

Received on	04/01/2023
Registered on	05/01/2025
Decided on	07/01/2026
Duration	03 Y. 00 M. 03 D.

IN THE COURT OF PRINCIPAL DISTRICT JUDGE, WASHIM.
[Presided over by Anil Subramaniam]

Civil M. A. No. 07/2023

Exh. No.

CNR No. MHWS010000172023

	1. Gopal Dwarkadas Mundada, Aged about 61 years, Occu. Farmer, R/o. Shri. Dwarka Hemraj Galli, Hingoli, Dist. Hingoli 431513 2) Jaykumar Ramniwas Laddha, Aged about 55 years, Occu. Farmer, R/o. Chandak Layout, Washim.	... Applicant.
<u>V E R S U S</u>		
1)	Sub-Divisional Officer and Land Acquisition Officer, Washim, Dist. Washim. SDO office, Washim – 444 505.	... Respondents.
2)	Project Director, National Highways Authority of India, Project Implementation Unit – Washim-37, IUDP Colony, Washim – 444 505.	

**APPLICATION UNDER SECTION 34 OF THE ARBITRATION AND CONCILIATION
ACT, 1996 R/W SECTION 3-G(6) OF THE NATIONAL HIGHWAYS ACT, 1956.**

=====

Appearance:-

Mr. R. N. Lathi, Advocate for the applicant.
APP Mr. A. R. Vyawahare for respondent No. 1.
Mr. V. T. Sakolkar, Advocate for the respondent No. 2.

=====

J U D G M E N T
(Dated 07/01/2026)

1. By the present application, the applicant is praying for setting aside the award No. LA/NH-161/Chivara/Malegaon/49/2018-19 dated 27/06/2022.
2. It is the case of the applicant that the following land with details stated hereinafter has been acquired by the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI for short) for the reasons stated therein.

Village	Gat No.	Area (Sq. Mtr).
Chivara	253	5100

3. The Ld. Land Acquisition Officer (LAO) granted compensation at the rate stated in the LAO's order.
4. Being aggrieved thereto, the applicant preferred objection and the matter was referred for Arbitration as contemplated under Highways Act. The grounds taken are that, the compensation is less, Sale instances not considered properly, N.A Use not considered, belt system is followed incorrectly, statutory benefits not granted, statutory easement compensation is not granted, severance charges are not granted etc.
5. The Ld. Arbitrator after hearing the parties, rejected the claim. Hence, the present proceeding.
6. Heard both sides. Perused the documents available on record. Considered the submissions. Following points arise for my consideration and I answer the same as under for the reasons stated hereinafter.

Sr. No.	Points	Findings
----------------	---------------	-----------------

1]	Whether the impugned award requires any interference and is required to be set aside on grounds stated in Section 34 ?	... In the affirmative.
2]	What order ?	... As per final order.

REASONS

As to Point No. 1 :-

7. The National and the State Act relating to highways to has been enacted to provide for the declaration of certain highways to be national or state highways respectively and for matters connected therewith. The Act under which the lands in question have been acquired and especially is in the nature of a comprehensive code in itself for the purposes of acquisition of lands which includes determination of compensation, its disbursement, settlement of disputes and payment of compensation. The determination of the amount of compensation by the Competent Authority has been made subject to enhancement/reduction by having recourse to arbitration under the respective Highway Act.
8. Since the respective Highway Act makes the provisions of the Arbitration Act of 1996 applicable, remedy under Section 34 of the Act of 1996 is available to the party aggrieved by the award passed by the Arbitrator. It may be noted that Chapter VII of the Act of 1996 in which Section 34 finds place refers to recourse against an arbitral award. Section 34 far from being an appellate provision only provides for setting aside awards on very limited grounds.
9. In this proceeding the challenge to the arbitral award is principally based on the provisions of Section 34(2)(b)(ii) of the Arbitration Act

of 1996 namely that the arbitral award as passed is in conflict with the public policy of India. The main principle grounds for challenge are that the award is violation of the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013 (RFCTLARR Act, 2013). The grounds raised are

- a) Belting method has been used without any basis.
- b) Proper characteristics of property not considered
- c) Incorrect ready reckoner rates considered
- d) Sale instances of higher consideration are not considered.
- e) 12 % additional market value under Section 13(3) should be considered.
- f) Easement compensation not awarded.
- g) Severance Compensation is not given.
- h) Proper documents are not received.
- i) The award is non speaking award and the process is illegal.
- j) The judgments cited are not considered.

