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IN THE HIGH COURT OF JUDICATURE AT BOMBAY
CIVIL APPELLATE JURISDICTION

ARBITRATION PETITION NO. 180 OF 2025

Mahesh Kantilal Bhandari

...Petitioner

Versus

Pahilajrai Isserdas Rupani and Ors.

...Respondents

Mr. Hrishikesh S. Shinde *i/b Rishabh Gandhi and Associates for the Petitioner.*

Mr. Prashant Berri *for Respondent Nos. 1 to 13.*

CORAM : SOMASEKHAR SUNDARESAN, J.

DATE : JULY 1, 2025

ORDER :

1. This Petition has been filed under Section 11 of the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996 (***“the Act”***) seeking appointment of an arbitrator in connection with disputes and differences that are said to have arisen between the parties under a Shareholders Agreement dated July 17, 2010 (***“Agreement”***). The arbitration agreement is contained in Clause 12 of the Agreement (found at Page No. 78 of the Petition). In the interest of brevity, the arbitration agreement is not being extracted here. Suffice it to say that this matter falls within the jurisdiction of this Court.

2. Learned Counsel for the Respondents has no objection to proceed to arbitration forthwith. The Learned Counsel for the parties jointly submit that they have instructions to confirm that the seat of arbitration may be recorded as Pune instead of Solapur as mentioned in the arbitration agreement, since this would be convenient for the parties and

will enable appointment of an Arbitral Tribunal in the matter. The venue of the arbitration is therefore confirmed, by consent, as being Pune.

3. The scope of review under Section 11 is explicitly set out in Section 11(6A) of the Act. It is now trite law, with particular regard to the Supreme Court's decision rendered by a seven-judge Bench in the *Interplay Judgement*¹ followed by multiple others, including *SBI General*² and *Patel*³ that the Section 11 Court ought not to venture beyond examining the existence of a validly existing arbitration agreement that has been formally executed. Even questions of existential substance is a matter that falls squarely in the domain of the arbitral tribunal, in view of Section 16 of the Act.

4. Being satisfied that an arbitration agreement is validly in existence, and that arbitration has been duly invoked, it is in the fitness of things to refer the disputes and differences between the parties in connection with the aforesaid Agreement to arbitration by a Sole Arbitrator.

5. In these circumstances, taking on board consent of the parties and specific request to record the seat of arbitration as Pune, this Petition is ***finally disposed of*** in the following terms:-

A] Mr. Dormaan Dalal, a learned advocate of this Court is hereby appointed as the Sole Arbitrator to adjudicate upon the disputes and differences between the parties arising out of and

¹ In Re: Interplay Between Arbitration Agreements under the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996 and Stamp Act, 1899 - (2024) 6 SCC 1

² SBI General Insurance Co. Ltd. Vs. Krish Spinning - 2024 SCC OnLine SC 1754

³ Ajay Madhusudan Patel Vs. Jyotrindra S. Patel - 2024 SCC OnLine SC 2597

in connection with the Agreement referred to above;

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B] A copy of this Order will be communicated to the Learned Sole Arbitrator by the Advocate for the Petitioner within a period of one week from the date on which this order is uploaded on the website of this Court. The Petitioner shall provide the contact and communication particulars of the parties to the Arbitral Tribunal along with a copy of this Order;

C] The Learned Sole Arbitrator is requested to forward the statutory Statement of Disclosure under Section 11(8) read with Section 12(1) of the Act to the Advocate for the Petitioner so as to enable them to file the same in the Registry of this Court. The Registry of this Court shall retain the said Statement on the file of this Petition and a copy of the same shall be furnished by the Advocate for the Petitioner to the Respondents;

D] The parties shall appear before the Learned Sole Arbitrator on such date and at such place as indicated, to obtain appropriate directions with regard to conduct of the arbitration including fixing a schedule for pleadings, examination of witnesses, if any, schedule of hearings etc. At such meeting, the parties shall provide a valid and functional email address along with mobile and landline numbers of the respective Advocates of the parties to the Arbitral Tribunal. Communications to such email addresses shall constitute valid service of correspondence in connection with the arbitration;

E] All arbitral costs and fees of the Arbitral Tribunal shall be borne by the parties equally in the first instance, and shall

be subject to any final Award that may be passed by the Tribunal in relation to costs.

6. Needless to say, nothing contained in this order is an expression of an opinion on merits of the matter or the relative strength of the parties. All issues on merits are expressly kept open to be agitated before the arbitral tribunal appointed hereby.

7. All actions required to be taken pursuant to this order shall be taken upon receipt of a downloaded copy as available on this Court's website.

[SOMASEKHAR SUNDARESAN, J.]