

Apex court reejects plea against French turban law

The Supreme Court Tuesday refused to entertain a lawsuit protesting against a controversial French law that prevents Sikhs in that country from wearing turbans or other tell-tale religious symbols in public places.

A bench of Chief Justice K.G. Balakrishnan and Justices R.V. Raveendran and M.K. Sharma dismissed the petition, pointing out that the apex court has no jurisdiction over foreign territory.

'We can protect the Fundamental Rights of the citizens only within the boundary of India. Fundamental Rights cannot be protected in foreign land,' the bench observed.

The bench also said that the government has already taken up the issue with the French authorities through the diplomatic channels and it does not require a court direction to do so.

The lawsuit was filed by a Sikh organisation, Singh Legal Foundation, which sought the court's direction to the central government to ensure protection of Indian citizens' Fundamental Rights in France.

The foundation contended that the French law preventing Sikhs from wearing turbans in France violated Indian Sikhs' Fundamental Right to religion and it was the duty of the government to protect that right abroad.

The bench, however, said any grievance against the French law can be raised only in the courts of that country. The apex court also suggested that the foundation takes up the matter with the International Court of Justice or the European Union Court.

Counsel, appearing for the Sikh group, responded to the court suggestion by saying even international conventions guarantee the ethnic minorities the right to practise their religion and preserve their distinct identity.

Counsel wanted the court to ask the union government to take up the issue with France in right earnest to protect the religious and cultural freedom of its citizens who have migrated to France.

At this, the bench observed that the government is already doing the needful.

(© IANS / India eNews)