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* **IN THE HIGH COURT OF DELHI AT NEW DELHI**

+ **Date of Decision: 28.04.2026**

% **LPA 321/2026 & CM APPLs. 28168-70/2026**

ALL INDIA FOOTBALL FEDERATIONAppellant

Through: Mr.Tanmaya Mehta with Ms.Aashita Khanna, Mr.Neil M Goswami, Mr.Vidushpat Singhania, Mr.Ritwik Prakash, Ms.Aanya Agarwal, Advs.

versus

CHURCHILL BROTHERS SPORTS CLUB PVT. LTD. & ANR.

.....Respondents

Through: Mr.Ravi Prakash, Sr.Adv. with Ms.Niharika Tiwari and Mr.Ranjeet Pawar, Advs. for R-1.

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% **LPA 322/2026 & CM APPLs. 28175-77/2026**

ALL INDIA FOOTBALL FEDERATIONAppellant

Through: Mr.Tanmaya Mehta with Ms.Aashita Khanna, Mr.Neil M Goswami, Mr.Vidushpat Singhania, Mr.Ritwik Prakash, Ms.Aanya Agarwal, Advs.

versus

CHURCHILL BROTHERS SPORTS CLUB PVT. LTD. & ORS.

.....Respondents

Through: Mr.Ravi Prakash, Sr.Adv. with Ms.Niharika Tiwari and Mr.Ranjeet Pawar, Advs. for R-1.



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CORAM:
HON'BLE THE CHIEF JUSTICE
HON'BLE MR. JUSTICE TEJAS KARIA

DEVENDRA KUMAR UPADHYAYA, CJ. (ORAL)

1. Heard the learned counsel for the appellant, Sh. Tanmaya Mehta and Sh. Ravi Prakash, learned senior counsel representing the respondent no.1 and perused the record available before us on these appeals.
2. Since both the appeals arise out of the same judgment and order dated 01.04.2026 passed by learned Single Judge in *W.P.(C) 3981/2026* and *W.P.(C) 4064/2026*, both have been heard together and are being decided by the common judgment which follows:
3. Before advertng to the respective submissions made by learned counsel representing the parties, we may note certain facts which are essential for proper adjudication of the controversy involved in these appeals.
4. The respondent no.1 instituted *W.P.(C) 3981/2026* with the prayer to set aside the proceedings in respect of representation dated 14.03.2026 and to constitute an independent, neutral and impartial committee, preferably under the supervision of a retired Judge of the High Court, to examine and adjudicate the representation dated 14.03.2026 preferred by the respondent no.1. Another prayer made in the writ petition was that a direction be issued to the respondent no.2 in the Writ Petition that he shall not, directly or



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indirectly, participate in or influence any proceedings, decisions or processes relating to the representation preferred by the respondent no.1 or any subject matter connected with the same.

5. *W.P.(C) 4064/2026* was instituted by the respondent no.1 with the prayer for setting aside the proceedings in respect of the representation dated 16.01.2026 with a further prayer to constitute an independent, neutral and impartial committee, preferably under the supervision of retired Judge of a High Court, to adjudicate the representation dated 16.01.2026 preferred by the respondent no.1 and counter complaint filed by Inter Kashi FC.

6. Prior to instituting the aforesaid two writ petitions, the respondent no.1 had filed a *W.P.(C) 14408/2025*, which was disposed of by learned Single Judge *vide* order dated 08.01.2026, whereby it was provided that the respondent no.1 shall submit their comprehensive representations enclosing all the documents, including earlier complaints, and on receipt of such representations, the appellant will deal with the same after affording opportunity of hearing to the parties. The Court also directed the respondent no.1 to pass a speaking order dealing with the grievances raised by the parties. The learned Single Judge in his order dated 08.01.2026 further observed that it will be open to the appellant to determine as to how the complaints/representations will be decided.

