

CIVIL MISCELLANEOUS

Before S. S. Dulat and Prem Chand Pandit, JJ.

SODHI HARBAKHSI SINGH,—*Petitioner.*

versus

THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT AND OTHERS,—
Respondents.

Civil Writ No. 1583 of 1960.

1962
April, 9th

Displaced Persons (Compensation and Rehabilitation) Rules, (1955)—Rule 26—Allotable property in the occupation of non-claimant—Whether must be transferred to him—Interpretation of Statutes—“May”—Whether can be interpreted as “shall”.

Held, that the expression ‘may’ used in rule 26 of the Displaced Persons (Compensation and Rehabilitation) Rules, 1955, cannot be taken as “must” and it does not cast any obligation on the authorities to transfer allotable property to a non-claimant in whose occupation such property may happen to be. The rule merely vests power in the authority concerned to make or not to make the transfer according to the circumstances.

Held, that ordinarily where the legislature uses the expression ‘may’ when clothing an authority with the exercise of certain powers, the meaning is that such exercise is discretionary and there is no obligation on the part of the authority concerned to do the act which it is merely authorised to do. In the peculiar context of a provision of law the Court may be compelled to conclude that that provision does cast an obligation on the concerned authority, but such an unusual construction is not to be resorted to lightly and must be justified by the scheme of the provision in question.

Case referred by Hon’ble Mr. Justice D. K. Mahajan, on 24th November, 1961 to a larger Bench owing to the importance of the legal questions involved in the case. The case was finally decided by a Division Bench consisting of Hon’ble Mr. Justice Dulat and Hon’ble Mr. Justice P. C. Pandit, on 9th April, 1962.

Petition under Articles 226 and 227 of the Constitution of India praying that a writ in the nature of certiorari or any other appropriate writ, order or direction be issued directing the respondents to transfer the plot No. 155-A/13, situated in Gol Masjid Bazar Sharifpura, at Amritsar, to the petitioner in accordance with rules and law on the subject.

H. S. WASU and B. S. WASU, ADVOCATES, for the Petitioner.

S. M. SIKRI, ADVOCATE-GENERAL, for the Respondents.

ORDER

DULAT, J.—This is a petition under Article 226 of the Constitution, and it has been referred to us because the learned Single Judge who first heard it felt that there was some conflict of views concerning the meaning of rule 26 of the Displaced Persons (Compensation and Rehabilitation) Rules, 1955.

Dulat, J.

The petitioner is a displaced person. He put in a claim which was verified. It was a small claim and in satisfaction of it a residential house was transferred to him in accordance with rule 25 of the Rules framed under the Displaced Persons (Compensation and Rehabilitation) Act, 1954. He was, however, also in occupation of two vacant sites and he claimed that those should also be transferred to him in accordance with rule 26. The resettlement authorities agreed to transfer one of the sites to the petitioner treating him as a non-claimant under rule 26. They, however, declined to transfer the second site observing that it was not in accordance with departmental practice to allow multiple allotments, the meaning being that one individual was not to be transferred more than one property of the same kind. It is against this decision that the present petition is directed and the argument in support of the petition is that under rule 26 the petitioner, being in the sole occupation of the disputed site, is entitled to have it transferred to him on payment of the appropriate price and there is an

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obligation on the part of the Resettlement authorities to make the transfer. Rule 26 of the Rules says this—

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“Where an acquired evacuee property which is an allottable property is in the sole occupation of a displaced person who does not hold a verified claim, the property may be transferred to him.”

