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## **SC to examine state laws on religious conversion due to interfaith marriage**

***The Supreme Court agreed to examine controversial new laws of Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand regulating religious conversions due to inter-faith marriages.***

By Press Trust of India

Business Standard (06.01.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3ov9XFP> - The Supreme Court Wednesday agreed to examine controversial new laws of Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand regulating religious conversions due to inter-faith marriages.

A bench headed by Chief Justice S A Bobde refused, however, to stay the controversial provisions of the laws and issued notices to both state governments on two different petitions.

The pleas, filed by advocate Vishal Thakre and others and an NGO Citizen for Justice and Peace', have challenged the constitutional validity of the Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Religious Conversion Ordinance, 2020 and the Uttarakhand Freedom of Religion Act, 2018 which regulate religious conversions of inter-faith marriages.

At the outset, the top court asked the petitioners to approach the Allahabad High Court after Solicitor General Tushar Mehta said that it is already seized of the matter.

The bench said that this is not the transfer petition where it can transfer to itself all the cases on the law after one of the petitioner said that the issue should be examined by the top court.

Senior advocate C U Singh, appearing for the NGO, referred to the judgement of Justice (retd) Deepak Gupta and says that similar laws are being made in various states.

He sought stay of the provisions of the law and said that people are being in the middle of wedding ceremonies.

Singh added that some of the provisions of these laws are oppressive and horrible in nature and requires prior consent of government to marry which is absolutely obnoxious.

The bench said that it is issuing notice and sought response from both the state governments within four weeks.

When Singh insisted for stay of provisions, the CJI said that now stay is sought on some provisions without hearing the states.

How can it be done? the bench said.

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# India deals another blow to religious freedom

By Katey Hearth

MNN (05.01.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3bnyBVd> - India deals another blow to religious freedom as four states consider anti-conversion laws. More about that here. Police often use anti-conversion rules to persecute Christians and other religious minorities, putting these groups at risk.

"[Another] state that has one in process is Maharashtra – a well-known state because of Mumbai, the economic and financial capital of India," John Pudaite of Bibles For The World says.

If state authorities pass the new legislation into law, "close to two-thirds of India's 1.3 billion people would now be under some anti-conversion law," Pudaite adds.

## ***Why anti-conversion laws matter***

India is one of the world's most challenging places to follow Christ, according to persecution watchdog groups like Voice of the Martyrs and Open Doors.

Hindu radicals regularly persecute religious minorities. Plus, India's constitution allows for religious freedom, but authorities target Christian outreach using anti-conversion laws as a pretense.

It puts Bibles For The World partners in a precarious situation. "We're in touch with [our partners], urging them to continue their outreach but be careful, be cautious," Pudaite says.

"When we reach out in love and provide blankets, or clothing or food or things like that, [it] can easily be misconstrued by anti-Christians as 'Oh, they're enticing [people] with these material goods,'" he explains. More about Bibles For The World's ministry here.

"It's unfortunate because they don't understand – what our partners are offering is a relationship with Jesus Christ."

## ***How to help***

For believers in states with current or potential anti-conversion laws, pray for wisdom and discernment. Ask the Lord to protect believers in Uttar Pradesh, where police use a new anti-conversion law to arrest religious minorities.

"It was pushed through and signed by the governor of the state [even though] the legislature is not sitting right now; they're on vacation," Pudaite says.

"He is allowed to do that for a period of up to six months until the actual state legislature ratifies it."

Enacting the controversial 'love jihad' law was "very significant because [Uttar Pradesh] is the largest state in India. If it were an independent country, this state would be number six or seven in terms of population in the entire world," Pudaite continues.

"It has the strongest 'pro-Hindu' population, so it is a very significant battleground for religious freedoms."