



IN THE HIGH COURT OF JUDICATURE AT BOMBAY
BENCH AT AURANGABAD

WRIT PETITION NO. 7134 OF 2024

1. Dattaprasad Dnyaneshwar Patil,
Age-30 years, Occ. Agricultural,
2. Megha Dnyaneshwar Patil,
Age-37 years, Occ. Agricultural,
3. Bhaghyashri Dnyaneshwar Patil,
Age. 37 years, Occ. Agricultural,

... PETITIONERS

All R/o. Mehergaon,
Tq. Dist. Dhule

VERSUS

1. The State of Maharashtra,
Through District Collector,
Dhule, Collector office,
Dhule.
2. The Deputy Collector
Land Acquisition (General), Dhule
Dist. Dhule.

... RESPONDENTS

WITH
WRIT PETITION NO. 7120 of 2024

1. Vidyabai Bhaskar Bhamre,
Age-58 days, Occu. Agricultural,
2. Lokesh Bhaskar Bhamre,
Age-38 years, Occu. Agricultural,
3. Bhanupriya Vikas Patil,
Age-42 years, Occu. Agricultural,
4. Purnabai Dnyaneshwar Sisode,
Age-48 years, Occu. Agricultural,

... PETITIONERS

All R/o. Mehergaon,
Tq. and Dist. Dhule.

VERSUS

1. The State of Maharashtra,
Through District Collector,
Dhule, Collector office,
Dhule.
2. The Deputy Collector
Land Acquisition (General), Dhule
Dist. Dhule.

... RESPONDENTS

WITH**WRIT PETITION NO. 7130 OF 2024**

1. Shivaji S/o. Natthu Patil,
Age-76 days, Occu. Agricultural,
2. Bhagwan S/o. Gorakh Patil,
Age-67 years, Occu. Agricultural,
3. Sindhubai W/o. Rangrao Patil,
Age-71 years, Occu. Agricultural,

... PETITIONERS

All R/o. Mehergaon,
Tq. and Dist. Dhule.

VERSUS

1. The State of Maharashtra,
Through District Collector,
Dhule, Collector office,
Dhule.
2. The Deputy Collector
Land Acquisition (General), Dhule
Dist. Dhule.

... RESPONDENTS

WITH**WRIT PETITION NO. 7131 OF 2024**

1. Murlidhar S/o. Lotan Patil,
Age-57 days, Occu. Agricultural,
2. Rajasbai W/o. Lotan Patil,
Age-78 years, Occu. Agricultural,

... PETITIONERS

Both R/o. Mehergaon,
Tq. and Dist. Dhule.

VERSUS

1. The State of Maharashtra,
Through District Collector,
Dhule, Collector office,
Dhule.
2. The Deputy Collector
Land Acquisition (General), Dhule
Dist. Dhule.

... RESPONDENTS

**WITH
WRIT PETITION NO. 7132 OF 2024**

1. Murlidhar Nimba Bhamre,
Age.45 Years, Occ. Agricultural,
2. Sakhubai Nimba Bhamre,
Age-66 Years, Occ. Agricultural,
3. Jijabai Kashinath Patil,
Age 47 Years, Occ. Agricultural,
4. Khatabai Kishan Patil,
Age. 41 Years, Occ. agricultural,
5. Sarlabai Vijay Patil,
Age. 36 Years, Occ. Agricultural,

... PETITIONERS

All R/o. Mehergaon,
Tq. and Dist. Dhule.

VERSUS

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Through District Collector,
Dhule, Collector office,
Dhule.
2. The Deputy Collector
Land Acquisition (General), Dhule
Dist. Dhule.

... RESPONDENTS

**WITH
WRIT PETITION NO. 7133 OF 2024**

Pradip Devidas Suryawanshi,
Age-54 Years, Occu. Agricultural,
R/o. Mehergaon,
Tq. and Dist. Dhule.

... PETITIONER

VERSUS

1. The State of Maharashtra,
Through District Collector,
Dhule, Collector office,
Dhule.
2. The Deputy Collector
Land Acquisition (General), Dhule
Dist. Dhule.

