

Citizenship decisions must be 'fair, reasoned', says SC

Top court sets aside 27 judgments of Gauhati HC on 'foreigners', asks tribunals to adjudicate afresh; Citizenship declarations can't be sustainable if 'procedure adopted is mechanical', says the court

Aaratrika Bhaumik

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday held that the determination of citizenship and foreigner status must be undertaken through a "fair, lawful, and reasoned" process, as it set aside a batch of 27 Gauhati High Court judgments declaring the appellants to be foreigners, and remanded the cases to the Foreigners' Tribunals concerned for fresh adjudication.

A Bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta observed that while the state has a legitimate interest in ensuring that persons who are legally ineligible for an Indian citizenship do not obtain such a status through "false claims", the "grave conse-



A state action which is arbitrary cannot claim the protection of law merely because it is clothed in statutory form.

A proceeding which may result in a person being declared a foreigner cannot be sustained if the procedure adopted is mechanical, one-sided, or devoid of application of mind

SUPREME COURT JUDGMENT



quence" of being declared a foreigner must follow a procedure that adheres to constitutional guarantees.

Fair opportunity

"A state action which is arbitrary cannot claim the protection of law merely because it is clothed in statutory form. A proceeding which may result in a person being declared a foreigner cannot be sus-

tained if the procedure adopted is mechanical, one-sided, or devoid of application of mind," the judgment, authored by Justice Nath, said. The Tribunal must examine whether the person had a "fair opportunity, whether the main grounds were disclosed, whether the evidence before it was capable of supporting the reference, and whether the

conclusion follows from the material on record," it added.

The HC had dismissed the appeals against the orders of the Foreigners' Tribunals declaring the appellants to be foreigners after noting that none of them had appeared before the tribunals despite having been served notices. It had observed that, in the absence of any written statement, documents, or evidence from the appellants, the tribunals had "no option" but to affirm the references.

The top court, however, clarified that the remand should not be construed as an affirmation of the appellants' claim to Indian citizenship.

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‘Citizenship decisions must be fair, reasoned’

The remand was intended solely to ensure that the serious civil consequences of being declared a foreigner flow only from an adjudication that is legally sustainable and consistent with the principles of fairness, the top court said.

Accordingly, the Bench set aside both the High Court judgments and the corresponding opinions of the Foreigners Tribunals concerned, directing the tribunals to decide the matters afresh without being influenced by their earlier findings or those of the High Court. It said the fresh adjudication must involve an independent assessment of the evidence and the rival claims in accordance with law and should, as far as possible, be completed within six months. The court further directed that no coercive steps be taken against the appellants until the Foreigners Tribunals render fresh opinions. Justice Nath also acknowledged that questions of citizenship and foreigner status occupy a field of “high constitutional and legal significance”, particularly because a declaration that a person is a foreigner carries far more than ordinary civil consequences.

All Ladakh districts to get autonomous hill councils

Ladakh administration announces creation of 17 new tehsils; Chief Secretary Ashish Kundra says several rounds of talks were held with regional representatives over constitutional safeguards

Peerzada Ashiq
SRINAGAR

The Ladakh administration on Monday announced 17 new tehsils “to strengthen grassroots governance” in the Union Territory and said the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council (LAHDC) Act will be extended to all seven districts of the region.

“The administration is working on an institutional framework suited to Ladakh’s unique requirements and is also taking steps to extend the benefits of the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council (LAHDC) Act to all seven newly created districts through appropriate legal provisions,” said Ladakh Chief Secretary Ashish Kundra.

Earlier, Ladakh had only two districts of Leh and Kargil. However, five new districts of Sham, Nubra, Changthang, Zaskar and Drass were notified in April. With 17 additional tehsils, Ladakh has a total of 32 tehsils now. “These initiatives would bring government services closer to the people, reduce travel for citizens living in remote villages and strengthen infrastructure and



Governance boost: With the creation of new tehsils, the Union Territory has a total of 32 tehsils now. FILE PHOTO

development across regions, including Zaskar, Drass, Nubra, Changthang and Sham,” said Mr. Kundra.

He said the administration has issued posting orders for tehsildars in 17 newly created tehsils. “Four new divisions under the Public Health Engineering (PHE) and Flood Control Department, along with five new divisions under the Public Works Department (PWD) and PMGSY (Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana), have been created to strengthen service delivery in remote areas,” he added.

He said significant progress has been made in government recruitment, decentralised governance, and ongoing discussions on constitutional safeguards for Ladakh.