7. It appears that in compliance of the order dated 08.01.2026 passed by learned Single Judge in *W.P.(C) 14408/2025*, the complaints/representations were not decided by the appellant, which led to filing of *CONT.CAS.(C) 357/2026*. In the said contempt case, notices were ordered to be issued,



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whereupon the Ethics and Dispute Resolution Committee (Ethics Committee) was constituted by the appellant. The respondent no.1 appears to have raised certain grievances against some of the members of the Ethics Committee on account of alleged conflict of interest and therefore, it was submitted by respondent no.1 before the learned Single Judge that such members should not continue to be the part of the Ethics Committee which was directed to decide the complaints/representations. It was also urged by the respondent no.1 before the learned Single Judge that unless an independent grievance redressal mechanism is in place to decide the representations, appropriate decision may not be taken into the complaints/representations preferred by the respondent no.1.

8. The Ethics Committee was, however, reconstituted and in place of one Mr. Ranjit Kumar Pachnanda, against whom the allegations were made by the respondent no.1 pertaining to conflict of interest, Mr. Justice (Retd.) Shekhar Dhawan, a former Judge of Punjab and Haryana High Court, was inducted into the Ethics Committee as its Chairperson along with Mr. Ayush Jain, a practicing Advocate of this Court. Despite the aforesaid changes in the constitution of the committee, the learned Single Judge by the impugned order, appointed Ms. Justice (Retd.) Rekha Palli, a former Judge of this Court as Chairperson of the Ethics Committee. Learned Single Judge further provided in the impugned order that other members of the Ethics Committee shall be (i) Mr. Akshay Makhija, Senior Advocate and (ii) Mr. Ashok Tripathi, a retired Principal District & Sessions Judge. In addition to these members, the Court directed that two additional members shall be inducted in consultation with these three members i.e. (i) Ms. Justice (Retd.)



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Rekha Palli, (ii) Mr. Akshay Makhija and (iii) Mr. Ashok Tripathi. Thus, as a result of what has been provided by learned Single Judge in the impugned order, the constitution of the Ethics Committee has been altered and in place of the members who constituted the Ethics Committee in terms of the Constitution of the appellant, some other members have been substituted in terms of the directions issued *vide* impugned order.

9. It is this order dated 01.04.2026 passed by learned Single Judge, which is under challenge in these two appeals.

10. The appellant is the sole recognized National Sports Federation [NSF] for the sport of football in the country duly recognized by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, Government of India. It is affiliated to Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), which is the apex level international body governing the sport of football at global level. The appellant is also affiliated to the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) and is also an affiliate of Indian Olympic Association (IOA).

11. The appellant is a society registered under the Societies Registration Act, 1860, affairs of which are governed by the Memorandum of Association, its Bye-laws, Rules, Regulations and Constitution.

12. Article 45 of the Constitution of the appellant prescribes for Judicial bodies. Article 45.1 prescribes 7 Judicial bodies of the appellant including the Ethics Committee and Appeal Committee.

13. As per the provision of Clause 45.10 of the Constitution of the appellant, the Chairperson, the Deputy Chairperson and other members of



the Judicial bodies have a term of four years and it is the general body which is vested with the power to appoint and remove the members of the Judicial bodies. It further provides that appointment shall be by a simple majority of members present and voting, whereas the removal shall be by the 2/3rd majority of the members present and voting.

14. Clause 45.12 prescribes that in case of resignation by Chairperson or Deputy Chairperson or a member of a Judicial body or in case such persons become incapacitated permanently in respect of performing their functions during the term of their office, the Executive Committee shall appoint a replacement to serve the remainder of the term of office of such Chairperson or Deputy Chairperson or member, which is subject to ratification by the general body in the Annual General Meeting (AGM) / Special General Meeting (SGM).

