

Berlin eases citizenship rules for Nazi victims' offspring

AFP, Berlin

Berlin yesterday eased rules allowing the descendants of people who fled Nazi Germany to reclaim citizenship. Germany must "live up to its historical responsibility with regards to those affected," said Interior Minister Horst Seehofer. While Germany already has rules allowing descendants of persecuted Jews to reclaim citizenship, the two decrees that came into force yesterday closed several loopholes that had previously shut others out. The offspring of people who left Nazi Germany before their nationality was evoked by the regime can now reclaim it under the new decree.

People who previously would not have been accorded German nationality, because their father was a foreigner and whose mother lost her German citizenship under the Nazis, for example, can now also benefit from the new rules. The ministry stressed that no one should be shut out because the Nazi-era injustice was too far back in time. Second, third, fourth "and in some cases fifth generation" descendants can apply, said the ministry. "Persecuted persons and their descendants, who had been previously excluded from naturalisation because of the morally unjust legal situation, can now have the opportunity to acquire German citizenship under eased conditions," said Josef Schuster, who heads the Central Council of Jews in Germany. "This closes a gap in justice," he added.

The required conditions will be reduced "to a minimum" comprising "basic German language skills" and a basic knowledge of the legal and social order in Germany, said the ministry. Unlike under typical citizenship application processes, applicants under these categories would not need to prove that they have sufficient financial means to support themselves.

The difficulties for some in using ancestry grounds to claim their citizenship came into focus partly due to the sharp rise in number of applications from Britons evoking Nazi persecution of their ancestors, after the UK voted to leave the European Union.

Court blocks Australia from deporting Tamil toddlers

AFP, Melbourne

A dramatic late-night call from an Australian judge to a plane bound for Sri Lanka has temporarily spared a family of four -- including two Aussie-born toddlers -- from deportation and fuelled a political firestorm Down Under. Australia's conservative government has ordered the Tamil family to be taken from immigration detention in Melbourne, put on a plane and deported to Sri Lanka late on Thursday.

But an injunction made by a phone call from Federal Judge Heather Riley after the plane took off forced pilots to land the aircraft and deposit the family in the far north city of Darwin. The case has become a new flashpoint over the Australian government's hardline immigration policies, which include turning away refugees arriving by boat and de facto offshore detention, both measures condemned by the United Nations.

Two killed

FROM PAGE 16

weapons and bullets from the spot. Meanwhile, a suspected drug peddler was killed in a "gunfight" with police in Chuadanga's Damurhuda upazila.

The dead -- Rokonuzzaman Siddiq, 35 -- was accused in 11 cases, said police.

Sukumar Biswas, officer-in-charge of Damurhuda Police Station, said a police team raided Joyrampur village of the upazila around 2:30am on information that two groups of drug peddlers were distributing narcotics.

Sensing police presence, the criminals opened fire on the law enforcers, forcing them to retaliate, he claimed.

During the "gunfight", Rokonuzzaman sustained bullet injuries and died on the spot, he added.

The body was sent to Chuadanga Sadar Hospital morgue for autopsy. Police claimed to have recovered one LG gun, 200 bottles of phensidyl and two sharp weapons from the spot.

Rokonuzzaman's brother Asifuzzaman, however, alleged that his brother was detained on Thursday evening from a local bazar and he had been missing since then.

Our Kushtia correspondent contributed to this report.



Protesters cover their right eyes as they attend the Stand in Silence for the 74th Anniversary of the Liberation of Hong Kong gathering at the Cenotaph in Hong Kong yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

Trump's personal assistant steps down over info breach: reports

AFP, Washington

Donald Trump's personal assistant Madeleine Westerhout resigned on Thursday after she shared information about the president's family with journalists, US media reported.

Westerhout's unexpected departure came after Trump learned that she had talked about his family and White House matters with reporters at an off-the-record session during the president's recent working vacation in New Jersey, The New York Times reported citing unnamed sources.

Later, other outlets -- including CNN and Politico -- also reported her departure citing unnamed sources. CNN said Westerhout had failed to make clear during the interaction with journalists that her comments were off the record, and one reporter

disclosed the conversation to the White House. Westerhout's office was in front of the Oval Office and she had been described as Trump's "gatekeeper" in US media. She had been his personal assistant from the beginning of his presidency.

The Trump administration has been particularly sensitive about staff leaking information to the media, with the president railing against both officials and journalists over reports about the state of affairs in the White House.

The New York Times said Westerhout was now a "separated employee" and would not be allowed into the White House. A former administration official described Trump and Westerhout's relationship as "close", CNN said, but added that talking about his family was "a red line".

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4.1m await their fate

FROM PAGE 16

nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which also runs Assam, say the NRC process reflects its aim to serve only its co-religionists.

In January, India's lower house passed legislation that stands to grant citizenship to people who moved to India from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan as recently as six years ago -- but not if they are Muslim. Indian Home Minister Amit Shah, Modi's right-hand-man, has called for the ejection of "termites" and said before the BJP's thumping re-election victory in May that it would "run a countrywide campaign to send back the infiltrators".