On the issue of constitutional safeguards, Mr. Kundra said several rounds of discussions have been held with representatives of religious organisations and civil society bodies. “The minutes of the meetings held on May 22 and July 3 have been shared in the public domain to ensure transparency. There is broad consensus on protecting Ladakh’s land, culture and identity while promoting inclusive development,” said Mr. Kundra.

Glaring imbalance: KDA

In July, the draft shared by a team from the Union Home Ministry in Leh suggested that the Centre was considering a customised *sui generis* model, most suitable for Ladakh, under the provisions of Article 371 for the Union Territory.

The Kargil-based civil society organisation, the Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA), said the tehsil figures “reveal a glaring imbalance”. “While the erstwhile Leh district has been allotted 12 new tehsils, the erstwhile Kargil district has received only five,” said KDA leader Sajjad Kargili. He said this disparity was difficult to reconcile with objective parameters. “Kargil has a larger population and a greater number of villages than the other five newly created districts combined. Yet its administrative needs appear to have been overlooked. Even more striking is the fact that Drass has not been granted a single additional tehsil, despite its substantial population, large number of villages, and genuine administrative requirements,” he said.

He said there were instances where a new tehsil was created for a single village. “It has raised serious questions about the criteria adopted for this exercise. This also shows the absence of a sense of justice from the administration and also shows discriminatory approach towards the people of Kargil and Drass,” he added.

Assam Rifles jawan killed, four injured in Nagaland IED blast

The Hindu Bureau

GUWAHATI

An Assam Rifles jawan was killed and four more from the paramilitary force were injured in a bomb blast in Chumoukedima district of Nagaland on Monday afternoon. The condition of one of the injured personnel was critical, officials said.

A Defence spokesperson in Nagaland's capital, Kohima, said a suspected improvised explosive device caused the blast near Sukhovi. The victims were

reportedly returning in a convoy of vehicles to Dimaapur, the State's commercial hub, when the explosion occurred.

The Assam Rifles, in a post on X, paid tribute to the deceased jawan, Havildar Mohd. Iqbal.

Chomoukedima's Deputy Commissioner of Police Nikho Venuh confirmed the incident. "A bomb disposal squad went to the site of the incident to ascertain the nature of the blast," he said. The officials did not rule out the possi-

bility of a targeted attack on the paramilitary force. Last week, suspected extremists ambushed an Assam Rifles patrol in Ukhrul district of Manipur, killing two personnel.

"The bomb blast at Chomoukedima is a cowardly act that has no place in our society. Those responsible will be identified and brought to justice. We will not allow such acts to threaten the peace and security of our people," said Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio.

India, Japan review defence ties, prepare ground for 2+2 dialogue

Saurabh Trivedi

NEW DELHI

India and Japan on Monday reviewed the entire spectrum of their expanding defence cooperation and agreed to deepen collaboration in emerging domains such as defence industry, cybersecurity, space and advanced technologies during the eighth India-Japan Defence Policy Dialogue held in Tokyo.

The dialogue was led by Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh and Japan's

Vice-Minister of Defence for International Affairs, Kano Koji.

According to Ministry of Defence, the two sides assessed the progress made since the previous round of talks and reaffirmed their commitment to further strengthening the India-Japan Special Strategic and Global Partnership.

The discussions covered the regional and global security environment. They also reviewed ongoing defence engagements, including military-to-military

exchanges, cooperation between the two countries' joint headquarters, maritime cooperation, bilateral and multilateral exercises, capacity building, and defence equipment and technology collaboration, particularly in the maritime domain. They also discussed preparations and expected outcomes of the India-Japan ministerial engagements, including the next India-Japan 2+2 Foreign and Defence Ministers' Dialogue scheduled later this year.

User data exposed due to flaws in UMAN portal: researchers

UAN of PF subscribers, LPG booking details, and Aadhaar numbers among the exposed data; IT Ministry acknowledges vulnerabilities, says necessary measures are being implemented; initial fixes do nothing to fix the system, says researcher

Aroon Deep
NEW DELHI

Multiple vulnerabilities in the UMAN, or Unified Mobile Application for New-age Governance, portal that aggregates hundreds of public services offered by the Union and State governments are leaving data of potentially millions of Indians exposed across a variety of databases, including those from the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO), according to two security researchers who shared their findings with *The Hindu*.

