



Friday, Jul 28, 2023

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What is a stapled visa, and why does China issue these to Indians from Arunachal and J&K?

The issuing of such visas related to the fact that China disputes India's unequivocal and internationally accepted sovereignty over Arunachal Pradesh.

By: **Explained Desk**

New Delhi | July 28, 2023 13:01 IST



2



A stapled visa is simply an unstamped piece of paper that is attached by a pin or staples to a page of the passport and can be torn off or detached at will. (File photo/Unsplash)

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India withdrew its eight-athlete wushu contingent from the **Summer World University Games beginning in Chengdu on Friday (July 28)** after China issued stapled visas to three athletes from the team who belong to Arunachal Pradesh.

Wushu is the Chinese term for martial arts. Two hundred and twenty-seven Indian athletes are participating in 11 other sports at the games that are held every two years, and are officially known as the FISU World University Games.

The Chengdu edition was originally scheduled for 2021 but was postponed because of the **Covid-19** pandemic, and the original 2023 games, scheduled to be held in Yekaterinburg, were cancelled after Russia invaded **Ukraine** in February 2022.

What is a stapled visa?

A stapled visa is simply an unstamped piece of paper that is attached by a pin or staples to a page of the passport and can be torn off or detached at will. This is different from a regular visa that is affixed to the passport by the issuing authority and stamped.

China has made it a practice to issue stapled visas to Indian nationals from Arunachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir. It says the visas are valid documents, but the Government of India has consistently refused to accept this position.

On Thursday (July 27), Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson **Arindam Bagchi** said the issue of stapled visas was “unacceptable and we have lodged our strong protest with the Chinese side, reiterating our consistent position on the matter”.

Bagchi said India’s “long-standing and consistent position is that there should be no discrimination or differential treatment based on domicile or ethnicity in the visa regime for Indian citizens holding valid India passports”, and that “India reserves the right to suitably respond to such actions”.

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Why does China do this?

Passports, visas, and other kinds of immigration controls reiterate the idea of a nation-state and its sovereignty which is inalienable and inviolable. A passport is the certificate of its holder’s identity and citizenship. Since nation-states reserve the right to control and regulate who enters or leaves their borders, a passport and visa entitle their holders to travel freely and under legal protection across international borders.

China disputes India’s unequivocal and internationally accepted sovereignty over Arunachal Pradesh. It challenges the legal status of the McMahon Line, the boundary between Tibet and British India that was agreed at the Convention Between Great Britain, China, and Tibet at the Simla Convention of 1914. It is this disagreement that lies at the heart of Chinese claims over the position of the Line of Actual Control (LAC), and its repeated transgressions into Indian territory.

Explained | Understanding the disputed LAC and China's claims over Arunachal

China claims some 90,000 sq km of Arunachal Pradesh as its territory. It calls the area “Zangnan” in the Chinese language and makes repeated references to “South Tibet”. Chinese maps show Arunachal Pradesh as part of China, and sometimes parenthetically refer to it as “so-called Arunachal Pradesh”.

China makes periodic efforts to underline this unilateral claim to Indian territory, and to undermine the sovereignty of India over parts of Indian territory. As part of these efforts, it issues lists of Chinese names for places in Arunachal Pradesh — it has issued three such lists in 2017, 2021, and in April this year — and takes steps such as issuing stapled visas.

Since when has this practice gone on?

In his book ‘After Tiananmen: The Rise of China’, India’s former foreign secretary Vijay Gokhale noted that state-run Chinese media began to refer to Arunachal Pradesh as “South Tibet” from 2005 onward.

“They (the Chinese) signalled their intention by refusing to give a visa to an Indian government official who was serving in Arunachal Pradesh in late 2006.

Subsequently, they started the practice of issuing ‘stapled’ visas – the visa was not affixed to the passport but was given on a separate piece of paper stapled to the passport – to all Indian citizens from Arunachal Pradesh (as well as Jammu and Kashmir),” Gokhale wrote.

* The stapled visas for Jammu and Kashmir residents appear to have started around 2008-09, media reports have noted. In 2013, *The New York Times* published an account of a Kashmiri man who claimed he had been issued a stapled visa by the Chinese embassy in New Delhi and had been stopped at the airport in September 2009.

* In 2010, the **Chinese refused a visa to Northern Army Commander Lt Gen B S Jaswal** to attend an official meeting on the ground that he serves in “sensitive” Jammu and Kashmir.

* In 2011, ahead of a scheduled meeting between Prime Minister **Manmohan Singh** and China's President Hu Jintao, media reports quoted Chinese **foreign ministry official Hong Lie as saying** China was “ready to work with India to have friendly consultation and properly handle” issues such as the one related to the stapled visas.

* Also in 2011, the junior **External Affairs Minister E Ahamed told Rajya Sabha** that the Indian government was “aware” that “despite strong protest by the Indian Government, the Chinese Embassy in India has again issued stapled visas to the people of Jammu and Kashmir”, and that “one officer of Indian Weightlifting Federation (IWF) along with a noted weightlifter were not allowed to board the flight to Beijing because of the stapled visas issued by the Chinese Embassy in the capital”.

Ahamed said that the “Government’s position that there should be no discrimination against visa applicants of Indian nationality on grounds of domicile and ethnicity has been clearly conveyed to the Chinese Government on several occasions, including during the recent visit to India by Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao in December 2010”. This same position was reiterated by the MEA on Thursday as well.

Ahamed also informed Parliament that an advisory had been issued on November 12, 2009, “cautioning Indian citizens that Chinese paper visas stapled to the passport are not considered valid for travel out of the country”.

* Even so, five karatekas from Arunachal Pradesh seeking to participate in the Asian Karate Championships in Quanzhou in July 2011 were issued stapled visas.

* In 2013, two young women archers from Arunachal Pradesh, Maselo Mihu and Sorang Yumi, who were to take part in the Youth World Archery Championship in Wuxi, were stopped at the airport after they were issued stapled visas by the Chinese.

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* In 2016, Bamang Tago, the manager of the Indian badminton team, said he did not get a Chinese visa to travel to Fuzhou for the China Super Series Premier tournament because he was from Arunachal Pradesh.

First published on: 28-07-2023 at 13:01 IST

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