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

+ W.P.(C) 93/2026, CM APPL. 517/2026, CM APPL. 518/2026 & CM APPL. 519/2026

SANJEEV TRIPATHI & ANR.Petitioners

Through: Mr. Abhijit Anand, Adv.

versus

UNION OF INDIA & ORS.Respondents

Through: Mr. Nishant Gautam, CGSC with Mr. Vardhman Kaushik & Ms. Kavya Shukla, Advs.

+ W.P.(C) 94/2026, CM APPL. 520/2026, CM APPL. 521/2026 & CM APPL. 522/2026

ANJALIPetitioner

Through: Mr. Abhijit Anand, Adv.

versus

UNION OF INDIA & ORS.Respondent

Through: Mr. Shashank Bajpai, CGSC with Mr. Govind Singh Chauhan, Adv.

CORAM:

HON'BLE MR. JUSTICE SANJEEV NARULA

ORDER

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06.01.2026

1. These petitions under Article 226 of the Constitution of India assail the recruitment process initiated by the Respondents for recruitment to the posts of Officer Scale-I and Office Assistant (Multipurpose) in Regional Rural Banks under notification dated 31st August, 2025.
2. The Petitioners contend that the Common Recruitment Process for RRBs is conducted annually and in prior cycles, the cut-off date for the purpose of age eligibility was fixed as 1st June of the relevant year.



Reference is made to ‘CRP RRBs XIII’, where the cut-off date for age was fixed as 1st June, 2024. The grievance in the present batch is that for ‘CRP RRBs XIV’ the Respondents altered the cut-off framework and fixed a different date, allegedly because the recruitment calendar was revised and the examinations were scheduled later than in earlier cycles. The Petitioners submit that this alteration has rendered them age-ineligible.

3. On that footing, the Petitioner in W.P. 94/2026 seeks reliefs in relation to the post of Officer Scale-I, whereas W.P. 93/2026 has been instituted by two Petitioners, of whom Petitioner No. 1 intended to apply for both the posts of Officer Scale-I and Office Assistant (Multipurpose) and Petitioner No. 2 intended to apply for the post of Office Assistant (Multipurpose). They contend that owing to the revised cut-off date notified under ‘CRP RRBs XIV’, they were rendered age-ineligible for the post of Office Assistant (Multipurpose).

4. In substance, the Petitioners pray for (i) quashing of the notification dated 31st August, 2025 issued under ‘CRP RRBs XIV’; (ii) a direction to revise the cut-off date for age eligibility to 1st June, 2025 or 1st April, 2025; (iii) a direction to revise the prescribed lower age limit for the posts in question on the ground that the minimum age of 18 years is incompatible with the requirement of a Bachelor’s degree; (iv) permission to participate in the current recruitment notwithstanding age ineligibility; and (v) in the alternative, a one-time relaxation enabling participation in the next recruitment cycle despite the age bar.

5. The Respondents oppose the petitions on maintainability as well as on merits. It is stated that online registration has long since closed, the preliminary examination has already been held, and the process has reached



an advanced stage. It is further submitted that the results are scheduled to be declared in January, 2026. Any interference now, it is urged, would unravel the entire recruitment exercise and prejudice a large body of candidates who are not before the Court.

6. Two features of the present litigation stand out. First, the reliefs sought are not incremental. The Petitioners invite the Court to reset a foundational eligibility parameter mid-process. A direction to substitute the notified cut-off date for age with a different date would necessarily entail reopening of the process, revisiting eligibility, and reworking the candidate pool. In a national-level recruitment involving thousands of applicants, such an order carries an obvious systemic cost and immediate third-party prejudice. Article 226 does not operate in a vacuum. Where a recruitment process is substantially underway, judicial intervention is reserved for clear illegality, demonstrable *mala fides*, or a breach of binding statutory rules, and not for re-casting eligibility norms because a different policy choice might have caused less individual hardship.

7. Second, the petitions suffer from delay in the only sense that matters in recruitment cases, namely, the stage at which relief is sought. The Petitioners approach the Court after the process has moved beyond registration and the preliminary test. The explanation offered, that information was being gathered under the RTI mechanism to understand the reasons for the change, does not supply a valid basis to destabilise an ongoing recruitment.

8. The Supreme Court in *Union of India v. Tarsem Singh*¹ has clarified that even where delay may otherwise be overlooked, claims cannot be



entertained if reopening the issue would disturb settled rights of third parties or affect a large class of persons. Recruitment processes, by their very nature, implicate competing claims of numerous candidates, and belated judicial intervention at an advanced stage would prejudice those not before the Court. Recruitment processes must attain closure within a reasonable time, and belated challenges, “howsoever genuine”, cannot be entertained beyond a point because there has to be finality.

9. Even otherwise, on merits, the Petitioners do not demonstrate a statutory infraction. The Regional Rural Banks (Appointment of Officers and Employees) Rules, 2017 contemplate recruitment through an approved agency and provide the framework for selection. The Third Schedule prescribes, post-wise, the age limits for direct recruitment, but does not embed any rigid, immutable cut-off date as a matter of statute. In the absence of a statutory command fixing the cut-off date, the recruiting authority is entitled to specify, in the recruitment notification, a uniform date for reckoning age, provided the prescription is non-discriminatory and bears a rational nexus to the recruitment exercise.

10. The Supreme Court in *Ami Lal Bhat v. State of Rajasthan*² has held that fixation of a cut-off date for determining age lies within the discretion of the recruiting authority and is not rendered arbitrary merely because another date could also have been chosen. A cut-off date can be interdicted only if it is shown to be so capricious or grossly unreasonable as to warrant judicial interference. The prescription of an independent, determinate cut-off date, far from being arbitrary, promotes certainty in the recruitment process.

¹ (2008) 8 SCC 648

² (1997) 6 SCC 614



The mere fact that a different cut-off operated in earlier recruitment cycles does not, by itself, establish arbitrariness.

11. Equally, the relief sought would require the Court to alter the “rules of the game” after the game has begun. The Courts have often emphasised the need for certainty and stability in recruitment norms, and have cautioned against midstream alterations except in legally permissible situations. The Petitioners, in substance, seek a judicially mandated alteration mid-process. Such a direction would be inconsistent with the very discipline that public recruitment demands.

12. No case of violation of statutory rules, demonstrable arbitrariness of the kind that attracts Article 14 review, or mala fides is made out so as to justify judicial intervention that would unsettle an advanced recruitment process.

13. The writ petitions are, accordingly, dismissed along with pending applications.

SANJEEV NARULA, J

JANUARY 6, 2026

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