# France's draft law against 'Islamism'

## Why in news?

The French cabinet presented a draft law that targets "radical Islamism" (although the word "Islamist" is not part of the text).

## What is the proposed rationale?

- The Bill is called as a law "to reinforce Republican principles".
- Prime Minister Jean Castex has said it is "not a text against religion, nor against the Muslim religion".
- It is rather said to be against radical Islamism the objective of which is "to divide French people from one another."
- At home, French President Emmanuel Macron largely enjoys the support of a French electorate that has hardened its position on terrorism.
- In a recent nationwide survey, 79% of respondents agreed that "Islamism is at war with France".
- The Bill comes in the wake of a series of terror attacks in recent years.
- Although it was under consideration for some time, the law is being seen as a response to the October 2020 beheading of school teacher Samuel Paty.

## What does the proposed law aim to do?

- It envisages a range of measures including -

i. school education reforms to ensure Muslim children do not drop out
ii. stricter controls on mosques and preachers
iii. rules against hate campaigns online

- Once the law comes into force, French mosques could see increased surveillance of their activities, such as financing.
- The government would be able to exercise supervision over the training of imams.
- It could have greater powers to shut down places of worship receiving public subsidies if they go against "republican principles" such as gender equality.
- Moderate community leaders targeted by an extremist "putsch" (a coup) could receive protection.
- Under French secularism laws, or laïcité, there is already a ban on state employees displaying religious symbols that are "conspicuous", such as the

crucifix or hijab.
    - This ban would now be extended beyond government bodies to any sub-contracted public service.
- There would also be a clampdown on home-schooling for children over age three.
    - Parents will thus be dissuaded from enrolling them in underground Islamic structures.
- Couples would be interviewed separately by city hall officials prior to their wedding to find out if they have been forced into marriage.
- Officials would be banned from granting residency permits to polygamous applicants.
- Doctors who issue "virginity certificates" would be fined or jailed.
- Stricter punishments would be introduced for online hate speech.
    - This is seen as a direct response to the killing of Paty, who was targeted in an online campaign before he was killed.

## What has the response been?

- The proposed law has raised concerns that it could stigmatise France's Muslim community, the largest in Europe.
- The sharpest criticism of the Bill has come from abroad.
- Turkish President Recep Erdogan has been strongly criticising French President Emmanuel Macron in recent months.
    - He has called the proposed law an "open provocation".
- The Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Egypt's top cleric, has called Macron's views "racist".
- Critics have expressed alarm that the Bill could lead to the merger of the Islamic religion with Islamism, a political movement.
- This might lead to the alienation of French Muslims.
- Nevertheless, there have been members of the community who have come out in support of the law.

## Why is it significant politically?

- Macron faces re-election in 2022.
- So, seemingly, he is appealing to France's right-wing voters after facing a series of electoral losses in 2020.
- Macron, who describes his politics as "neither right nor left" [he was with the Socialist Party until 2009] faces a challenge from right-wing politician Marine Le Pen.
- The President has also been facing protests over a proposed "global security" legislation.

**Source: The Indian Express**

