HIGH COURT OF JUDICATURE FOR RAJASTHAN
BENCH AT JAIPUR

S.B. Civil Writ Petition No. 15973/2026
CNR: RJHC020800092026 | URN: CW / 33980U / 2026

Yash Chandra S/o Shri Chandra Prakash Meena, Aged About 25 Years, Resident Of C-34 Bal Nagar, Kartarpura, Jaipur.

----Petitioner

Versus

1. State Of Rajasthan, Through The Principal Secretary, Department Of Higher Education, Government Of Rajasthan, Secretariat, Jaipur-302005
2. University Of Rajasthan, A Statutory University Established Under The Rajasthan University Act, 1946, Through Its Registrar, Having Its Office At University Of Rajasthan Campus, Jln Marg, Jaipur-302004, Rajasthan
3. University Grants Commission, A Statutory Body Constituted Under The University Grants Commission Act, 1956, Through Its Secretary, Having Its Office At Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg, New Delhi-110002
4. National Testing Agency, Through Its Director General, Block-C, 3Rd Floor, Institutional Area, Adjacent Iit Delhi, New Delhi-110016, Being The Agency Conducting The Ugc-Net Examination.

----Respondents

Connected With

S.B. Civil Writ Petition No. 15786/2026
CNR: RJHC020794002026 | URN: CW / 33637U / 2026

1. Ajay Yadav S/o Shri Rajendra Prasad Yadav, Aged About 27 Years, Resident Of Vpo Manksi, Tehsil Neema Ka Thana, District Sikar-332711
2. Pradeep Kumar S/o Shri Mangtu Ram, Aged About 32 Years, Resident Of Post Deswala, Via. Nua, Khidasar, (Peva Ki Dhani), Jhunjhunu-333001

----Petitioners

Versus

1. University Of Rajasthan, Through Registrar, Jln Marg Jaipur

2. Department Of Law University Of Rajasthan, Through Head Of The Department, Jaipur-302004

----Respondents

For Petitioner(s)	:	Dr. Rudranshu Singh, Amicus Curiae Mr. Darsh Pareek Mr. Tanveer Ahmed with Ms. Akshita Sharma
For Respondent(s)	:	Mr. Vishnu Kant Sharma

HON'BLE MR. JUSTICE SAMEER JAIN

Judgment

1	Arguments concluded on	13/10/2026
2	Judgment Reserved on	13/10/2026
3	Full Judgment or Operative Part Pronounced	Full Judgment
4	Pronounced on	30/10/2026

1. In view of the intertwined nature of the controversy involved, coupled with the identical factual matrix emerging in the present matters, and with the consent of the learned counsel representing the respective sides, owing to the congruence of issues and for the sake of expedient adjudication, the instant petitions are decided by this common adjudicatory judgment, the ratio *decidendi* whereof shall operate *mutatis mutandis* upon all related pleadings. For the purposes of factual clarity and narrative convenience, the averments articulated in SBCWP No. 15973/2026 are adopted by this Court as the primary factual matrix for the disposal of the instant *lis.*

BRIEF FACTS OF THE CASE :

2. The present writ petition has been filed by the petitioner, a meritorious student belonging to the Scheduled Tribe (ST) category, who has successfully qualified the UGC NET examination

in the subject of Economics and has been declared eligible for the award of Junior Research Fellowship (hereinafter referred to as "JRF"). The petitioner is aggrieved by the first merit list dated 10.08.2026 issued by respondent No. 1, University of Rajasthan, for admission to its Ph.D. programme for the academic session 2025–2026 under the Rajasthan University Ph.D. Admission Examination Scheme (hereinafter referred to as "RUPA").

