



NORTH EAST CATHOLIC RESEARCH FORUM
C/O NEIRBC Secretariat, Inspiration Building,
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February 12, 2025

Memorandum

Submitted to Shri Pema Khandu, Hon. Chief Minister, Arunachal Pradesh

Sub: Objection to the revival of the Arunachal Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act, 1978

Respected Sir,

The North East Catholic Research Forum, a nonpartisan organization dedicated to upholding constitutional liberties, social justice, democratic integrity, social harmony, and peace, submits this memorandum to express our strong opposition to the proposed revival of the Arunachal Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act, 1978. We feel that the revival of this Act, which remained dormant for 47 years, would vitiate the peaceful atmosphere in the state of Arunachal Pradesh. Some of the key reasons why the forum has strong reservation against the Act are as follows:

1. Article 25 guarantees the right to freely profess, practice, and propagate religion. This Act, however, aims to restrict this constitutional safeguard through vague and sweeping definitions of "forced conversion" and empowers the state administrative machinery to infringe upon liberty and privacy in choosing one's faith by making it mandatory to submit reports on so-called conversions. This amounts to nullifying the constitutional right to liberty guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution.
2. Article 14 of the constitution guarantees equality before the law. But under Section 5(1) of the Arunachal Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act 1978, targeting religious minorities is encouraged on the pretext of anti-conversion. The law, however, is silent on attempts to reconvert by powerful religious and political groups in the name of Ghar Wapasi.
3. In the Shafin Jahan vs. Asokan K.M. (2018) case, the Supreme Court reaffirmed that an adult's right to choose their religion is an absolute individual right, superseding family, societal, or state interests. In this Act, there is a clear attempt to deprive individuals from choosing a religion of their choice, which is egregiously incompatible with the spirit of the Indian constitution.
4. There are elements at work, aiming to create differences between different religious groups in this country, and taking cue from them, divisive forces in this region are also trying to fuel inter-religious frictions, instigating tribal groups to discourage individuals from choosing religion of their choice. There are also groups habitually indulging in Christians bashing, charging them with false allegations of eroding tribal culture, language, and tradition. These groups even demand delisting of tribal Christians from the list of Scheduled Tribes of the country.



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We have no doubt in our minds, that, this law, if revived, will only strengthen the hands of such divisive forces in our region.

Sir, Arunachal Pradesh has, historically, been a model of peace and coexistence. Unlike other Northeast states plagued by insurgency, Arunachal Pradesh remained largely untouched by this contagious menace, except in some parts of the state's eastern region. Despite the diversity, the state is never known for ethnic violence. In other words, the state exemplifies harmonious inter-religious coexistence, where every religion enjoys the freedom to practice their respective faiths freely. What the Arunachal Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act aims at is to curtail this freedom, which is against the spirit of the constitution of India.

Arunachal Pradesh is also one of the states with an impressive literacy rate (82.92%) and GDP growth rate of 14.56%. This trajectory has been possible because of stability, inclusivity, and excellent governance. Adopting legislation that has the potential to divide its people along religious lines would only discourage investors, civil society, and international development agencies for fear of possible social disturbance and curtailment of human and fundamental rights. States that have passed or enforced similar laws—Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh—have seen international development aid shrink, human rights indices fall, and communal tensions rise.

Sir, we may also remind you that your late father, Shri Dorjee Khandu ji, who was one of the architects of new Arunachal Pradesh, did not deliver by appeasing divisive forces, but through his commitment to a peaceful and progressive Arunachal Pradesh. Your government, under your esteemed leadership, therefore has the opportunity to demonstrate courage, reject sectarian politics, and uphold constitutional values, in order to ensure that the state further move up the ladder of development.

Last but not the least, supporters of this Act may argue that such a law was needed to protect tribal customs and traditions. However, Tribal traditions are best safeguarded through affirmative policies, tribal empowerment, and sustainable development plans, and not through coercive laws that would create mistrust among the citizens. Furthermore, by reviving this law, your government risks playing into the hands of sectarian forces that seek to destabilize indigenous harmony. Arunachal's indigenous communities, rich in diverse traditions, have maintained inter-religious and inter-tribal cohesion and stood the test of time. Tampering with this rich heritage shall be a grave injustice.

We, therefore, humbly urge you and your government, not to revive the Arunachal Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act, 1978.

Respectfully,

Members of the North East Catholic Research Forum



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