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IN THE HIGH COURT OF JUDICATURE AT BOMBAY
ORDINARY ORIGINAL CIVIL JURISDICTION

ARBITRATION APPLICATION NO. 23 OF 2024

State Bank of India

...Application

Versus

Central Railway

...Respondent

Mr. Ashok Kumar Mishra a/w *Mr. Pratik Kadav i/b Mr. A.K. Mishra & Associates for the Applicant.*

Mr. Ashok R. Varma *for the Respondent.*

CORAM : SOMASEKHAR SUNDARESAN, J.

DATE : APRIL 1, 2025

PC :

1. This is an Application under Section 11 of the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1999 (*"the Act"*).
2. The Respondent has tendered an affidavit in reply dated March 27, 2024, where it specifically asserts that the Court may appoint an arbitrator but from the panel of retired Railway Officers. The law on unilateral appointment of an arbitral tribunal is now clearly declared by the Supreme Court and that too in proceedings involving the Indian Railways.
3. Besides, 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 decisions of a seven-judge Bench in the *Interplay Judgement*¹

¹ In Re: Interplay Between Arbitration Agreements Under Arbitration and Conciliation

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, since the Applicant objects to any name from the panel maintained by the Railways, taking into account the scale of the dispute it would be appropriate to allow this Application disposing it of finally in the following terms:-

A] Mr. Vishal Phal, 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 in connection with the Agreement referred to above;

Office Address: 102, Gundecha Chambers,
Nagindas Master Road, Fort,
Mumbai – 400 001.

Email: vishalphal@yahoo.com

B] A copy of this Order will be communicated to the Learned Sole Arbitrator by the Advocates for the Applicant within a period of one week from the date on which this order is uploaded on the website of this Court. The Applicant shall

Act, 1996 & Stamp Act, 1899 – (2024) 6 SCC 1

² SBI General Insurance Co. Ltd. v. Krish Spinning – 2024 SCC OnLine SC 1754

³ Ajay Madhusudan Patel v. Jyotindra S. Patel – 2024 SCC OnLine SC 2597

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 Advocates for the Applicant 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 Application and a copy of the same shall be furnished by the Advocates for the Applicant to the Respondent;

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.]