... RESPONDENTS

WITH**WRIT PETITION NO. 7135 OF 2024**

1. Pradip Shravan Bhamre,
Age.42 Years, Occ.Agricultural,
2. Bhatu Shravan Bhamre,
Age: 53 years, Occu: Agricultural

... PETITIONERS

Both R/o. Mehergaon,
Tq. and Dist. Dhule.

VERSUS

1. The State of Maharashtra,
Through District Collector,
Dhule, Collector office,
Dhule.
2. The Deputy Collector
Land Acquisition (General), Dhule
Dist. Dhule.

... RESPONDENTS

WITH**WRIT PETITION NO. 7136 OF 2024**

1. Narayan Rupchand Patil,
Age.55 Years, Occ. Agricultural,
2. Manohar Rupchand Patil,
Age-74 Years, Occ. Agricultural,
3. Ramkrushna Gulabchand Patil,
Age. 70 Years, Occ. Agricultural,
4. Maltibai Prakash Patil,
Age. 49 Years, Occ. Agricultural,

5. Urmilabai Prabhakar, Bhamre
Age. 42 Years, Occ. Agricultural,

... PETITIONERS

All R/o. Mehergaon,
Tq. and Dist. Dhule.

VERSUS

1. The State of Maharashtra,
Through District Collector,
Dhule, Collector office,
Dhule.
2. The Deputy Collector
Land Acquisition (General), Dhule
Dist. Dhule.

... RESPONDENTS

**WITH
WRIT PETITION NO. 7137 OF 2024**

Ravindra S/o. Sahebrao Patil,
Age-53 years, Occ. Agricultural,
R/o. Mehergaon,
Tq. and Dist. Dhule.

... PETITIONER

VERSUS

1. The State of Maharashtra,
Through District Collector,
Dhule, Collector office,
Dhule.
2. The Deputy Collector
Land Acquisition (General), Dhule
Dist. Dhule.

... RESPONDENTS

**WITH
WRIT PETITION NO. 7138 OF 2024**

1. Rekhabai W/o. Murlidhar Patil,
Age.52 Years, Occ.Agricultural,
2. Murlidhar S/o. Lotan Patil,
Age: 57 years, Occu: Agricultural,

... PETITIONERS

Both R/o. Mehergaon,

Tq. and Dist. Dhule.

VERSUS

1. The State of Maharashtra,
Through District Collector,
Dhule, Collector office,
Dhule.
2. The Deputy Collector
Land Acquisition (General), Dhule
Dist. Dhule.

... RESPONDENTS

WITH

WRIT PETITION NO. 7139 OF 2024

Sahebrao S/o. Chindha Patil,
Age-85 years, Occ. Agricultural,
R/o. Mehergaon,
Tq. and Dist. Dhule.

... PETITIONER

VERSUS

1. The State of Maharashtra,
Through District Collector,
Dhule, Collector office,
Dhule.
2. The Deputy Collector
Land Acquisition (General), Dhule
Dist. Dhule.

... RESPONDENTS

WITH

WRIT PETITION NO. 7140 OF 2024

1. Zulal Mahipat Bhamre,
Age-55 Years, Occ. agricultural,
2. Ravindra Krushna Bhamre,
Age.54 Years, Occ. Agricultural,

... PETITIONERS

Both R/o. Mehergaon,
Tq. Dist. Dhule.

VERSUS

1. The State of Maharashtra,
Through District Collector,
Dhule, Collector office,
Dhule.
2. The Deputy Collector
Land Acquisition (General), Dhule
Dist. Dhule.

... RESPONDENTS

**WITH
WRIT PETITION NO. 7141 OF 2024**

1. Sulochana Deoram Thakre,
Age- 66 Years, Occ. agricultural,
2. Afrubai Madhavrao Patil,
Age. 88 Years, Occ. Agricultural,

... PETITIONERS

Both R/o. Mehergaon,
Tq. Dist. Dhule.

VERSUS

1. The State of Maharashtra,
Through District Collector,
Dhule, Collector office,
Dhule.
2. The Deputy Collector
Land Acquisition (General), Dhule
Dist. Dhule.