3. The preliminary alleged contention of the petitioner is that the impugned merit list has been prepared in flagrant violation of the University Grants Commission (Minimum Standards and Procedure for Award of Ph.D. Degree) Regulations, 2022 (hereinafter referred to as "the Regulations of 2022"), and the RUPA 2025 Information Bulletin, read with the corrigendum issued thereto. It is averred that respondent No. 1 has clubbed together candidates falling under Category 1, comprising JRF-qualified candidates; Category 2, comprising NET-qualified candidates eligible for appointment as Assistant Professors; and Category 3, comprising candidates qualified in NET for Ph.D. admission only, into a single common merit list, without adhering to the distinct criteria applicable to the respective categories; despite the fact that under the applicable provisions, candidates falling under Categories 2 and 3 are required to be evaluated on the basis of a combined weightage of 70% for the NET score and 30% for the interview. However, respondent No. 1 has arbitrarily and without any authority of law evaluated all candidates, including those falling under Category 1, such as the petitioner, solely on the basis of the marks obtained in the interview, thereby completely

disregarding the petitioner's NET/JRF score. It is, thus, alleged that the merit of the petitioner and other similarly situated JRF-qualified candidates, who otherwise possessed demonstrably superior overall merit, has been ignored in the preparation of the impugned merit list.

SUBMISSIONS ADVANCED BY THE LEARNED COUNSEL APPEARING ON BEHALF OF THE PETITIONER :

4. At the outset, it was submitted by the learned counsel for the petitioner that the Regulations of 2022 were notified on 07.11.2022 by the respondent number 3 and the same is binding on all the universities including respondent number 2 i.e. University of Rajasthan. It was submitted that Regulation 5 of the said Regulations categorically prescribes the procedure for admission to the PhD program. It was further submitted that on 13.03.2024 the UGC in its 578th meeting on the recommendation of an expert committee decided that from the academic session 2024-2025 the NET score can be used for admission to PhD programs in place of entrance test conducted by the individual universities. Consequently on 27.03.2024 the UGC issued a public notice classifying NET qualified candidates into three categories: Category 1 comprising of JRF and assistant professors, Category 2 assistant professor and PhD admission only, and Category 3 PhD admission only. It was contended that the JRF qualified, i.e. Category number 1 candidates are to be admitted on the basis of interview, while Category 2 and 3 candidates are to be admitted on the combined merit comprising of 70% of the NET score and 30% of the interview.

5. It was further submitted that respondent No. 2, University of Rajasthan, issued an advertisement inviting applications for admission to its Ph.D. programme for the academic session 2025–2026, along with the requisite Information Bulletin. Thereafter, a corrigendum was issued, whereby Clause 6 of Section A of the Information Bulletin was substituted to provide that candidates seeking admission under the JRF category must possess a valid JRF award for the period specified in the NET certificate. It was submitted that the petitioner, having obtained the requisite certificate, applied for admission under the RUPA Scheme, 2025, on 28.07.2026 in the JRF category. The petitioner appeared for the interview conducted by the Department of Economics of respondent No. 2. Subsequently, on 10.08.2026, the Department of Economics issued the first merit list for admission to the Ph.D. programme. However, to the shock and dismay of the petitioner, his candidature was rejected on the ground that he had failed to secure the prescribed qualifying marks in the interview. It was contended that candidates belonging to Categories 1, 2 and 3 were placed in a single common merit list, and their merit was determined solely on the basis of the marks obtained in the interview, in clear violation of the guidelines issued by the UGC.

6. It was further submitted that on 11.08.2026, i.e., the very next day after publication of the first merit list, the petitioner submitted a representation by way of email to the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Rajasthan, bringing the aforesaid discrepancies to the University's attention. However, no action was taken on the said representation. Learned counsel for the

petitioner further submitted that as per the revised schedule for Ph.D. admissions, the last date for depositing the admission fee by demand draft by provisionally admitted candidates was 14.08.2026. In view of the imminent deadline and the grievance raised by the petitioner, the present writ petition came to be filed, and by an interim order dated 14.08.2026, this Court granted provisional admission to the petitioner to the Ph.D. programme in Economics under the JRF category.