15. The general body of the appellant considered the agenda concerning constitution of the Judicial bodies including the constitution of the Ethics Committee and the Appeal Committee in its meeting held on 20.12.2025 and approved constitution of such judicial bodies. As per the said decision of the general body, following is the constitution of the Ethics Committee:

<i>ETHICS AND DISPUTE RESOLUTION COMMITTEE</i>			
1	<i>Ranjit Kumar Pachnanda, IPS (Retd)</i>	<i>Ex DGP</i>	<i>Chairperson</i>
2	<i>Judge Ashok Tripathi (Retd)</i>	<i>Ex District Court Judge</i>	<i>Deputy Chairperson</i>
3	<i>Sudharshan Aggarwal</i>	<i>Practicing Advocate</i>	<i>Member</i>
4	<i>Adv. Diwakar Thite</i>	<i>Delhi High Court</i>	<i>Member</i>
5	<i>Adv. Vanshika Lamba</i>	<i>Practicing Advocate</i>	<i>Member</i>

16. It appears that considering the objections raised by the respondent no.1 in respect of Mr.Ranjit Kumar Pachnanda, who was appointed as the



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Chairperson of the Ethics Committee, the appellant replaced Mr. Pachnanda by Mr. Justice (Retd.) Shekhar Dhawan, a former Judge of Punjab and Haryana High Court. Mr. Sudharshan Aggarwal, Advocate has recused himself from being a member of the Ethics Committee, whereas Mr. Diwakar Thite, Advocate did not give his consent to be the member of the Ethics Committee and accordingly, in his place, Mr. Ayush Jain, Advocate has been inducted.

17. After the aforesaid changes in the constitution of the Ethics Committee made by the appellant, the constitution of the Ethics Committee at present is as follows:

PRESENT ETHICS AND DISPUTE RESOLUTION COMMITTEE CONSTITUTED FOR DISPOSAL OF COMPLAINT OF RESPONDENT NO. 1			
1	Justice Shekhar Dhawan (Retd)	<i>Punjab & Haryana High Court</i>	<i>Chairperson</i>
2	Judge Ashok Tripathi (Retd)	<i>Ex District Court Judge</i>	<i>Deputy Chairperson</i>
3	Adv. Ayush Jain	<i>Delhi High Court</i>	<i>Member</i>
4	Adv. Vanshika Lamba	<i>Practicing Advocate</i>	<i>Member</i>

Thus, at present the Ethics Committee of the appellant comprises of four persons, which include a Chairperson, a Deputy Chairperson and two members.

18. Article 41 of the Constitution of the appellant provides for quorum of the general body [AGM or SGM meeting or meeting of any Judicial body], according to which, the quorum shall be a majority i.e. 50% of the total number of members entitled to vote.

19. The learned Single Judge, however, by the impugned judgment and order dated 01.04.2026 has substituted Mr. Justice (Retd.) Shekhar Dhawan,



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the Chairperson of the Ethics Committee, by Ms. Justice (Retd.) Rekha Palli, a former Judge of this Court. As per the impugned order, Sh. Ashok Tripathi, a former Principal District & Sessions Judge has been retained as Deputy Chairperson of the Ethics Committee. Mr. Akshay Makhija, Senior Advocate, who was not part of the initial Ethics Committee as constituted by the appellant, has also been ordered to be inducted as a member. Rest of the two additional members have been ordered by the impugned judgment passed by the learned Single Judge to be inducted as members of the Ethics Committee in consultation with all the three members.

20. Having noted the facts in the brief as above, we now proceed to note the submissions made by the learned counsel for the respective parties.

21. Impeaching the impugned judgment dated 01.04.2026 passed by learned Single Judge, Mr. Tanmaya Mehta, learned counsel representing the appellant, has submitted that the primary grievance of the respondent no.1 was against Mr. Ranjit Kumar Pachnanda, who has been replaced by a retired Judge of Punjab and Haryana High Court, Mr. Justice (Retd.) Shekhar Dhawan and therefore, there was no occasion for the learned Single Judge to have reconstituted the Ethics Committee.

22. He has also stated that the appellant is an autonomous society, affairs of which are necessarily governed by its own Constitution and Rules and Regulations and unless and until the respondent no.1 is able to establish any cogent and strong reason as to the constitution of the Ethics Committee constituted by the appellant, it was legally not permissible for the learned Single Judge to have inducted members of the choice of the Court.



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23. Mr. Mehta has also argued that the learned Single Judge has erred in law by taking up the functions of the appellant which otherwise the appellant is entitled to discharge in terms of its Constitution and such interjection by the Court amounts to eroding the autonomy of the appellant, which functions in accordance with its Constitution and Rules and Regulations.