... RESPONDENTS

**WITH
WRIT PETITION NO. 7142 OF 2024**

1. Krushnabai Ravindra Patil,
Age. 47 Years, Oc.Agricultural,
2. Mathurabai Adhikar Bhamre,
Age 78 Years, Occ. Agricultural,
3. Ravindra Adhikar Bhamre,
Age 50 Years, Occ. Agricultural,
4. Ramdas Adhikar Bhamre,
Age. 46 Years, Occ. agricultural,
5. Ranjanabai Shriram Patil,
Age.60 Years, Occ. Agricultural,

6. Laxman Adhikar Bhamre,
Age. 48 Years, Occ. Agricultural,
7. Hirkanbai Barku Patil,
Age. 49 Years, Occ. Agricultural,

... PETITIONERS

All R/o. Mehergaon,
Tq. and Dist. Dhule.

VERSUS

1. The State of Maharashtra,
Through District Collector,
Dhule, Collector office,
Dhule.
2. The Deputy Collector
Land Acquisition (General), Dhule
Dist. Dhule.

... RESPONDENTS

WITH
WRIT PETITION NO. 7143 OF 2024

Vishwas Damu Bhamre (Patil)
Age. 76 years, Occ. Agricultural,
R/o. Mehergaon,
Tq. and Dist. Dhule.

... PETITIONER

VERSUS

1. The State of Maharashtra,
Through District Collector,
Dhule, Collector office,
Dhule.
2. The Deputy Collector
Land Acquisition (General), Dhule
Dist. Dhule.

... RESPONDENTS

WITH
WRIT PETITION NO. 7144 OF 2024

1. Anjanabai Murlidhar Patil,
Age 64 Years, Occ. Agricultural,
2. Vinod Murlidhar Patil,

Age-46 Years, Occ. Agricultural,

... PETITIONERS

Both R/o. Mehergaon,
Tq. Dist. Dhule.

VERSUS

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Dhule, Collector office,
Dhule.
2. The Deputy Collector
Land Acquisition (General), Dhule
Dist. Dhule.

... RESPONDENTS

WITH

WRIT PETITION NO. 7145 OF 2024

1. Jaywant Shivram Patil,
Age-74 Years, Occ. Agricultural,
2. Dattaprasad Dnyaneshwar Bhamre,
Age. 30 Years, Occ. Agricultural,

... PETITIONERS

Both R/o. Mehergaon,
Tq. Dist. Dhule.

VERSUS

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Dhule, Collector office,
Dhule.
2. The Deputy Collector
Land Acquisition (General), Dhule
Dist. Dhule.

... RESPONDENTS

WITH

WRIT PETITION NO. 7146 OF 2024

1. Shivdas Sonu Patil,
Age- 88 Years, Occ. Agricultural,
2. Subhash Sonu Patil,
Age. 77 Years, Occ. Agricultural,

... PETITIONERS

R/o. Mehergaon,
Tq. Dist. Dhule.

VERSUS

1. The State of Maharashtra,
Through District Collector,
Dhule, Collector office,
Dhule.
2. The Deputy Collector
Land Acquisition (General), Dhule
Dist. Dhule.

... RESPONDENTS

**WITH
WRIT PETITION NO. 7147 OF 2024**

Shravan Motiram Patil,
Age. 84 years, Occu. Agricultural,
R/o. Mehergaon,
Tq. and Dist. Dhule.

... PETITIONER

VERSUS

1. The State of Maharashtra,
Through District Collector,
Dhule, Collector office,
Dhule.
2. The Deputy Collector
Land Acquisition (General), Dhule
Dist. Dhule.

... RESPONDENTS

**WITH
WRIT PETITION NO. 7148 OF 2024**

1. Sarjerao S/o. Madhavrao Bhamre,
Age-73 Years, Occ. Agricultural,
2. Surekha Sarjerao Bhamre,
Age:68 years, Occu: Agricultural,
3. Snehal Sarjerao Bhamre,
Age: 45 years, Occu: Agricultural,
4. Suyog Sarjerao Bhamre,
Age: 47 years, Occu: Agricultural,

... PETITIONERS

All R/o. Mehergaon,
Tq. and Dist. Dhule.