The vulnerabilities, which have likely existed for years, affect several services tested on the UMAN portal, which has onboarded over 2,400 services. It stems from the architecture of the portal itself, said the researchers, Akshay C.S. and Viral Vaghela. "Almost everything is broken by design," Mr. Vaghela said.

The data exposed included Unique Account Numbers (UAN) with the EPFO, LPG cylinder booking details with at least one major oil marketing com-

Data at risk

Vulnerabilities in the UMAN portal are exposing user data across hundreds of services, including UAN cards, according to researchers

- Apart from UAN, details of LPG cylinder bookings and Aadhaar numbers have been exposed
- The EPFO module alone has been used over 40 crore times in the last three months; shortly after the vulnerabilities were reported, the main EPFO portal was taken down for "migration"
- The IT Ministry's initial fix has not completely shut off the flaws, over a month after vulnerabilities were reported to the government, the researchers say



pany, and Aadhaar numbers across several services where a user's ID details are saved. The Aadhaar numbers were found across many services in plain text, though such storage is disallowed by the Aadhaar Act, 2016. The Aadhaar module itself within UMAN was not vulnerable.

The EPFO module is UMAN's most-used service, recording over 40 crore transactions over the past three months.

The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology acknowledged the vulnerabilities in a

statement to *The Hindu*. "Our development and security teams have carefully examined the observations and are implementing the necessary corrective and preventive measures," the Ministry said. "The plain-text information in the concerned APIs has been appropriately encrypted."

API review

The Ministry added that it has "reviewed the API transaction logs for the past three months" and found that "transaction volumes" were consistent and that it continued to keep a watch on activities on the

UMAN portal.

The Hindu is withholding the precise technical details of the vulnerabilities, as they remain active despite the above interventions. The encryption the IT Ministry referred to is "flawed and inadequate", Mr. Akshay said, adding that a simple workaround allowed it to be cracked anyway. At *The Hindu's* request, the researchers shared their findings with Karan Saini, another independent security researcher, who termed the vulnerabilities "significant".

"Considering that rate limiting was implemented and the large number-space of EPFO UANs, it is unlikely that the vulnerability could have been exploited to mirror the entire EPFO database," Mr. Saini said, referring to the steps taken by the site to limit the number of requests a user can make. Still, he added, it "could potentially have been abused by cybercriminals in possession of UANs to siphon funds at scale by allowing for both changing of bank account details and initiating payouts, which is very concerning".

The fixes initially im-

plemented following the disclosure appear to do nothing to secure the system and instead confuse obscurity with security, while also introducing another vulnerability in the process," Mr. Saini said.

Mr. Akshay and Mr. Vaghela reported both vulnerabilities to the IT Ministry and the Computer Emergency Response Team, India (CERT-In), which issues alerts and helps organisations across the country with fixes for vulnerabilities like these. Shortly after the pair reported the vulnerabilities, the EPFO took down its online portal for a "migration", and some services remained unavailable this week.

The researchers said they suspected this was in response to their alerts, which were also sent to the organisation. The Ministry of Labour and Employment did not respond to a request for comment.

"It is worth examining whether the fixes deployed on the UMAN portal were simultaneously deployed across the services for which UMAN acts as a proxy," Mr. Saini said.

Trump restores Iran blockade, says U.S. will be 'paid' to guard Hormuz

Iran's military command says it would not allow the U.S. to 'interfere' in the key conduit for oil and gas, while also warning its Gulf neighbours against cooperating with Washington; U.S. hit targets in Iran while Tehran struck U.S. bases in the region

Agence France-Presse

WASHINGTON

President Donald Trump said on Monday the U.S. was reinstating its blockade of Iranian ports and "taking over" the Strait of Hormuz, where it would levy charges on shipping.

The President's declaration came after U.S. and Iranian attacks of a scale unseen since an April ceasefire, adding to doubts about efforts to bring a permanent end to the war that has curtailed shipping through the strait.

"The Hormuz Strait is OPEN, and will remain OPEN, with or without Iran. We are reinstating the THE IRANIAN BLOCKADE,



Boys play in the waters of the Strait of Hormuz, as smoke rises from an explosion in the background, off Bandar Abbas, Iran, on Monday. AP

so named because it is only stopping Iran's ships or customers from entering or leaving," Mr. Trump wrote on his Truth Social platform.

"The U.S.A. will be, from this point forward, known as 'THE GUARDIAN

OF THE HORMUZ STRAIT,'" he added.

Hours later, the U.S. Central Command said it would resume the blockade on Tuesday.

