

# HARYANA PASSES ANTI-CONVERSION BILL

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The Haryana Assembly on Tuesday passed the Haryana Prevention of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Bill, 2022, even as Congress lawmakers opposed the Bill and staged a walkout from the House.

Chief Minister Manohar Lal said the Bill was aimed at instilling fear among those who commit crimes. A person can change religion as per their own free will, but it will not be allowed to happen to anyone forcibly, he added.

“Action will be taken against such people if they convert by deceit or by giving any kind of greed. The purpose of this Bill is to control forced religious conversion,” Mr. Lal said.

The Chief Minister said 127 FIRs against religious conversion were registered in six districts over the last four years. He said such cases of conversion have been witnessed in Yamunanagar, Panipat, Gurugram, Palwal and Faridabad districts, and hence, the Bill has been introduced. He said the Bill was in the interest of Haryana as well as the country.

The Bill was introduced in the Assembly on March 4 and was taken up for consideration and its passing in the Assembly on Tuesday.

## ‘No need for new law’

As the Bill came up for consideration, the Leader of the Opposition in the Houses, Congress's Bhupinder Singh Hooda, said that there was no need to bring a new law as there is an existing provision for punishment of forcible conversions.

Terming the Bill “scary”, Congress leader Kiran Choudhary said it would deepen the communal divide. She said the Bill could have serious effects and it's a black chapter in the State's history. The Congress MLAs then staged a brief walkout from the House.

The Bill prohibits unlawful conversion from one religion to another by misinterpretation, use of force, threat, undue influence, coercion, or by any fraudulent means or by marriage. According to the Bill, if a person wants to convert voluntarily, he will have to submit a declaration of conversion in the prescribed format to the District Magistrate.

Any religious priest or other person intending to organize a conversion shall give prior notice to the District Magistrate giving information about the venue.

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