VERSUS

1. The State of Maharashtra,
Through District Collector,
Dhule, Collector office,
Dhule.
2. The Deputy Collector
Land Acquisition (General), Dhule
Dist. Dhule.

... RESPONDENTS

**WITH
WRIT PETITION NO. 7149 OF 2024**

1. Ushabai Baban Bhamre,
Age-54 Years, Occ. agricultural,
2. Shantilal Zulal Bhamre,
Age. 63 Years, Occ. Agricultural,
3. Mangalabai Shantilal Patil,
Age. 59 Years, Occ. Agricultural,
4. Rahul Baban Bhamre,
Age. 31 Years, Occ. Agricultural,
5. Rohini Babab Bhamre,
Age. 38 Years, Occ. Agricultural,
6. Sunita Baban Bhamre
Age.34 Years, Occ. Agricultural,

... PETITIONERS

All R/o. Mehergaon,
Tq. Dist. Dhule

VERSUS

1. The State of Maharashtra,
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Dhule, Collector office,
Dhule.
2. The Deputy Collector
Land Acquisition (General), Dhule
Dist. Dhule.

... RESPONDENTS

**WITH
WRIT PETITION NO. 7150 OF 2024**

Smt. Bhagrathabai Bhalerao Patil, (Expire)
Age-76 years, Occu. Agricultural,
R/o. Mehergaon,
Tq. and Dist. Dhule.

LEGAL HEIRS

- 1a) Ratilal Bhalerao Bhamare
Age-45, Occu- Agriculture
R/o Mehergaon
Tq. And Dist- Dhule
- 1b) Sunanda Devidas Patil
Age-54, Occu- Housewife
Sambhaji Chowk, Patonda, Amalner
Jalgaon 425401
- 1c) Kalpana Subhash Jadhav
Age-50, Occu- Housewife
Panchawati Road Nashik 422101
- 1d) Chitrabai Murlidhar Patil
Age-46, Occu- Housewife.
R/o. Sambhaji Chowk, Patonda,
Amalner, Jalgaon

... PETITIONERS

VERSUS

- 1. The State of Maharashtra,
Through District Collector,
Dhule, Collector office,
Dhule.
- 2. The Deputy Collector
Land Acquisition (General), Dhule
Dist. Dhule.

... RESPONDENTS

**WITH
WRIT PETITION NO. 7151 OF 2024**

Pandurang S/o. Bhatu Patil,
Age-68 days, Occu. Agricultural,
R/o. Mehergaon,

Tq. and Dist. Dhule.

... PETITIONER

VERSUS

1. The State of Maharashtra,
Through District Collector,
Dhule, Collector office,
Dhule.
2. The Deputy Collector
Land Acquisition (General), Dhule
Dist. Dhule.

... RESPONDENTS

WITH

WRIT PETITION NO. 7152 OF 2024

1. Khatabai Gorakh Bhamre,
Age-55 Years, Occ. agricultural,
2. Popat Lahu Bhamre,
Age.64 Years, Occ. agricultural,
3. Nagraj Lahu Bhamre,
Age 48 Years, Occ. Agricultural,
4. Dhanraj Lahu Bhamre,
Age 56 Years, Occ. Agricultural,
5. Bhaskar Lahu Bhamre,
Age.51 Years, Occ. Agricultural,

... PETITIONERS

All R/o. Mehergaon,
Tq. and Dist. Dhule.

VERSUS

1. The State of Maharashtra,
Through District Collector,
Dhule, Collector office,
Dhule.
2. The Deputy Collector
Land Acquisition (General), Dhule
Dist. Dhule.

... RESPONDENTS

WITH

WRIT PETITION NO. 7153 OF 2024

Dipak Sahebrao Patil,
Age-53 Years, Occ. Agricultural,
All R/o. Mehergaon,

Tq. and Dist. Dhule.