Iran started blocking the strait after the U.S. and Israel launched attacks in

late February, which prompted Washington to stop shipping to and from Iranian ports. Those restrictions were eased after the two sides agreed on a memorandum of understanding in June aimed at ending the war.

Mr. Trump said that the U.S. "will be reimbursed, at the rate of 20% on all cargo shipped, for any and all costs necessary to do the job of providing safety and security to this very volatile section of the World." Iran's military command insisted on Monday it would not allow the U.S. to "interfere" in the key conduit for oil and gas, while also warning its Gulf neighbours against cooperating with Washington.

Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi mocked Mr. Trump over his vow to impose hefty charges, saying Iran would charge a lower rate. "POTUS is absolutely right. Whoever provides safe passage of vessels through the strait should be compensated. Iran has always been the GUARDIAN of the Strait and will remain so FOREVER. 20% is too much. We will be fair," Mr. Araghchi wrote in a social media post.

The U.S. military said it hit dozens of targets on Monday, while Iran's Revolutionary Guards announced new strikes in response on Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait and Oman and insisted that the strait is "closed".

Sri Lanka's minority parties launch common platform

Meera Srinivasan

COLOMBO

Prominent political parties representing Sri Lanka's Tamil-speaking ethnic minorities have launched a platform to voice shared concerns around the pending political solution to the island's national question, and the persisting challenges to their communities' land rights.

Addressing a press conference in Colombo on Monday, leaders from parties and alliances – currently in Opposition – representing Tamils of the north and east, Malaiyaha Tamils of the central and southern hill country, and Muslims across the island, said the effort was aimed at foregrounding key issues facing the Tamil-speaking communities of Sri Lanka.

Three key issues

Leaders of the All Ceylon Makkal Congress (ACMC), Ceylon Workers' Congress (CWC), Democratic Tamil National Alliance (DTNA), Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kadchi (ITAK), Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC), and the Tamil Progressive Alliance (TPA) outlined three key areas of focus – introducing a new Constitution, early conduct of the long-pending provincial polls, and addressing conflicts surrounding people's land.

“Operating within the broad national framework of Sri Lanka's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and based on principles that the rule of law be upheld, and human rights and democracy be protected, this platform seeks to voice concerns pertaining to the people who have given us a mandate to represent them,” said SLMC leader and MP Rauff Hakeem. “This should not be interpreted as an anti-government or a pro-opposition stance,” added the MP, cur-



Common cause: Leaders of parties and groups for ethnic minorities hold a press conference in Colombo on Monday. MEERA SRINIVASAN

rently aligned to the main Opposition Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB).

Pointing to the ruling National People's Power (NPP) coalition's August 2024 poll manifesto – subsequently adopted as the government's National Policy Framework – that promised the introduction of a new Constitution and the conduct of Provincial Council elections within a year, the Opposition leaders said the Anura Kumara Dissanayake administration was yet to move on either. “We urge the government and the President to act on these two demands without any further delay,” said TPA leader and legislator Mano Ganesan.

Further, the government must take steps to resolve land grabs in the island's north and east, carried out by state agencies including the Archaeology and Forest Departments, as well as the military, the politicians said. “The question of land concerns all three groups,” said ACMC leader and MP Rishad Bathiudeen, referring to the north and east, where sizeable populations of Tamils and Muslims live, and the hill country that is home to Malaiyaha Tamils. “In addition to voicing shared concerns over land rights, this platform also gives us a chance to iron out diffe-

rences among us over land rights,” said Vanni MP Selvam Adaikkalanathan of the DTNA, in an apparent reference to conflicts over land between Tamil and Muslim communities.

The NPP secured a two-thirds majority in the November 2024 general election, outperforming regional parties in the north, east and hill country, except in the eastern Batticaloa district, where it lost the first spot to ITAK. Its success in areas with a large population of ethnic minorities, following a campaign that steered clear of ethno-nationalist or racist propaganda, pointed to a significant shift in the voting patterns of Tamils and Muslims, who appeared willing to give Mr. Dissanayake's government a chance. While his administration has taken some steps to address land rights, it has indicated that reviving the country's battered economy will take precedence over constitutional reform.

ITAK general secretary M.A. Sumanthiran described the coming together of parties representing the country's Tamil-speaking people as “historically significant”. “Majoritarianism is an enduring challenge in Sri Lanka. This is an effort to bring together representatives of minority communities to highlight our shared concerns.”