10. The claim is resisted by the acquiring body contending that the provisions contemplated by Law are duly followed. The Competent Authority has considered and followed all the conditions complying with the various directions and arrived at just and proper compensation. Belting method is appropriate method approved by the Courts. The Court cannot re-appreciate and re-consider the evidence. The market rate is properly appreciated. Proper and well defined reasoning has been given. Proper sale instances have considered. There is no violation of easementary rights and rehabilitation. Considering the said reasons, application be rejected.

11. In *Ssangyong Engineering and Construction Company Limited v*

National Highways Authority of India (NHAI), (2019) 15 SCC 131 it has been held that the provisions of Section 34 as amended by Act No.3 of 2016 would apply only to Section 34 applications that have been made to the Court on or after 23.10.2015 even if the arbitration proceedings may have commenced prior to that date. It is thus clear that the provisions of Section 34 after being amended by Act No.3 of 2016 would have to be considered while adjudicating the challenge to the awards passed by the Arbitrator.

12. Having considered this circumstances, it is necessary to consider scope of the said ground of violation of provisions of RFCTLARR Act. The RFCTLARR Act contemplates determination of market value and it can consider ready-reckoner, average sale price. This has contemplates under Section 6 of the said Act. It is further pointed out that it is necessary to point out that the Highway Act also contemplates that the Arbitrator is also to consider market value of the property. Thus, what one has to consider is if the Arbitrator has considered market value or not any in proper prospective applying proper principles or whether basis adopted is proper or not. I cannot reconsider factual facts but certainly the principles of grant of compensation would be under the term “Public policy”.

13. In ***Associate Builders vs Delhi Development Authority 2014 AIR SCW 6861*** it is held that “

“29. It is clear that the juristic principle of a “judicial approach” demands that a decision be fair, reasonable and objective. On the obverse side, anything arbitrary and whimsical would obviously not be a determination which would either be fair, reasonable or objective.”

31. The third juristic principle is that a decision which is perverse or so irrational that no reasonable person would have arrived at the same is important and requires some degree of explanation. It is settled law that where: (i) a finding is based on no evidence, or (ii) an Arbitral Tribunal takes into account something irrelevant to the decision which it arrives at; or (iii) ignores vital evidence in arriving at its decision, such decision would necessarily be perverse.”

“33. It must clearly be understood that when a Court is applying the “public policy” test to an arbitration award, it does not act as a Court of appeal and consequently errors of fact cannot be corrected. A possible view by the arbitrator on facts has necessarily to pass muster as the arbitrator is the ultimate master of the quantity and quality of evidence to be relied upon when he delivers his arbitral award. Thus an award based on little evidence or on evidence which does not measure up in quality to a trained legal mind would not be held to be invalid on this score.....Once it is found that the arbitrators approach is not arbitrary or capricious, then he is the last word on facts.

14. The arbitration herein was initiated under a statutory provision which provides for such arbitration in lieu of ‘reference’ under the regime for acquisition of land for public purpose. One of the parties to such arbitration proceedings would also be a land loser and the adjudication in the arbitration though appropriate Sections like 3G(7)(a) of the National Highways Act provides the parameters to be taken into consideration, it only provides the basic parameters to be taken note of, for determining the amount payable as compensation. While applying the said parameters for determination

of compensation, since RFCTLARR Act, 2013 is also applicable as Highways Act and the factors as provided under Section 26 and 28 RFCTLARR Act, 2013 including the seventh factor will also be applicable in appropriate cases for the determination of the market value as fair compensation for the acquired land. When land is acquired from a citizen, Articles 300A and 31A of the Constitution will have to be borne in mind since the deprivation of property should be with authority of law, after being duly compensated and by adequately compensating the land loser keeping in view the market value. Though each enactment may have a different procedure prescribed for the process of acquisition, the principles of determining the compensation cannot be different as the market value of the land and the hardship faced due to deprivation of the property would be the same irrespective of the Act under which it is acquired or the purpose for which it is acquired. In that background, the award passed by the Arbitrator is to be examined keeping in view the limited scope available under Section 34 of Act, 1996 to interfere with an award.

15. In this case, if the existence or genuineness or validity of any piece of evidence is not disputed by the other side, and the said factor definitely would have a bearing on the aspect of determination of the admissibility, relevance, materiality and weight of evidence produced. If any piece of evidence was disputed or doubted or any similar reason is put forth, the arbitral tribunal could require the party relying upon such piece of evidence to substantiate the same while determining the admissibility, relevance, materiality and weight of that piece of evidence. Same is not followed here. The sale

deeds or Valuers reports were not challenged by the Authority before the Concerned Arbitrator except bare denial. There were specific pleadings in the claim petitions of the land owners and copies of documents relied were also supplied to the other side.