7. Learned counsel for the petitioner stoutly submitted that the petitioner had a legitimate expectation of being duly considered for admission to the Ph.D. programme in accordance with the applicable rules and guidelines, having qualified the UGC NET-JRF examination and thereafter applied for admission and appeared in the interview in conformity with the guidelines. It was contended that the petitioner possessed demonstrably superior merit as compared to the candidates whose names find place in the impugned merit list and, therefore, had a legitimate expectation of being selected in accordance with the prescribed admission criteria. However, owing to the alleged misinterpretation and erroneous application of the applicable rules and regulations, culminating in the preparation of the impugned merit list, the petitioner was denied admission despite his superior merit. It was further contended that the admission criteria prescribed under the RUPA 2025 Information Bulletin, as adopted by the University of Rajasthan, are inconsistent with the public notice dated 27.03.2024 issued by the UGC, particularly with regard to the methodology prescribed for the evaluation and selection of

candidates belonging to the three distinct NET categories. In this regard, learned counsel for the petitioner advanced the following submissions:

7.1 That under the UGC public notice dated 27.03.2024, candidates falling under Categories 2 and 3 are required to be assessed on the basis of a combined weightage of 70% for the NET score and 30% for the interview. However, under the RUPA 2025 guidelines, only twice the number of candidates corresponding to the available seats are called for the interview, with such candidates being shortlisted solely on the basis of their NET percentile. Therefore, the NET percentile operates as a decisive screening criterion even before the prescribed 30% weightage for the interview is applied, thereby raising concerns regarding the manner in which the University's admission procedure gives effect to the evaluation methodology stipulated by the UGC.

7.2 That under the UGC framework, candidates qualified for JRF, falling under Category 1, are to be considered for admission on the basis of their performance in the interview. However, Clause B(2) of the RUPA 2025 guidelines provides for calling candidates for the interview on the basis of their percentile, whereas Clause B(1) provides that admission is to be determined on the basis of the test score obtained in the interview. It was contended that these provisions, when read together with Clause B(5)(i), which stipulates that candidates belonging to Category 1 are to be evaluated on the basis of the interview alone, give rise to an apparent inconsistency within the University's own

admission framework. Thus, such inconsistency exposes JRF-qualified candidates to a percentile-based cut-off, notwithstanding that the methodology prescribed for their category under the UGC public notice does not contemplate such an additional criterion for determining their merit.

7.3 That the method prescribed under the RUPA 2025 guidelines for declaring and utilising the NET result for admission is ambiguous. Learned counsel contended that the NET result is required to be declared in terms of both marks and percentile so that the relevant score may be utilised for the purpose of admission. However, while the UGC framework prescribes a weightage of 70% for the NET score and 30% for the interview in the case of Categories 2 and 3, Clause B(5) of the RUPA 2025 guidelines refers to the score/percentile without clearly specifying which of the two parameters is to be adopted for the purpose of determining the final merit. Therefore, the guidelines do not clearly prescribe the manner in which the NET score is to be converted or accorded the stipulated weightage, nor do they specify the method by which the marks obtained out of 100 in the interview are to be scaled to correspond to the prescribed 30% weightage. In the absence of a clear and unambiguous formula governing such evaluation, the methodology adopted by the University is alleged to be vague and uncertain, leaving the process of preparation of the final merit list susceptible to inconsistent interpretation.

8. Fourthly, it was contended that the respondents have not prescribed any clear provision regarding the allocation or

distribution of seats among the three categories, nor have they specified any inter se priority or preference to be accorded to candidates belonging to the respective categories. Learned counsel submitted that the NET score and the interview score constitute distinct evaluation parameters and are not directly comparable unless an appropriate and uniform methodology is prescribed for their assessment. In the absence of clear rules governing the comparative evaluation of candidates belonging to different categories, the placement of all such candidates in a common merit list, without adhering to the distinct selection criteria applicable to each category, is arbitrary and contrary to the framework contemplated by the UGC.