24. It has also been contended that even on facts no such cogent reason can be deciphered from the available records that would impel the learned Single Judge to substitute the members of the Ethics Committee by the members suggested by the Court in place of the members which form the Ethics Committee, which was constituted duly in terms of the Constitution of the appellant by the appellant itself.

25. Our attention has also been drawn to certain observations made by learned Single Judge in paragraph 13 of the impugned judgment dated 01.04.2026, wherein learned Single Judge has clearly observed that, *“It would also not mean that the Court has assumed any malice or mala fide on the part of the respondents (appellant herein). This arrangement is made without prejudice to the rights and contentions made by the parties”*. Learned counsel submits that once a finding of absence of malice or *mala fide* was recorded by learned Single Judge, altering the constitution of the Ethics Committee, as constituted by the appellant, was legally unwarranted.

26. He further states that in case the arrangement made by learned Single Judge *vide* impugned judgment is allowed, that will not only erode the autonomy of the appellant, which is a society registered under the Societies



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Registration Act, but will also be against the Constitution of the appellant society.

27. On the aforesaid courts, it has been urged by learned counsel for the appellant that the impugned judgment and order dated 01.04.2026 passed by learned Single Judge, which is under challenge herein, be set aside and the Ethics Committee constituted by the appellant be permitted to proceed with consideration and decision on the representation preferred by the respondent no.1.

28. Opposing the appeal and defending the impugned judgment and order dated 01.04.2026, learned senior counsel for respondent no.1, however, has submitted that by constitution of the Ethics Committee in terms of the order passed by learned Single Judge no prejudice is going to be caused to the appellant and as such, no interference in the impugned order passed by learned Single Judge is called for.

29. Drawing our attention to the representations/complaints made by the respondent no.1, it has been argued by learned senior counsel for the respondent no.1 that in fact the allegations against the President of the appellant – federation regarding the manner in which he has been conducting himself *vis-à-vis* the affairs of respondent no.1, learned Single Judge has rightly ordered for reconstitution of the Ethics Committee. He has also submitted that so far as the constitution of the Ethics Committee by the appellant is concerned, the President in his capacity has been instrumental in inducting the Chairperson, Deputy Chairperson and other members and therefore, it is most likely that he may exercise his influence on the Ethics



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Committee constituted by the appellant in case the representations/complaints made by it are decided by the Ethics Committee constituted by the appellant. Therefore, the submission is that since no prejudice is going to be caused to the appellant in case the representations/complaints made by the respondent no.1 are permitted to be decided by the Ethics Committee to be constituted in terms of the impugned judgment and order dated 01.04.2026 passed by learned Single Judge, the appeal ought not be entertained and, thus, is liable to be dismissed at its threshold.

30. We have carefully considered the submissions of the learned counsel appearing for the parties.

31. Learned Single Judge *vide* impugned judgment and order dated 01.04.2026 has directed for reconstitution of the Ethics Committee by inducting the Chairperson and certain other members in place of the Chairperson and members of the Ethics Committee that was constituted by the appellant as per its Constitution.

32. The appellant, as observed above, is a society registered under the Societies Registration Act, 1860. It is affiliated with the international bodies, such as FIFA and AFC. It is also an affiliate of the IOA and is also recognized as a NSF by the Government of India in the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports as per the requirement of the National Sports Development Code of India, 2011 or the National Sports Governance Act, 2025, as the case may be.



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33. The appellant is autonomous in itself, affairs of which are to be governed by its own Constitution, Memorandum of Association, Bye-laws or Rules and Regulations, etc.

34. Right to form an association is a fundamental right enshrined in Article 19(1) (c) of the Constitution of India. It is only for registration and other ancillary purposes of a society that Societies Registration Act, 1860 has been enacted.

35. As per Section 3 of the Societies Registration Act, 1860, any seven or more persons can form a society for any literary, scientific, or charitable purpose, or for any such purpose described in Section 20 of the Act, simply by subscribing their names to a Memorandum of Association and filing the same with the Registrar of the Societies.