16. Further, the Acquiring Authority did not counter the aforesaid material by placing on record before the Arbitrator some other material which according to it could be the basis for determination of the market value of the acquired land. Under the Highway Act the Arbitrator is duty bound to take into consideration the market value of the land acquired as on the date of publication of the notification . When therefore, a claimant places certain material on record before the Arbitrator which material according to the claimant ought to be taken into consideration for determining the market value of the acquired land and that material is neither countered nor specifically disputed by the other side, there would hardly be any scope for the Arbitrator for not relying upon the material before him.

Belting system

17. Firstly, the objection is relates to the belting system. At the outset, belting system adopted herein is not actual belting system but block belting system where fixed area of block is given a particular rate and thereafter, by a particular area , same gets reduced for each of the acquired plot separately. A belt with fixed area is created for each plot. A homogeneous continuous belt has not been created and same rate throughout the belt is not granted. Same has been challenged before the Ld. Arbitrator. The Ld. Arbitrator has not considered this challenge at all.
18. It is necessary to point out that the regular homogeneous belting

system is well settled mode of determining compensation to be payable. Suffice to say that said belting system should have basis to it with respect to the areas appurtenant to the land acquired. The market value of the front road abutting the main road is taken to fetch the maximum value whereas the second belt fetches lesser value and the third belt, if carved out, would command a value lower still.

19. Nothing has been pointed out by the Arbitrator as to why this block belting system is followed. It is necessary to point out that this belting system does not consider the proximity of the ownership of the land acquired to the State Highway but considered it as a block of piece of land. Thus, for larger block, half of the land should be entitled for higher rate and similarly situated half land will not be entitled for higher rate. It would be worse if we consider two plots of lands, adjacent to one another, one horizontal and one vertical. The vertical land further from the highway will get benefit which will not be available for the horizontal land adjacent to it.
20. The said belting system has also been considered adversely by the Hon'ble High Court in various judgments of *Radhika Bhalerao Vs state of Maharashtra W.P. 3683/2020 dated 24-3-2022*, *Janabai Rathod V/s State W.P. 12232/2106 dated 15-10-2018*, *Harishchnadra Birle Vs State W.P. 3423/2020 dated 19-3-2021* but the same is not considered on the pretext that it is subsequent to the Ascertainment of compensation by the Competent authority. In case of *Birle* the Hon'ble High Court of Bombay has held "The arbitrator will consider the land of the petitioner for the purpose of compensation keeping in mind the Circular dated 13/8/2018" while holding that the whole

chunk of land has to be considered and not the belting method.

21. In *Unibros Versus All India Radio reported in 2023 SCC OnLine SC 1366* it is held that “ It is elementary, though it has to be restated, that a judicial decision of a superior court, which is binding on an inferior court, has to be accepted with grace by the inferior court notwithstanding that the decision of the superior court may not be palatable to the inferior court. This principle, ex proprio vigore, would be applicable to an arbitrator and a multi-member arbitral tribunal as well, particularly when it is faced with a judicial decision (either under section 34 or section 37 of the Act) ordering a limited remand. In the wake of authority of judicial determination made by the Courts of law, any award of an arbitrator or a tribunal that seeks to overreach a binding judicial decision, in our opinion, does conflict with the fundamental public policy and cannot, therefore, sustain.”
22. There should be some basis stated for the said peculiar belting system to be accepted . In absence of such reasons by the Arbitrator, basic assessment of consideration of this peculiar block belting system is not acceptable on the face of it.
23. The aspect of validity of the belting system and its reasonableness to the present acquisition has not been considered. The belting system implies the land closure to key infrastructural assets like highway have greater market potentials and warrant higher greater as compensation to those situated further away. The belting method applied is large scale acquisition where the land is homogeneous and the benefit of proximity to measure infrastructure can be clearly eliminated. The belting system in this case is not shown to be qualifying in all this characteristics.

24. This goes to the root of the assessment of the compensation of the property. This also implies discrimination as pointed out some situated plots of lands of facing highway. No reasons are given for considering such peculiar block belting system to be a proper system either by the Acquiring body or the Arbitrator.