9. Learned counsel for the petitioner clarified that the petitioner has not called into question the validity of the UGC scheme or the relevant University ordinances. Rather, the grievance of the petitioner is confined to the alleged failure of the respondents to implement and enforce the applicable provisions in their true letter and spirit. It is submitted that the UGC, by its public notice dated 27.03.2024, has expressly classified NET-qualified candidates into three distinct categories and prescribed different admission methodologies in recognition of the distinctions between the qualifications and eligibility criteria applicable to such candidates. Hence, the said classification and the corresponding evaluation criteria have been consciously formulated by the UGC for valid reasons and are required to be given effect to by the University without amalgamating the distinct categories or disregarding the methodology applicable to each of them. In support of the

submissions made insofar, learned counsel had placed reliance upon a catena of judgments, inter alia, Dr. S. Mohan vs. The Secretary to the Chancellor, Puducherry Technological University & Ors.: 2026 INSC 100; Krishna Rai (Dead) Through Lrs & Ors. Vs. Banaras Hindu University Through Registrar & Ors.: (2022) 8 SCC 713; Parmender Kumar & Ors. Vs. State of Haryana & Ors. : (2012) 1 SCC 177; Visvesaraya Technological University & Anr. Vs. Krishnendu Halder & Ors.: (2011) 4 SC 606; Professor Dr. Sreejith PS Vs. Dr. Rajasee MS & Ors.: 2022 INSC 1137; Annamalai University Vs. Secretary to Government, Information & Tourism Dept. & Ors.: (2009) 4 SCC 590; Mandeep Singh Vs. State of Punjab & Ors.: 2025 INSC 834; Divyot Sekhon Vs. State of Punjab & Ors.: 2026 INSC 26; Tej Prakash Pathak & Ors. Vs. Rajasthan High Court: (2025) 2 SCC 1; K. Manjusree Vs. State of Andhra Pradesh & Anr.: (2008) 3 SCC 512.

10. On the aforesaid grounds, and the judgments as relied upon, learned counsel for the petitioner submitted that the impugned merit list has been prepared by adopting an allegedly inconsistent and legally impermissible method of evaluation, thereby defeating the prescribed admission framework and prejudicing the petitioner's claim for admission despite his qualification under the JRF category. Thus, appropriate directions are warranted to ensure that the petitioner's candidature is considered in accordance with the applicable UGC Regulations, the public notice dated 27.03.2024 and the relevant provisions of the RUPA 2025 guidelines.

SUBMISSIONS ADVANCED BY THE LEARNED COUNSEL APPEARING ON BEHALF OF THE RESPONDENTS :

11. *Per contra,* learned counsel for the respondents submitted that the petitioner had been called for an interview on 28.07.2026 in accordance with the Ph.D. admission schedule uploaded by the Head of the Department of Economics. It was contended that, upon completion of the selection process, the merit list had been prepared strictly in accordance with the criteria prescribed under Rule 5.4 of Ordinance 124 governing admissions to the Ph.D. programme. The respondents maintained the selection process and the same had been conducted in accordance with the applicable rules and the prescribed procedure, and that no illegality or irregularity could be attributed to the preparation of the impugned merit list.

12. Learned counsel for the respondents further submitted that no separate quota or reservation of seats had been prescribed for candidates falling under Categories 1, 2 and 3, respectively. It was contended that the seats had been allocated discipline-wise and that the relevant seat matrix had been published by the University in advance. Accordingly, the admission process had been undertaken on the basis of the available seats in the respective disciplines and the selection criteria prescribed by the University, without any separate category-wise allocation of seats for the aforesaid categories of NET-qualified candidates. It was further contended that the petitioner had not challenged the validity of the basic Regulations governing the admission process and, therefore, could not seek to question the selection procedure

adopted by the University while leaving the underlying regulatory framework unchallenged. Thus, the present writ petition is not maintainable.

