

Jewish Nation Law

December 24, 2020

In news

The Supreme Court of Israel hears a case against the contentious Jewish Nation Law

Key provisions of Jewish Nation Law

- The law defines the country as the nation-state of the Jewish people
- It defines Israel as the “nation-state of the Jewish people” and adds that “fulfilling the right to national self-determination in the state of Israel is unique to the Jewish people.”
- The law also downgraded Arabic from an official state language to one with “special status.”
- The passage of the law prompted vocal opposition by the country’s Arab minority, particularly among Druze Israelis, who serve in the military and saw themselves demoted to second class citizens.
- According to critics, the law further downgrades the status of Israel’s Arab minority, which makes up around 20% of the country’s population.
- Proponents claim the legislation merely enshrined Israel’s existing Jewish character into law.
- The nation-state law was approved by the Knesset in July 2018.

The law does three big things:

1. It states that “the right to exercise national self-determination” in Israel is “unique to the Jewish people.”
2. It establishes Hebrew as Israel’s official language, and downgrades Arabic – a language widely spoken by Arab Israelis – to a “special status.”

3. It establishes "Jewish settlement as a national value" and mandates that the state "will labor to encourage and promote its establishment and development."

With respect to Jewish people

- The state will strive to ensure the safety of the members of the Jewish people and of its citizens in trouble or in captivity due to the fact of their Jewishness or their citizenship.
- The state shall act within the Diaspora to strengthen the affinity between the state and members of the Jewish people.
- The state shall act to preserve the cultural, historical, and religious heritage of the Jewish people among Jews in the Diaspora.

Who are Jewish people?

- Jew, Hebrew Yĕhūdhī or Yehudi, any person whose religion is Judaism. In the broader sense of the term, a Jew is any person belonging to the worldwide group that constitutes, through descent or conversion, a continuation of the ancient Jewish people, who were themselves descendants of the Hebrews of the Bible (Old Testament).
- Jewish people are an ethnoreligious group and a nation originating from the Israelites and Hebrews of historical Israel and Judah. Jewish ethnicity, nationhood, and religion are strongly interrelated, as Judaism is the ethnic religion of the Jewish people, while its observance varies from strict observance to complete nonobservance.