Valuation

25. The Ld. Arbitrator has considered sole consideration that Competent Authority for Land Acquisition (CALA) has assessed it at a particular rate and same is correct. The ready-reckoner rates are not considered for similar lands use. Thus, there are principle violation with regard to the assessment and analysis.

26. The International Valuation Standards Council states that the market value of the land represents the estimated amount that a willing buyer would pay prudently to a willing seller in an arm's length transaction, without compulsion, on a particular valuation date. This estimate includes characteristics unique to the land that would inflate or deflate its price but excludes special concessions or considerations granted by anyone associated with the sale. The buyer here refers to one who is motivated but is neither over- eager nor determined to buy irrespective of the price quoted. Similarly, the seller here is neither over-eager nor forced. Both parties are assumed to be conducting the transaction in keeping with market realities, rather than terms that are hypothetical or cannot be anticipated to exist.

27. The value of the land is determined by the vendor and the purchaser as in prevalent circumstance. That is market value. Certain lands may have some drawback or impediments like easementary

rights, title rates, etc., but that may depreciate the market value, while other lands may have addition features like plain land, quality, ease of access, nearness of urban area ,roads etc. But certainly, one cannot make it a incorrect valuation or non reliable valuation of the property. For it to be discarded in case of acquisition it should be shown to be malafide or inflated or some other cause to show it more. The people who purchased the property in the sale instance referred to have not shown to be done so. Thus it has to be considered as a proper sale instances for consideration and cannot be discarded perse.

Other statutory benefits not considered

28. The Authority has for its own convenience referred to the surveys (although not part of record) but failed to see the JMR even when the same was to be relied upon by the applicants and held that no map is filed for the other benefits.
29. Statutory Compensation of Section 33 of RFCTLARR Act is also not considered or discussed with which are mandatory.
30. In such circumstances, on perusal of the said award , it consider the primary Applicability of NA incorrectly , in appropriateness of belting system for assessing market value of the assets and the land acquired. Secondly, there are no probable reasons except findings of rate of CALA being correct. The ready-reckoner is not accepted for similar category. All these circumstances goes to the route of the entire award and purport of scope of reference to the Arbitrator.

Non speaking order

31. One of the basic aspects of this case is the lack of transparency. A blanket reliance on CALA is made without any record being

available. The reliance on the valuation by the said Authority is accepted as Gospel truth without evaluating the same independently. It was necessary for the Arbitrator to see and verify that the valuation framework used by CALA prescribe distinct methods for valuing land, plots, houses, and buildings, accounting for variable factors and for agricultural land, such variables would include the nature of the soil, location, nature of the crop, the yield for specified years, proximity to roads, markets, etc.....Circle rates computed through a detailed and scientific exercise would be a relevant piece of evidence for determining the market value, being equivalent to expert evidence.

32. Considering scope of Section 34, the concept of just compensation for the acquired land is to be kept in view while taking note of the award. Considering sufficiency of the reasons given in the award for the ultimate conclusion. The challenge to the LAO's violation was based on certain principle and legal issues. The Ld. Arbitrator has not accepted these contentions which I believe are violative of assessment of just and fair compensation to be provided.

33. I have refrained myself from fact findings of the case in this regard.

Considering that principally, the causes

- a) improper non consideration of features of land,
- b) use to block belting system,
- c) non consideration of special features of the property,
- d) non consideration of statutory benefit like Section 33, severance charges, etc.,
- e) non consideration of proper ready-reckoner rates of proper category make the award against public policy which is one of the

ground for setting aside the award under Section 34. Hence, I pass the following order.

ORDER

1)	The application is allowed.
2)	The award bearing No. LA/NH-161/Chivara /Malegaon/49/2018-19 dated 27/06/2022 in case of the applicant is hereby set aside.
3)	No order as to costs.
4)	The record and proceedings be forwarded back to the concerned authority after suffixing copy of the same on record.
5)	Civil M. A. No. 07/2023 stands disposed off.

Date:- 07/01/2026.

(Anil Subramaniam)
Principal District Judge,
Washim.

CERTIFICATE

I affirm that the contents of this PDF file word to word are same as per original judgment/order.

Name of Stenographer	:	A. W. Ajmire, Steno (G-II)
Court Name	:	Principal District & Sessions Judge, Washim.
Date of order/Judgment	:	07/01/2026
Transcribed and typed on	:	07/01/2026
Order/Judgment signed by	:	
Presiding Officer on	:	15/01/2026
Order/Judgment uploaded on	:	16/01/2026