36. Under the Scheme of the Societies Registration Act, 1860, any such society can get itself registered in the manner prescribed for the said purpose under Section 3, with the Registrar of Societies. However, the Act, except for providing certain statutory requirements such as furnishing the annual list of managing body with the Registrar of Societies, does not contain any such provision which, in any manner, may permit the Registrar or any other authority of the State to interfere with the functions of a society or with the manner in which a registered society performs its function. The purpose of enacting the Societies Registration Act, 1860 was to make a provision for improving the legal conditions of the societies as envisaged by the preamble of the Act.



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37. So far as the functioning of a registered society is concerned, the Societies Registration Act, 1860 does not envisage any role of the Registrar or any other government official, in fact, under the Act, not even any supervisory role has been assigned to the Registrar or any other government authority as to the functions discharged by the society concerned.

38. A society registered under the Societies Registration Act, 1860, thus, functions in accordance with its own Constitution, Bye-laws, Rules or Regulations or Memorandum and Articles of Association. It is in this sense, that a society registered under the Societies Registration Act, 1860 enjoys full autonomy so far as its affairs are concerned. As a matter of fact, the only provision which we found in the Societies Registration Act, 1860 where the functions of the societies are somewhat fettered is Section 13 of the Act, which prescribes a provision for dissolution of societies and adjustment of their affairs. According to Section 13, in case of dissolution of a society, necessary steps shall be taken for disposal and settlement of the property of the society and also of the claims and liabilities according to the rules of the society concerned and adjustment, after dissolution, of its affairs is required to be referred to the Principal Court of original Civil jurisdiction of the District in which the society is situated and on such reference the Court shall make such order in the manner as it shall deem requisite.

39. Formation of a society is a voluntary act and such act to form an association is protected by Article 19(1)(c) of the Constitution of India, which is a fundamental right. In our opinion, the rules and regulations, as may be framed by a society, form a contract amongst the members of the



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society who form it, which are required to be registered under the Societies Registration Act, 1860. However, merely because of the requirement of registration, such rules do not acquire any statutory character.

40. Having regard to the fundamental right available to every citizen under Article 19(1)(c) of the Constitution of India as also the entire scheme of the Societies Registration Act, 1860, what we conclude is that a registered society is completely an autonomous body or association of persons, affairs of which are to be necessarily governed by the Memorandum and Articles of Association or Bye-laws or Rules and Regulations framed by the society itself for the reason that the Memorandum/Articles of Association or the Bye-laws or the Rules and Regulations framed or adopted by the members of the society form a contract amongst its members to govern the affairs of the society. In this view, in our considered opinion, any unwarranted or uncalled for interference into the manner of governing the affairs of the society will be legally impermissible, unless some law, statutory or otherwise, permits such interference.

41. For the said reasons, in our opinion, it will be legally impermissible for a Court, while exercising writ jurisdiction under Article 226 of the Constitution of India, to assume any function of a society, which is otherwise required to be performed by the society itself under its own Constitution or Bye-laws or Rules and Regulations or Memorandum/Articles of Association.

42. Having observed as above, we, however, do not mean that even if cogent reasons exist and the situation so calls for, while exercising the



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plenary jurisdiction under Article 226 of the Constitution of India, a direction in the nature of the direction issued by learned Single Judge *vide* impugned judgment and order dated 01.04.2026 is impermissible to be issued. However, for making such a direction, there should exist very strong and cogent reasons.

43. If we examine and consider the impugned judgment and order dated 01.04.2026 passed by learned Single Judge on the anvil of the aforesaid legal principles as mentioned by us in the foregoing paragraphs, what we find is that the objection by the respondent no.1 was only against the Chairperson of the Ethics Committee constituted by the appellant, namely Mr.Ranjit Kumar Pachnanda. The Chairperson of the Ethics Committee, Mr.Ranjit Kumar Pachnanda has already been replaced by none other than a retired Judge of Punjab and Haryana High Court, Mr. Justice (Retd.) Shekhar Dhawan. Accordingly, whatever apprehension existed in the mind of the respondent no.1, stood allayed once Mr.Pachnanda was replaced by Mr. Justice (Retd.) Shekhar Dhawan, as Chairperson of the Ethics Committee.

