

Beef ban prompts fears over state of Indian secularism

Posted: Wed, 4th Mar 2015

The Indian state of Maharashtra has banned the sale or possession of beef, leading to fears that secularism in India is being eroded.

Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis said "our dream of ban on cow slaughter becomes a reality now".

80% of India's population is Hindu, and there are already many restrictions on cattle products in place. However, the ban in Maharashtra is particularly stringent, and carries a potential fine of 10,000 Rupees, or a prison term of up to five years. The Maharashtra Animal Preservation (Amendment) Bill, which received assent from President Pranab Mukherjee on Monday 2 March 2015, bans the slaughter of bulls and bullocks, which had previously been permitted provided there was a "fit-for-slaughter" certificate.

There is a range of existing laws in India relating to beef and products derived from cattle, with a patchwork of laws that allow beef to be imported in some states where the slaughter of cows is illegal, and laws in other states which prohibit the sale of beef completely.

The new ban has prompted widespread debate on social media, and polarized opinion among Indians. Much of the debate mocked the Indian government for taking action over the slaughter of cows and not prioritising the safety and rights of women.

The new law comes against a background of religious tension in India, which has seen violence against churches and forced conversions of religious minorities by Hindu nationalists.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has [strongly condemned](#) the violence, and stated that Indians have an "undeniable right to retain or adopt" any religion. He added that his government would give "equal respect to all religions".

The Prime Minister [also said that](#) "the principles of equal respect for all faiths and secularism have been fundamental component parts of the Indian ethos. It is integral to the constitution of India."

Despite this, the ban on beef has led to fears that the religious sensitivities of some Hindus are encroaching on Indian secularism, and many have complained about the [huge economic cost](#) the beef ban will carry.

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