

Bill Summary

The Karnataka Protection of Freedom of Religion Bill, 2021

- The Karnataka Protection of Right to Freedom of Religion Bill, 2021 was introduced in the Karnataka Assembly on December 21, 2021. The Bill prohibits forced religious conversion by direct or indirect means. It also specifies the procedure for undertaking a religious conversion. Key features of the Bill include:
 - **Prohibition on conversion:** No person may force someone else to convert their religion, directly or indirectly through certain means, such as misrepresentation, coercion, and allurement. Converting back to the immediate previous religion will not be deemed as conversion under the Bill.
 - **Penalty for forced conversion:** Penalties for attempting to forcibly convert someone are highlighted in the table below. If an institution violates the provisions of the Act, the persons in charge of the institution will be punished as per the provisions in Table 1. Every offence under this Bill will be cognizable and non-bailable.

Table 1: Penalties for forced conversion

Conversion of	Imprisonment	Fine (in Rs)
Any person through specified means	3-5 years	25,000
Minor, woman, SC/ST, or a person of unsound mind	3-10 years	50,000
Two or more persons (Mass conversion)	3-10 years	1,00,000

- **Procedure for conversion:** Any person seeking to convert their religion must submit a declaration in the prescribed form at least thirty days before the conversion to the District Magistrate (DM). The religious convertor (the person who performs any act of conversion) will also submit a prescribed form to the DM (at least thirty days in advance), informing him of the intended conversion. The DM will notify the proposed religious conversion on the notice board of the offices of the DM and Tehsildar. Within thirty days of the public notice, any person may file an objection to the proposed religious conversion. If any objection is received within this time period, the DM will conduct an

inquiry to investigate the intention, purpose and cause of the proposed conversion.

- If the DM concludes that an offence has been committed, he must initiate criminal action. Any conversion which doesn't follow the specified procedure will be considered illegal and void.
- After the conversion, the converted person must submit a declaration form to the DM. The DM will notify the conversion on the notice board of the offices of the DM and Tehsildar. If no objections were received earlier, objections to the conversion will again be invited for a period of 30 days. If objections are received, the DM will conduct an enquiry. If no objections are received, the DM will: (i) issue an official notification, and (ii) inform the concerned authorities (employer, officials of various government departments, rural and urban local bodies, and heads of educational institutions) about the conversion.
- **Penalties for not following procedure:** If the person intending to convert does not provide the declaration in the specified time, he may be punished with imprisonment between one to three years, and a minimum fine of Rs 10,000. If the declaration of the religious convertor is not received in time, he may be punished with imprisonment between one to five years, and a fine of at least Rs 25,000.
- **Marriage involving conversion:** Marriages in which one of the parties changes their religion, will be solemnized, only after that party follows the specified procedure for religious conversion. A Family Court must declare a marriage null and void if: (i) a petition is filed by one of the parties, and (ii) marriage is done for the purpose of unlawful conversion (or vice versa).
- **Lodging complaints:** The Bill specifies that a complaint about unlawful conversion can be lodged by any converted person, and persons related or associated to him. This includes parents, siblings, and any other relative by blood, marriage, or adoption. The colleagues of a converted person may also lodge a complaint.

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