UK says a Tehran-backed group behind attacks on Jewish community, bans IRGC

London: A series of arson and vandalism attacks on Jewish sites in Britain were work of a proxy group backed by Iran, the UK government said Monday.

The government said it is banning the Islamic Movement of the Companions of the Right, or IMCR, also known as Harakat Ashab al-Yamin al-Islamia.

It also banned Iran's power-

ful paramilitary Revolutionary Guard as a threat to national security. Committing sabotage on behalf of the groups will be punishable by up to life imprisonment after Parliament approves the legislation, which the government expects to take place by the end of the week.

Security Minister Angela Eagle said in a statement that

the IMCR has claimed seven attacks in the UK.

The group had said online that it was responsible for a string of arson attacks on Jewish sites in London in recent months, including fires at synagogues and Jewish charity ambulances, as well as a Persian-language media organization critical of Iran's government. **AP**

Trade deficit widens to \$30.4 bn in Jun

New Delhi: India's merchandise trade deficit widened to \$30.43 billion in June as exports fell faster than imports, weighed down by shipping disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz linked to the West Asia conflict.

Exporters' bodies have flagged concerns over global demand softness, particularly

from Western markets, as a drag on growth in outbound shipments.

Economists had expected India's trade deficit to widen to \$26.63 billion in June, according to a *Reuters* poll, compared with a deficit of \$28.21 billion in May.

The country's merchandise exports fell to \$40.41 billion in

June from \$45.2 billion in the previous month while imports declined to \$70.84 billion from \$73.41 billion in May, data released on Monday showed.

Aditi Nayar, chief economist at ICRA, said the merchandise trade deficit widened by over 50% from a year earlier as elevated commodity prices pushed up the import bill. **REUTERS**

US N-fuel firm counters BARC's safety concerns over thorium fuel

Pratyush Deep

New Delhi, July 13

CHICAGO-BASED nuclear fuel company Clean Core Thorium Energy (CCTE) has refuted concerns over the use of its advanced nuclear fuel, ANEEL, in existing pressurised heavy water reactors (PHWRs), claiming that the thorium-based fuel improves key reactor safety characteristics and can be deployed without requiring modifications to reactor designs or control systems.

In a paper published in the journal *Nuclear Engineering and Design*, researchers from Clean Core, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Toronto-based Innovative Nuclear Solutions, and San Diego-

based Structural Integrity Associates challenged the findings of an earlier study by scientists at the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC). The BARC paper had argued that deploying ANEEL in India's existing PHWR fleet would require reactor redesigns and could increase safety risks under accident conditions.

The paper also claimed the advanced nuclear fuel has the potential to generate around six times more energy than conventional natural uranium fuel.

CCTE, only the second American company to have secured an export license from the US Department of Energy to sell nuclear technology to India in nearly two decades, has developed this patented thorium-

• THORIUM FUEL PUSH

THE BARC paper had argued that deploying ANEEL in India's existing PHWR fleet will require reactor redesigns and could increase safety risks under accident conditions

CCTE HAS developed the patented thorium-based fuel called ANEEL that combines thorium with high-assay low-enriched uranium for use in PHWRs

ANEEL CAN be deployed in India's PHWR fleet, which accounts for the majority of the

based fuel called ANEEL (Advanced Nuclear Energy for Enriched Life) that combines



country's operational nuclear reactors, as per the company

thorium with high-assay low-enriched uranium (HALEU) for use in PHWRs.

As per the company, ANEEL can be deployed in India's PHWR fleet, which accounts for the majority of the country's operational nuclear reactors.

In December 2024, state-owned NTPC Ltd and CCTE had announced a strategic partnership to explore the development and deployment of ANEEL for existing nuclear stations in India, subject to regulatory clearances. Apart from exploring development and deployment of ANEEL fuel in India, NTPC and CCTE intend to collaborate for exploring the possible indigenisation of its manufacturing with local supply chain development, establishing supply chain for HALEU, and supply of Uranium to India with sovereign guarantee.

In January, a paper published in the journal *Current Science* authored by scientists at the BARC had flagged concerns about using ANEEL fuel in the country's existing PHWRs. It concluded that thorium-HALEU fuel was "far from a drop-in option" and that existing reactors were unsuitable without substantial changes.

The CCTE paper, however, refuted this and described ANEEL as a "plug-and-play" replacement for natural uranium fuel bundles, saying it retains the same external dimensions and geometry as conventional fuel and modifications are limited to internal pin geometry and fuel composition.

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