ASSAM ASSEMBLY CLEARS UCC BILL AMID OPPN'S DEMAND FOR IT TO BE SENT TO PANEL

Utpal Parashar
letters@hindustantimes.com

GUWAHATI: The Assam Assembly on Wednesday passed the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) Bill that seeks to put in place a common legal framework to govern marriage, divorce, succession and live-in relationships irrespective of religion, even as the opposition demanded that it be sent to a select committee.

The Bill, the third such after similar legislations were passed in Uttarakhand and Gujarat, aims to govern and regulate laws relating to marriage and divorce, succession and live-in relationships.

The Assam legislation excludes scheduled tribes (STs), who comprise 12.45% of the population (2011 census).

Legislators from the ruling parties stressed that the law will empower and honour women, but opposition parties stated that it was not needed, was introduced without wide consultations, is not uniform as it excludes scheduled tribes (STs), termed it a political stunt and suggested amendments.

"We had mentioned clearly in our manifesto ahead of polls that if we win, we will bring UCC...Congress has concerns about how the Bill will affect practices followed under Quran and Shariat, but they haven't mentioned once about Bhagawad Gita or Ramayan, which shows that the party represents just one community," said chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, defending the legislation and targeting the Congress earlier.

Opposing the legislation, Congress legislature party leader, Wazed Ali Choudhury, stated that forcible implementation of UCC will infringe on personal liberties, create social and religious tensions in a diverse country like India and maintained that existing laws related to polygamy, child marriages etc are enough to handle issues related to women empowerment.

All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) MLA, Mazibur Rahman, stated that implementation of UCC based on Article 44 of the Constitution would violate the fundamental rights and existing legal provisions guaranteed to all including Muslims, who comprise 34.22% of Assam's population (2011 census).

{ ILLEGAL SAND MINING }

SC seeks MP govt reply on HT's Chambal report

Abraham Thomas
letters@hindustantimes.com

HT reported large craters along the banks of the river in clear signs of unabated sand mining. RAJ K RAJ /HT PHOTO

NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court on Tuesday sought the Madhya Pradesh government's response over unabated illegal mining at the National Chambal Gharial Sanctuary (NCGS) despite its directions, taking cognisance of an HT report showing large craters along the banks of the river, leaving indentations where once natural sand would have accumulated through the river flow

A bench of justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta said the report indicated that illegal mining and transportation activities continue unabated despite the court's directions as it issued timebound directions for the states of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh to fill up vacant posts of forest guards within a year and put up an effective surveillance and monitoring system including CCTVs, GPS and vehicle tracking devices within six months.

Referring to the HT report published on Monday, the bench said, "They have clicked pictures of numerous unregistered vehicles moving with the river sand. These activities have been noticed in Morena village." "If this [HT] report is correct, your officers have filed a false affidavit in court," the court told additional solicitor general (ASG) SV Raju, appearing for the Madhya Pradesh government. The news report was shown to the court by senior advocate Nikhil Goel, assisting the court as amicus curiae along with advocate Rupali Samuel. Raju said he has gone through the report and will take instructions, calling the matter serious and shocking if found to be correct. "I will urge the court to continue monitoring," he said.

The report, published on Monday, found that the natural habitat of the animals outside the manicured 3.5-acre park, 15km away, which should have been undisturbed floodplains consisting of sand from the river, looked ravaged. The riverbank, once the nesting site for the critically endangered gharials and accounting for nearly 80–90% of the entire global wild gharial population, was found to be degraded, with deep pits pockmarking the floodplain landscape.

The reality unearthed by the report was in stark contrast to the affidavit submitted by the Madhya Pradesh government in court, indicating that substantial enforcement action was undertaken in April, particularly in the district of Morena, where approximately 1641 vehicles were issued challan and an amount of approximately ₹23.55 lakh recovered by penalties and compounding fees.

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> **SUPREME COURT**

Similarly, the court had called for reports from the states of Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh as well, even summoning senior officials where illegal mining was found to be rampant by the expert body of Central Empowered Committee (CEC), assisting the court.

In an order on Tuesday, the bench said, "The material placed on record does not indicate the existence of any systematic mechanism for identification, seizure, blacklisting, confiscation of vehicles or prosecution of owners of the vehicle operating without registration particulars in blatant violation of the provisions of the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988 and the Central Motor Vehicles Rules, 1989." The court directed the states to register cases under the relevant laws – MV Act, Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and Mines and Mineral (Development &Regulation) Act – against not just the drivers but the owners, financiers, operators, contractors and those forming part of the illegal mining mafia.

It said, "The continued operation of such unidentified vehicles in ecologically sensitive regions and protected sanctuary areas raises serious concerns regarding both regulatory failure and possible facilitation of organized illegal mining through deliberate evasion of legal accountability."

On the efforts taken by Madhya Pradesh to establish check posts, issue challan and pass executive orders to deny fuel to vehicles having no registration, the court said, "Without stringent and immediate coercive action against the offending vehicles and their operators, and more particularly, the behind the scene kingpins, this is unlikely to produce any meaningful deterrent effect." The amicus highlighted how the seized vehicles were released by Madhya Pradesh police on payment of ₹5,000 fine.

The court further directed chief secretaries of the three states to identify the vacant posts of frontline personnel such as forest guards and member to the court by July 22 the action plan to complete the recruitment process within a year. The states were further asked to examine the need for providing a legal cover under Section 218(3) of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023 (prior sanction for prosecution) to forest guards engaged in action against illegal mining mafia. The amicus had recommended that absence of such protection deters forest guards from proactively engaging against illegal miners who have sophisticated weapons. The court also sought the responses of the three states to an application seeking compensation for guards who die while discharging their duty.

The court order came in a suo motu case arising from newspaper reports depicting large-scale mining under the noses of the forest administration and police. Earlier this month, the SC observed that steps to prevent illegal sand mining existed merely on paper.

Mini gun factory busted, three arrested in Patna

Mukesh Kumar Mishra
htpatna@hindustantimes.com

PATNA: A joint team of Patna police and STF busted an illegal arms manufacturing unit and arrested three people and recovered arms and cartridges at Kushwan village under Dhanaura police station in Patna late on Tuesday evening.

Disclosing on Wednesday, the police said that the unit setup was specially designed to hide the illegal activity under a hut and suppress noise generated during the weapon manufacturing. "The raid was conducted after received information that illegal weapons were being manufactured and sold by secretly constructing a Damkoliya hut at Kushwan village under Dhanaura police station, police said.

Police said that the raiding team unearthed a mini gun factory where illegal firearms were being manufactured in a hut. The police arrested three persons which have been identified as Sharan Vishwakarma,(60), Umesh Paswan, (40) and Babuanand Paswan (60)years, son of Late Ramdev Paswan, all residents of Kushwan, said a police officer.