rates as high as 90%**.
 - The **Christian population in Arunachal Pradesh** increased from **0.79% in 1971 to 30.26% in 2011**.

Constitutional Provisions Related to Religious Belief

- **Article 25:** [Article 25](#) ensures the **freedom of conscience and the right to profess, practice, and propagate religion**, subject to **public order, morality, and health**.
 - It permits the **state to regulate secular activities** related to **religious practice** and mandates the opening of Hindu religious institutions to all Hindus, irrespective of their caste or class.
- **Article 26:** [Article 26](#) grants every **religious denomination the right to manage its religious affairs**, subject to considerations of public order, morality, and health.
- **Articles 27-30:** Safeguard the **freedom to contribute financially to religious practices, manage religious affairs, and establish and administer educational institutions** for religious purposes.

State-Level Anti-Conversion Laws

- **Odisha (1967):** It became the **first state to pass a law restricting religious conversions**, prohibiting conversions through force or fraudulent means.
- **Madhya Pradesh (1968):** Introduced the **Madhya Pradesh Dharma Swatantraya Adhiniyam**, mandating that any conversion activities be reported to the District Magistrate, with penalties for non-compliance.
- **Other States:** Several other states, including **Gujarat (2003), Chhattisgarh (2000 and 2006), Rajasthan (2006 and 2008), Himachal Pradesh (2006 and 2019), Tamil Nadu (2002-2004), Jharkhand (2017), Uttarakhand (2018), Uttar Pradesh (2021), and Haryana (2022)**, have enacted similar laws prohibiting various forms of religious conversions.
 - These laws often impose **stricter penalties for conversions** involving [Scheduled Castes \(SCs\)](#), [Scheduled Tribes \(STs\)](#), **minors**, and **women**.

UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year Questions (PYQ)

Prelims:

Q. What was the exact constitutional status of India on 26th January, 1950? (2021)

- (a) A Democratic Republic
- (b) A Sovereign Democratic Republic
- (c) A Sovereign Secular Democratic Republic
- (d) A Sovereign Socialist Secular Democratic Republic

Ans: (b)

Q. The Preamble to the Constitution of India is (2020)

- (a) a part of the Constitution but has no legal effect
- (b) not a part of the Constitution and has no legal effect either
- (c) a part of the Constitution and has the same legal effect as any other part
- (d) a part of the Constitution but has no legal effect independently of other parts

Ans: (d)

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