A team of United Nations experts, including the special rapporteur for freedom of religion or belief, said in July that the NRC could "exacerbate the xenophobic climate while fueling religious intolerance and discrimination in the country."

The process to update the register began following an Indian Supreme Court order in 2013, with the state's nearly 33 million people having to prove that they were Indian nationals prior to March 24, 1971.

The Indian Home Ministry said last week that those who will be excluded from the NRC would not automatically become foreigners and "every individual left out can appeal to the Foreigners' Tribunals".

The roughly two million people who are expected to be left off the final NRC register -- although estimates vary -- will have 120 days to appeal at special Foreigners Tribunals, which the government says are being expanded, reports AFP.

The Indian government said it will also help the poor among the excluded with legal assistance to fight their cases. India has set up at least 1,000 Foreigners' Tribunals to hear disputed cases.

If one loses the case in the tribunal, the person can approach the High Court and then the Supreme Court and none will be sent to detention centres until all legal options are exhausted, reports our New Delhi correspondent citing Indian government sources.

It is unclear what will happen to those ultimately branded as foreigners because India has no treaty with Bangladesh to deport them.

And there are no such facilities in Assam to hold such large number of people. There are only six such detention camps exist in Assam which are holding 1,135 people and running for years now, according to the state government. Ten new such camps have been announced. One with space for 3,000 is being constructed in Goalpara west of Assam's capital Guwahati.

During his recently concluded Bangladesh visit, Indian External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar assured Dhaka over the issue. Asked about concerns that some four million Bangla-speaking people are at the risk of losing Indian citizenship as they were left out of the NRC, Jaishankar said, "This is an internal matter of India."

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Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen later told reporters that India asked Bangladesh not to worry about the NRC issue. "We said we are already in serious trouble with 1.1 million Rohingyas ... They [Jaishankar] said 'you don't worry at all about it,' Momen told some reporters at his ministry office on August 20.

Critics, however, say the whole NRC process is too complex for many people in a poor region where illiteracy is rife and where many lack documentation. Rights activists say courts will be overwhelmed since the appeal period is short and the number of pleas will be in millions.

"Imagine FTs adjudicating 2-3 million cases and they have been given just 120 days," Suhas Chakma, director of New Delhi-based Rights and Risks Analysis Group, told Al Jazeera. Objections were also raised against the Foreigners' Tribunals. Critics say that tribunal members, who are not judicial persons, can be underqualified and are subject to

"performance" targets, and that the entire process has been riddled with inconsistencies and errors. "We are genuine Indian people. My forefathers were born here in this land," Saheb Ali, 55, one of those left out of the draft NRC last year, told AFP.

"My mother's name was included in the voter list of 1966. We have submitted the documents while filing the forms. However, her name is not there in the draft NRC," said Ali. Nur Mohammad, 65, for instance, spent almost 10 years in one detention camp until a Supreme Court order saw him released this month.

"I just want to ask them what is my crime? I was born here and lived in Assam all my life," he said. "I don't know if my name will be in the NRC or not." Media reports say that there have been more than 40 cases of suicide caused by the worry about the NRC.

Hasina, Modi

FROM PAGE 16

Strengthening South Asia, Impacting the World". Bangladesh and India are discussing issues related to finalisation of programme and agenda of the PM's visit to New Delhi. The two countries reaffirmed that relationship between India and Bangladesh goes far beyond a strategic partnership.

Jamuna banks eroding near Bangabandhu bridge

FROM PAGE 16

Alipur, and Singulee in Kalihati upazila.

Last year, a 200-metre-long village protection embankment of BBA, which is around 1.5km south from the east end of the bridge, in Gorilabari area was devoured by the river with a number of houses from August 20 to 23.

Locals have blamed that indiscriminate sand lifting from the

river by powerful dredgers is one of the main reasons behind the erosion in the area.

Recently, people of several villages under Gohaliabari and Durgapur unions demonstrated at Alipur, demanding stopping of sand lifting to save the villages from erosion and construction of an embankment for protecting the area.

They also demanded punishment of those involved in the illegal sand

lifting. Although sand lifting is prohibited within six km of the bridge, some influential people have been doing illegal sand business near the east end of the bridge, putting the important structure under threat, said the site officials.

Tofazzal said they used to detain the illegal sand lifters and handed them over to police. Locals said the administration

launched mobile court drives once or twice a year and fined one or two sand traders, but it was not enough to stop the sand lifting.

The 5.63km Bangabandhu Multipurpose Bridge situated between Tangail and Sirajganj was built on the Jamuna for easing communications of northern and southwestern parts with other parts of the country, and it was opened to traffic in 1998.

HK cops round up key activists

FROM PAGE 16

The European Union's diplomatic chief Federica Mogherini on Friday said the developments were "extremely worrying".

The day saw rolling arrests of leading pro-democracy voices, including lawmaker Cheng Chung-tai, who advocates greater political autonomy for Hong Kong, his Civic Passion party said in a Facebook post. Police confirmed that a 35-year-old man surnamed Cheng had been held over "conspiracy to cause criminal damage" linked to the storming of the city's parliament in July.

