

the bill in and outside the assembly.

When this bill was passed, Pratibha Patil was the governor of the state. When the bill was sent for her approval, she refused to sign it, as she was not satisfied with certain clauses of the bill. She asked the government to reconsider it.

Chief minister Vasundhara Raje's cabinet considered the letter of Patil and sent back the bill with certain clarifications sought by her. But again she declined to give her approval and sat on it for about a year. It was said that Patil did not want to annoy Congress president Sonia Gandhi, who was a Roman Catholic.

Just before resigning from the post of governor to contest the election for the President of India Patil forwarded the bill to the then President saying that since it was a central subject, it could only be approved by the President of India. There was hardly any time for the outgoing President APJ Abdul Kalam to give a thought to it.

When Patil became the President, the state government and the ruling BJP lost hopes that she would give her assent to the bill.

The Raje government was again under pressure from the saffron brigade to do something about it. The RSS bosses told the BJP leadership that if such a legislation was not initiated during the BJP rule, how could the government of any other party do it.

It was suggested that a new bill should be



Vasundhara Raje

brought in the ongoing budget session of the assembly. The government sought the opinion of the advocate general of the state and also took advice from the constitutional experts whether the government could come out with a bill when an identical bill was waiting for the

assent of the President of India.

When the experts gave an affirmative opinion, a new bill was drafted. Some time back, during the previous Congress regime, the Himachal Pradesh assembly had passed an anti conversion bill. The President of India took no time to give his assent to the bill. It was decided that the new bill should be on the lines of the Himachal Pradesh legislation.

The new bill has many of the same provisions of the previous bill. But it added a new clause which says that those who want to change their religion have to intimate the district collector in advance and could do so only after getting his permission. On their part, the collectors would ensure that the person or persons who had applied for a change of religion, is/are not doing it under any pressure.

Since the Congress could not oppose the bill, as a similar kind of bill was passed by a Congress government in Himachal Pradesh, it opposed the bill on the ground that when the assembly had passed a bill on the subject, it could not pass another identical bill.

But Rajasthan home minister Gulab Chand Kataria maintained that the government had decided to come out with a new bill after seeking the opinion of constitutional experts. He says that certain provisions of the new bill may be similar to the old bill, but they are not the same in legal terms. •