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Anti-conversion law comes into force in Gujarat

Violators May Face Imprisonment

Rajiv Shah | TNN

Gandhinagar: From now on, anyone wishing to convert to another religion in Gujarat will have to tell the state government why they are doing so, and for how long they had been following the religion they are renouncing. Failing this, they will be declared offenders and prosecuted under criminal laws, according to the anti-conversion law which came into effect this month.

WORD OF LAW

- Anyone wishing to convert will have to state the reason. Else, they'll be declared offenders
- It is obligatory for a priest seeking to convert to take DM's permission
- DM has to maintain a register on conversions
- Forced conversion can land the priest behind bars for three years
- Jainism and Buddhism aren't sub-sects of Hinduism

The new law, called the Gujarat Freedom of Religion Act, 2003, was gestating for five years because the state government hadn't come up with rules on the kind of information to be provided while applying for permission to convert. Also now confirmed is that Jainism and Buddhism aren't sub-sects of Hinduism. These rules have

been published in the Gujarat government gazette and are effective since April 1.

The law makes it obligatory for a priest seeking to convert someone to take district magistrate's permission to avoid police action. The priest will have to sign a detailed form providing personal information on the person whom he wishes to convert, whether the one sought to be converted is a minor, a scheduled caste or tribal, marital status, occupation and monthly income.

Forced conversion can land the priest behind bars for three years. The other information mandatory is the address of the place where the conversion is to take place, its date and time, the name and address of the priest, and full personal details of the persons taking part in the conversion ceremony.

The rules say only after the DM grants permission within a month of the application can the priest be allowed to perform the conversion ceremony. If he refuses permission, the reasons would have to be communicated to the applicant. Failure to apply would lead to "prosecution for an offence", authorizing a police official not below the rank of a police inspector to start inquiry and sub-divisional magistrate to prosecute the "offender". The rules make it obligatory for the DM to maintain a register on conversions, giving reasons for granting or refusing permission.