44. We may further opine that a remedy of appeal against the orders passed by the Ethics Committee is available before the Appeal Committee formed in terms of Article 47 of the Constitution of the appellant, which at present is headed by a retired Judge of Hon'ble Supreme Court as its Chairperson. The Appeal Committee also comprises of a retired Judge of Punjab and Haryana High Court as its Deputy Chairperson and three



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members, who are practicing advocates in Gujarat High Court and Delhi High Court. The constitution of the present Appeal Committee is as follows:

APPEAL COMMITTEE			
1	<i>Justice Hemant Gupta (Retd)</i>	<i>Supreme Court</i>	<i>Chairperson</i>
2	<i>Justice K.S. Ahluwalia (Retd)</i>	<i>Punjab & Haryana High Court</i>	<i>Deputy Chairperson</i>
3	<i>Adv. Anil Kshatriya</i>	<i>Ahmedabad High Court</i>	<i>Member</i>
4	<i>Adv. Mahesh Thakur</i>	<i>Delhi High Court</i>	<i>Member</i>
5	<i>Adv. Dilip Niranjana</i>	<i>Delhi High Court</i>	<i>Member</i>

45. Furthermore, we may also point out that learned Single Judge, in the impugned judgment and order dated 01.04.2026, has noticed that the arrangement being made therein would not mean that the Court had assumed any malice or *mala fide* on the part of the respondents. In absence of any such finding regarding malice or *mala fide* or even regarding apprehension of any bias against the members of the Ethics Committee constituted by the appellant, in our opinion, learned Single Judge ought not to have substituted the Chairperson and members suggested by him *vide* impugned order.

46. So far as the submission of learned senior counsel for the respondent no.1 about the allegations relating to the manner in which the President of the appellant has been conducting himself *vis-à-vis* the affairs of the respondent no.1, we may only observe that the constitution of the Ethics Committee, which is headed by a retired Judge of a High Court, does not leave any room of doubt that the Ethics Committee will be able to discharge its function without being influenced by the President of the appellant – federation.

47. Further, in our opinion, the Appeal Committee, as already observed above, is chaired by a retired Judge of Hon'ble Supreme Court and



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therefore, apprehension in the mind of the respondent no.1 appear to be unfounded and without any basis.

48. Lastly, it was also contended on behalf of the respondent no.1 that reconstitution of the Ethics Committee made by the appellant is in violation of the Constitution of the appellant itself and therefore, subjecting the representations made by it to be decided by such a committee, will not be appropriate. In this regard, we may observe that before learned Single Judge, there was no challenge by the respondent no.1 as to the reconstitution of the Ethics Committee made by the appellant. Thus, this submission made by the respondent no.1 also does not appeal to us, which merits rejection.

49. For all the aforesaid reasons, we find that no cogent and compelling reasons existed which would have impelled, in our opinion, the learned Single Judge to substitute the members of the Ethics Committee constituted by the appellant – federation by the persons suggested by the learned Single Judge while passing the impugned judgment and order dated 01.04.2026.

50. In view of the discussions made and reasons given above, we find ourselves unable to agree with the impugned judgment and order passed by learned Single Judge and accordingly, the appeals are allowed and the impugned judgment and order dated 01.04.2026 passed by learned Single Judge in *W.P.(C) 3981/2026* and *W.P.(C) 4064/2026*, is set aside.

51. We, thus, direct that the representations/complaints of the respondent no.1 shall be considered and decided by the Ethics Committee reconstituted by the appellant – federation, in accordance with law and the extant rules, of course, after affording adequate opportunity to respondent no. 1 of



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presenting its case and also providing an opportunity of hearing to it, with expedition, say, within a period of eight weeks from today.

52. The appeals and the pending applications stand disposed of.

53. There shall be no order as to costs.

DEVENDRA KUMAR UPADHYAYA, CJ

TEJAS KARIA, J

APRIL 28, 2026

“shailndra”