... PETITIONER

VERSUS

1. The State of Maharashtra,
Through District Collector,
Dhule, Collector office,
Dhule.
2. The Deputy Collector
Land Acquisition (General), Dhule
Dist. Dhule.

... RESPONDENTS

...

Mr. Prathamesh M. Borde h/f. Mr. Shailesh S. Chapalgaonkar, Advocate for the
Petitioners in all matters

Mr. S. M. Ganachari, AGP for Respondent Nos.1 and 2 in all matters

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CORAM : AJIT B. KADETHANKAR, J.

DATE : 06.04.2026

JUDGMENT :-

. Rule. Rule made returnable forthwith.

2. Heard for final disposal by consent of Mr. Prathamesh M. Borde h/f. Mr. Shailesh S. Chapalgaonkar, learned counsel for the petitioners and Mrs. M. L. Sangit, learned AGP for the respondent – authorities. The Deputy Collector, Land Acquisition (General), Dhule has refused to accept and process Petitioners' applications u/s 64 of the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013 (hereinafter referred to as "the Act of 2013"). The reason for refusal is a short delay occurred in filing the reference applications.

3. It is not in dispute that the petitioner/s' lands in respective matters have been acquired for the "Lower Panzara (Akkalpada) Medium Project", and that awards have already been declared by the authorities as per

the following particulars :

WP. No.	Notice of award u/s 23	Filing date of application	Delay caused for filing appeal after lapse of 6th week
7134 of 2024	20.01.2022	10.04.2023	403 days
7120 of 2024	13.12.2022	10.04.2023	76 days
7130 of 2024	22.09.2022	10.04.2023	158 days
7131 of 2024	22.09.2022	10.04.2023	158 days
7132 of 2024	20.01.2022	10.04.2023	403 days
7133 of 2024	10.02.2023	10.04.2023	17 days
7135 of 2024	22.09.2022	10.04.2023	158 days
7136 of 2024	20.01.2022	10.04.2023	403 days
7137 of 2024	22.09.2022	10.04.2023	158 days
7138 of 2024	22.09.2022	10.04.2023	158 days
7139 of 2024	22.09.2022	24.04.2023	158 days
7140 of 2024	10.02.2023	10.04.2023	17 days
7141 of 2024	20.01.2022	10.04.2023	403 days
7142 of 2024	13.12.2022	10.04.2023	76 days
7143 of 2024	13.12.2022	10.04.2023	76 days
7144 of 2024	20.01.2022	10.04.2023	403 days
7145 of 2024	20.01.2022	10.04.2023	403 days
7146 of 2024	22.09.2022	10.04.2023	158 days
7147 of 2024	20.01.2022	10.04.2023	403 days
7148 of 2024	22.09.2022	10.04.2023	158 days
7149 of 2024	10.02.2023	10.04.2023	17 days
7150 of 2024	13.12.2022	10.04.2023	76 days
7151 of 2024	20.01.2022	10.04.2023	403 days
7152 of 2024	22.09.2022	10.04.2023	158 days
7153 of 2024	22.09.2022	10.04.2023	158 days

4. Learned counsel for the petitioners submits that it was incumbent upon the petitioners to file reference proceedings within six weeks from the date of receipt of notices. However, owing to the restrictions imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic, the lack of legal knowledge and poor financial condition, the petitioners could not file the references within time. It is submitted that after receipt of notices, some time is consumed in obtaining necessary documents including certified copies of the awards. Thereafter, they filed reference proceedings along with an applications for condonation of delay under Section 64(2) of the Act of 2013. The said applications came to be opposed by the respondent-authorities.

5. After hearing the parties, by the impugned orders dated 31.01.2024 and 29.02.2024 passed by the Deputy Collector, Land Acquisition (General), Dhule, rejected the petitioner/s' applications. Learned counsel for the petitioners submits that sufficient cause has been shown for condonation of delay. It is further submitted that the petitioners are farmers and have fairly disclosed the reasons which prevented them from filing the proceedings within the prescribed period. It is urged that the petitioners have a legitimate claim for enhancement of compensation and their rights deserve protection under Article 14 of the Constitution of India, particularly when similarly situated landowners are being granted such relief. It is further submitted that the petitioners are willing to waive interest for the delayed period as may be directed by this Court.