Pro-democracy campaigner Rick Hui -- a district councillor -- and former student leader Althea Suen

were also arrested separately, while vocal independence campaigner Andy Chan was detained at Hong Kong's airport. More than 900 people have been arrested in connection with protests since June.

But that has failed to snuff out a leaderless movement, which says freedoms in the city, unique within China, are being eviscerated by Beijing. Amnesty International decried yesterday's "ludicrous dawn swoops", describing them as "scare tactics straight out of Beijing's playbook". Police spokesperson John Tse denied the slew of arrests were timed specifically to defang the weekend's

protests as "totally false." Hong Kong's crisis-hit government has refused to back down over the protests, which have by turns seen millions march, closed the airport and left city streets strewn with bricks and shrouded in tear gas.

What started as a pushback against a bill allowing extraditions to mainland China quickly morphed into wider calls for democracy and police accountability. Bonnie Leung of the Civil Human Rights Front (CHRF), the organiser of today's banned rally, said it had "no option but to cancel the march".

However, pockets of protesters have vowed to hold creative events at the scheduled time and place to sidestep

the ban. Those included a mass shopping trip, football match and impromptu religious gatherings in downtown Hong Kong, while a YouTuber with 800,000 followers called a fan meeting.

With a hardcore minority among the protesters, mainly young students, unlikely to heed the police ban, the weekend could be poised for renewed violent clashes. The violence has damaged Hong Kong's reputation for stability and prosperity.

China has responded with a campaign of intimidation and state-media yesterday reported that fresh military anti-riot drills were held across the border in Shenzhen.

France launches cross-Channel Brexit 'dress rehearsal'

AFP, Paris

The French government yesterday kicked off a month-long Brexit dress rehearsal for trucks carrying goods across the Channel to Britain through the port of Calais.

"For one month we will act as if Brexit has happened," said Budget Minister Gerald Darmanin, who will launch the new customs system together with the British minister in charge of planning for a no-deal Brexit, Michael Gove. "We will put in place a sort of dress rehearsal for most companies, in order to be fully ready at the end of October," Darmanin told RTL radio.

The French state has hired an additional 700 customs agents to cope with the border checks that will be put in place after Britain leaves the European Union. Britain and EU members, particularly frontline states such as Ireland and France, are bracing for potential economic and travel chaos if, as is deemed increasingly likely, Britain crashes out of the union without a deal on October 31.

Darmanin attempted to assure the French that the situation was under control, thanks to the creation of a new "smart border" which will scan trucks' licence plates and automatically link them to shipping documents filled out online by exporters.

On arrival in Calais, trucks will either be waved through to take the Channel tunnel or a ferry to Britain, or be subjected to physical checks, depending on what type of goods they are carrying. "You're a small business in Grenoble and you export to Britain: you declare everything online from now," Darmanin said.

"There will be bar codes and licence plate readers, and at the border -- unless there are checks because we think you are smuggling contraband or counterfeit goods -- your goods will go directly to Britain," he said. There will not be "dozens and dozens of kilometres of queues in Calais," he promised.

In the event of a no-deal Brexit, trade between Britain and the EU will default to the World Trade Organization (WTO) tariff system.

4 Bangladeshis

FROM PAGE 16

The NIA took charge of investigations the same year and submitted the first charge sheet in March 2015, mentioning a conspiracy to overthrow the Sheikh Hasina government in Bangladesh.

"The rented house was occupied by the members of JMB, ostensibly for burkha-stitching, though in reality it was being used for the nefarious activity of bomb-making," said a NIA statement.

The investigation by NIA revealed a conspiracy by JMB to radicalise, recruit and provide training in arms and explosives to its members in India as well as to commit terrorist acts and wage war against the democratically established governments of India and Bangladesh, the statement added.

A large number of IEDs, explosives, hand grenades, training videos were recovered during the investigation of the case.

2 policemen

FROM PAGE 16

in-charge (OC) of Ramna Police Station.

According to the case statement, the duo tried to withdraw the money from Sonali Bank's Kakrail Branch on July 24, forging the signature of the ministry's chief accounts officer Shafiqul Islam. The forgery was detected when the Bangladesh Bank authorities called the accountant to verify whether they should clear the cheque. Shafiqul filed the case on August 28, and said in the case statement that it took time for him to lodge the case as he discussed the matter with higher officials.

It was not immediately known how the police officers got the cheque in the first place. The OC said they were doing investigation to find it out.

BSF detains

FROM PAGE 16

evening between the two counterparts. The four have been charged with intrusion, he added.

Nasa sending

FROM PAGE 16

gather important data from the surface. Nasa said it hopes the helicopter will eventually carry tools around the planet and guide astronauts when they arrive.

The rover launches in July 2020, and it won't arrive at the Jezero Crater until February 18, 2021. But if the helicopter soars, it'll provide never-before-seen views of the Red Planet.

Nasa plans to launch another rotorcraft soon as well -- Dragonfly, which will soar through the thick atmosphere of Saturn's huge moon Titan. The life-hunting Dragonfly is scheduled to lift off in 2026 and land on Titan's frigid surface in 2034.