It is somewhat doubtful, as pointed out by Mr. Sikri, whether the petitioner can legitimately be called a displaced person who does not hold a verified claim as the Rules and also the Displaced Persons (Compensation and Rehabilitation) Act seem to divide displaced persons into two separate categories, namely, those having a verified claim, as the petitioner undoubtedly did, and those not having any verified claim, and rule 26 is obviously meant to deal with those persons who, although displaced, do not hold a verified claim, I do not, however, propose to pursue this matter further as the Resettlement authorities have apparently decided to treat the petitioner as a non-claimant. The question then is whether rule 26 casts any obligation on the authorities to transfer allottable property to a non-claimant in whose occupation such property may happen to be or whether the rule merely vests a power in the authority concerned to make the transfer or not according to the circumstances. Mr. Wasu contends that although the word used in rule 26 is ‘may’, it really means ‘must’. To support this unusual construction learned counsel relies largely on two decisions of this Court. The first is Civil Writ No. 40 of 1960, *Shri Ramji Dass v. The Ministry of Rehabilitation, Government of India, and others* decided on 10th of November, 1960, by Shamsheer Bahadur, J., and the second is Civil Writ No. 685 of 1960, *S. Karam Singh v. The Chief Settlement Commissioner, Ministry of Rehabilitation, and others*, decided on 25th of April, 1961, by Mehar Singh, J., in which he followed the view adopted by Shamsheer Bahadur, J., in the earlier case. It, however, appears that both these decisions were concerned with the meaning of rule 25 of the Rules, and what Shamsheer Bahadur, J., held was that in the context of rule 25 the word ‘may’ appeared to have the force of ‘shall’ and should be construed as such. Rule 25 is concerned with payment

of compensation to persons holding verified claims and it directs that allottable evacuee property should be allotted to certain claimants provided the total amount of net compensation payable to the claimant is not less than half the value of the property. I do not see how this view turning on the context of rule 25 can necessarily apply to the construction of rule 26 which deals with another category of persons and where the context, therefore, is substantially different. It is obvious that ordinarily where the legislature uses the expression 'may' when clothing an authority with the exercise of certain powers, the meaning is that such exercise is discretionary and there is no obligation on the part of the authority concerned to do the act which it is merely authorised to do. It is true, of course, that in the peculiar context of a provision of law the Court may be compelled to conclude that that provision does cast an obligation on the concerned authority, but such an unusual construction is not to be resorted to lightly and must be justified by the scheme of the provision in question. In the present case there is nothing in the context of rule 26 to justify such unusual construction. It is significant in this connection that rule 25 expressly demands that no property be transferred even to a claimant unless the value of his net compensation is at least one-half the value of the property and, in my opinion, it would be somewhat strange if a person not holding any verified claim would be entitled to the transfer of such property irrespective of its value without any discretion in the matter of transfer being left to the competent authority. Reading the two rules together, therefore, I find that the context of each is different and there is no justification for importing into rule 26 the obligation which perhaps exists under rule 25, the pre-existing conditions in the two rules being different. On the question of construction, therefore, I am of opinion that the expression 'may' used in rule 26 cannot be taken as 'must'. Apart from this matter, however, there is the more pertinent question whether in the present case any injustice has been done to the petitioner which because of some small legal error requires to be set right by way of *certiorari*. As I have said, the

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petitioner's compensation claim has been fully satisfied by transfer of the residential house to him. He has, over and above that, been transferred a vacant site, and his further claim for the transfer of another vacant site has little merit on the ground of plain justice, for the policy of the Act is to resettle as many displaced persons as possible and there seems no reason why the petitioner should be permitted to hinder the resettlement of other deserving persons for whose benefit apparently the resettlement authorities have kept back the disputed site. In these circumstances, there is, in my opinion, no proper justification for this Court to exercise its jurisdiction under Article 226 of the Constitution and the petition must fail. I would, therefore, decline to interfere with the decision made by the resettlement authorities and dismiss the present petition leaving the parties to their own costs in this Court.

Pandit. PREM CHAND PANDIT, J.—I agree.

K.S.K.

LETTERS PATENT APPEAL

Before S. S. Dulat and Inder Dev Dua, JJ.

SHIBU METAL WORKS, JAGADHRI,—*Appellant.*

versus

REGIONAL PROVIDENT FUND COMMISSIONER,—
Respondent.

Letters Patent Appeal No. 312 of 1959.

1962
April, 10th

Employees' Provident Funds Act (XIX of 1952)—S. 2(i) and Schedule I—"Electrical, mechanical or general engineering products"—Meaning and scope of—Whether includes brass utensils—Interpretation of Statutes—Statute grouping together two or more words or expressions—Interpretation of—Rule as to, stated.

Held, that in the expression "Electrical, mechanical or general engineering products" the legislative emphasis is