6. Per contra, the learned Assistant Government Pleader relies upon the affidavit-in-reply filed on behalf of the respondent - authorities and submits that no error has been committed by the authorities while passing the impugned orders in accordance with the provisions of the said Act. He further submits that the affidavit-in-reply justifies the rejection of the applications.

The learned Assistant Government Pleader vehemently opposes the reasons advanced by the petitioners for condonation of delay contending that the grounds are omnibus in nature and do not constitute sufficient cause. Its an admitted fact that the Deputy Collector Land Acquisition (General), Dhule has considered the date of receipt of notice issued in format u/s 23 of the Act of 2013 for the purpose of counting limitation u/s 64 of the Act of 2013.

7. It is submitted by the learned Assistant Government Pleader that the powers of the District Collector u/s 64 of the Act of 2013 are exercised by the Deputy Collector, Land Acquisition (General), Dhule.

8. I have heard the learned counsel for the petitioners and learned Assistant Government Pleader at length.

9. Petitioners' claim is governed by the Right to Fair Compensation Act 2013. Section 64 of the Act of 2013 reads thus:

64.

(1) Any person interested who has not accepted the award may, by written application to the Collector, require that the matter be referred by the Collector for the determination of the Authority, as the case may be, whether his objection be to the measurement of the land, the amount of the compensation, the person to whom it is payable, the rights of Rehabilitation and Resettlement under Chapters V and VI or the apportionment of the compensation among the persons interested:

Provided that the Collector shall, within a period of thirty days from the date of receipt of application, make a reference to the appropriate Authority:

Provided further that where the Collector fails to make such reference within the period so specified, the applicant may apply to the Authority, as the case may be, requesting it to direct the Collector to make the reference to it within a period of thirty days.

(2) The application shall state the grounds on which objection to the award is taken: Provided that every such application shall be made- (a) if the person making it was present or represented before the Collector at the time when he made his award, within six weeks from the date of the Collector's award;

(b) in other cases, within six weeks of the receipt of the notice from the Collector under section 21, or within six months from the date of the Collector's award, whichever period shall first expire:

Provided further that the Collector may entertain an application after the expiry of the said period, within a further period of one year, if he is satisfied that there was sufficient cause for not filing it within the period specified in the first proviso.

10. Mr. Prathamesh M. Borde, learned Counsel fairly submits that the Petitioners seek benefit of the last proviso to Section 64 of the 2013 Act. He would submit that the reason submitted by the Petitioners for failing to file the reference within the time stipulated in the provision is justifiable. The last proviso empowers the Collector to entertain a Reference Application though filed by a delay, but if filed within a period of one year from the date of cause of action for filing the reference application.

11. In the cases at hand, it is not disputed that the Reference Applications are not filed within limitation as contemplated in Section 64 of the 2013 Act. Petitioners fairly accept the receipt of notices under Section 23 of the 2013 Act referable to Section 64 (2)(b) of the Act. It is an undisputed fact that the applications were filed within one year from the date of receipt of notices under Section 23 except in Writ Petition Nos.7134 of 2024, 7132 of 2024, 7136 of 2024, 7141 of 2024, 7144 of 2024, 7145 of 2024, 7147 of 2024 and 7151 of 2024.

12. Section 23 of the 2013 Act reads thus:

23. Enquiry and land acquisition award by Collector - On the day so fixed, or on any other day to which the enquiry has been adjourned, the Collector shall proceed to enquire into the objections (if any) which any person interested has stated pursuant to a notice given under section 21, to the measurements made under section 20, and into the value of the land at the date of the publication of the notification, and into the respective interests of the person claiming the compensation and rehabilitation and resettlement, shall make an award under his hand of -

(b) the true area of the land;

(b) the compensation as determined under section 27 along with Rehabilitation and Resettlement award as determined under section 31 and which in his opinion should be allowed for the land; and

(c) the apportionment of the said compensation among all the persons known or believed to be interested in the land, or whom, or of whose claims, he has information, whether

or not they have respectively appeared before him.

State Amendment:

[Maharashtra] *-In its application to the State of Maharashtra, after S. 23, the following section shall be inserted, namely :-*

"23-A. Award of Collector without enquiry in case of agreement of interested persons. -(1) Notwithstanding anything contained in section 23, if at any stage of the proceedings, the Collector is satisfied that all the persons interested in the land who appeared before him have agreed in writing on the matters to be included in the award of the Collector in the form prescribed by rules made by the State Government, he may, without making further enquiry, make an award according to the terms of such agreement.

(2) The determination of compensation for any land under sub-section (1) shall not in any way affect the determination of compensation in respect of other lands in the same locality or elsewhere in accordance with the other provisions of this Act.

(3) Notwithstanding anything contained in the Registration Act, 1908 (16 of 1908), no agreement made under sub-section (1) shall be liable to registration under that Act"- Maharashtra Act 37 of 2018, S. 4 (w.e.f. 26-4-2018).

13. The Petitioners are served with notice under Section 23 of the Act. As such, it's clear that Petitioners are not covered by Section 64 (2) (a) of the

Act. Petitioner/s' case is that only after receiving notice under Section 23 of the Act the Petitioners learned about the Award. Even the Deputy Collector has also counted the limitation w.e.f. service of notice u/s 23 of the Act. May it be, its not disputed that the application u/s 64 with applications for delay condonation are filed at-least within one year from the date of receipt of notice under Section 23 of the Act which has given cause of action to the Petitioners.

The statute, as observed supra empowers the Collector to condone the delay if reasons tendered by party are found satisfactory.

14. 'Satisfaction on sufficient cause' is a relative concept, and hence it is left to the discretion of the Collector calling upon to apply his/her reasoning cautiously and mindfully. The cases of enhancement in land acquisition compensation, in my considered view, must not be treated by the Government Authorities as an adversary litigation. Farmers loose their sole source of earning in the compulsory land acquisition. The Authorities go by the rules and accordingly the awards are passed. The statutory provision for enhancement is drafted bearing in mind that there could be cases and eventualities where adequate and appropriate compensation might be missed to be awarded. That's why the enhancement provision is a form of benevolent legislation.

15. The rider of limitation is to avoid cooked claims and unnecessary burden on the state exchequer that may fall due to interest part of the enhancement. The claimant(s) falling deficit to lodge enhancement case within stipulated time has to show the natural and justifiable cause resulting into delay. Not everything can be explained or examined merely putting finger on the rules. Delay and reasons behind it must be examined pragmatically on the test of actual circumstances and ground reality. Hence cautiously the last

Proviso to Section 64 of the Act is incorporated by the Legislature thereby leaving a room of one year for consideration at the end of the Collector. The District Collector is such an authority who is well aware and apprised of the general reasons, general conditions of the farmers in his district, the local factors in his district, special/distinguishing eventualities during the concerned period etc. which may cause delay in filing the enhancement claims by the farmers. The Collector is expected to consider mindfully the reasons rendered/even not rendered by the farmers which cause/may cause delay in filing enhancement in compensation. The Collector, although is a representative of the State, in true sense is a 'guardian' of interest of the farmers in his district. It has to be seen that only due to technicality of a justifiable delay, deserving claimant must not suffer deprivation of equal right to enhancement. Hence, the delay condonation applications need to be adjudicated giving mindful thought, not on mechanical reasoning.

16. In the cases at hand, apparently the Petitioners hail from Adiwasia region of the State. The period during which Petitioners missed the limitation was of Covid-19 pandemic and the restraints imposed by the Government. Even after lifting the riders by the State authorities post Covid-19, its strong after-burns were lasting for a long time. The people were not only financially affected, but even their day-to-day activities, decision making process, communication etc. everything was affected. Its a matter of judicial note that a farmer may not straightway go and file his Reference application to the District Collector. He/she approaches an advocate of choice and the further processes are brought in motion. The Petitioners have explained satisfactorily that once they approached their advocate, the things were put in service and the applications were filed, though by a little delay.

17. Its pertinent to note that apparently the delay is not an inordinate delay. Although the Petitioners missed to lodge the references within the initial limitation, still were filed within One year as per the Proviso (supra).

18. In Writ Petition Nos.7134 of 2024, 7132 of 2024, 7136 of 2024, 7141 of 2024, 7144 of 2024, 7145 of 2024, 7147 of 2024 and 7151 of 2024, there is delay of more than one year. However, the delay is not even beyond 50 days. Apparently it is not a huge, inordinate and unexplainable delay.

19. I am satisfied with the reasons rendered by the petitioners to explain the delay. I find that there are sufficient reasons to satisfy the delay. Considering the rider of limitation and principle of natural justice, the delay deserved to be considered so as to afford the petitioner/s an opportunity to present their case on merits. The only thing is that the Collector ought to have pragmatically considered the delay condonation applications, which in my opinion, is not done.

20. A beneficial reference can be made to the view expressed by the Honorable Supreme Court in the case of **Suresh Kumar and ors. Vs. State of Haryana with connected cases (2025 INSC 550)**. The Honorable Supreme Court, while dealing with the delay caused by the claimants seeking enhancement in land acquisition references observed thus:

“11. In all judgments referred supra, the common thread that can be observed is that delay is not a reason to deny the land losers their compensation, which is just, fair and reasonable for the land they have lost.

12. This Court has noticed that in Delhi Air Tech Services Pvt. Ltd. v. State of U.P. & Anr. (2022 SCC Online SC1408) , with reference to Coffee Board, Karnataka, Bangalore v. Commission

of Commercial Tax, Karnataka (1988) 3 SCC 263) that while the State has the power of eminent domain, the owner of a land can only be divested thereof in accordance with the procedure established by law after appropriately compensating them. This is in view of Article 300 A and 31A of the Constitution of India.

13. In view of the above discussion, we are of the considered view that the delay ought to have been condoned, since the position that the land loser had, in fact, asked for the appeal to be filed but it was not, for no fault of his, is an uncontroverted position of fact. Consequently, the appeals are allowed. The impugned judgment and orders are set aside and the matters are remanded to the High Court for consideration afresh, on all aspects, save and except delay. Such consideration is to be made, uninfluenced by the observations made hereinabove. However, for the delayed period that is being condoned, the appellant shall not be entitled to any interest. The Registry is requested to transmit a copy of this order to the learned Registrar General, High Court of Punjab and Haryana, for necessary follow up action. Because the Award from which the appeals arise is of the year 2005, the High Court is requested make an endeavour to decide the matters expeditiously. Pending application(s), if any, shall stand disposed of.”

21. For the reasons recorded above, I am of the considered view that on the principle of equity and in the interest of justice, the Petitioners must get an opportunity to make out a case on merits for enhancement. A small and justifiable delay must not defeat the substantive right. Interest of the State from loss of public exchequer also needs to be protected, which can be done

by putting some restraint on the interest over compensation.

22. Hence, I pass following order :

ORDER

- A. The Writ Petitions are allowed.
- B. Impugned orders dated 31.01.2024 and 29.02.2024 passed by the Respondent No. 2 in Delay Applications, are quashed and set aside. The delays caused in filing the References u/s 64 of the 2013 Act stand condoned.
- C. The Petitioners shall appear before the Deputy Collector, Land Acquisition (General), Dhule on 27.04.2026 or within a week thereafter alongwith the Reference Applications, relevant documents and copy of this order.
- D. Thereafter the Deputy Collector, Land Acquisition (General), Dhule shall process Petitioner/s' Reference Applications in accordance with law.
- E. In the event of enhancement of compensation, the Petitioners shall not be entitled for any interest from the last date of limitation pursuant to notice under Section 23 of the 2013 Act till the date of appearance before the Authority for re-presenting their applications.
- F. Rule made absolute in above terms.

[AJIT B. KADETHANKAR, J.]