13. Learned counsel for the respondents also submitted that the petitioner had voluntarily participated in the selection process, appeared for the interview and subjected himself to the procedure prescribed by the University. Having participated in the process, the petitioner could not subsequently challenge its validity merely because he had not been selected. It was contended that an unsuccessful candidate could not, solely on account of an unfavourable outcome, seek to invalidate the entire selection process in the absence of any demonstrable illegality or violation of the applicable rules. Lastly, it was submitted that the petitioner had no vested right to seek a change in the mode or methodology of selection adopted by the University. Learned counsel contended that the determination of the admission procedure, the formulation of the selection criteria and the manner in which candidates were to be evaluated fell within the domain of the University, subject to the governing statutory and regulatory framework. It was argued that the petitioner could not insist upon the adoption of a particular mode of selection merely because it might have resulted in a more favourable outcome for him. In support of the submissions made, learned counsel had relied upon the ratio encapsulated in **Edulanti Kistamma (Dead) thr. LRs. And ors. v. S. Venkatareddy (Dead) thr. LRs. And ors. : AIR 2010 SC 313, Ramesh Chandra Shah and ors. v. Anil Joshi : (2013) 11 SCC 309** and **Taniya Malik V. The Registrar**

General of the High Court of Delhi : 2018 INSC 168. Accordingly, the respondents sought dismissal of the writ petition, contending that the selection process had been conducted in accordance with the prescribed procedure and that no interference by this Court was warranted.

DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS :

14. Upon consideration of the submissions advanced by learned counsel for the parties, the material available on record and the applicable statutory and regulatory framework, this Court finds that the controversy arising in the present petition lies within a narrow compass, namely, whether the University of Rajasthan was justified in preparing a common merit list for candidates falling under Categories 1, 2 and 3 of the UGC NET classification and determining their merit solely on the basis of interview marks, without giving effect to the distinct admission methodology applicable to the respective categories.

15. At the outset, this Court places on record its appreciation for the valuable assistance rendered by learned Amicus Curiae – Dr. Rudranshu Singh, whose erudite submissions and able assistance have greatly facilitated the Court in adjudicating the issues involved in the present matter. The Court acknowledges the diligent efforts undertaken by learned Amicus Curiae in elucidating the relevant statutory provisions and the applicable legal principles, thereby assisting the Court in arriving at an informed and considered determination. The Court expresses its gratitude to learned Amicus Curiae for the assistance rendered.

16. Qua the merits/demerits of the case, it is necessary to observe that the autonomy enjoyed by a university in academic matters is not absolute or unfettered. Such autonomy must be exercised within the bounds of the governing statutory provisions and binding regulations framed by the competent authority. The University Grants Commission (Minimum Standards and Procedure for Award of Ph.D. Degree) Regulations, 2022, and the subsequent public notice dated 27.03.2024, therefore, assume significance in determining the legality of the admission procedure adopted by the respondents.

17. In the ratio encapsulated in **Annamalai University v. Secretary to Government, Information and Tourism Department : (2009) 4 SCC 590,** the Hon'ble Supreme Court emphasised the binding character of the UGC framework and held, in substance, that mandatory requirements prescribed under the governing regulatory legislation could not be disregarded or rendered ineffective by action taken under another statutory framework. The aforesaid judgment reinforces the principle that institutional autonomy cannot be exercised in derogation of binding regulatory requirements.

18. Applying the aforesaid principles to the facts of the present case, this Court finds that the UGC public notice dated 27.03.2024 classified NET-qualified candidates into three distinct categories, namely, Category 1, comprising candidates qualified for JRF and appointment as Assistant Professor; Category 2, comprising candidates qualified for appointment as Assistant Professor and admission to Ph.D. programmes; and Category 3, comprising

candidates qualified for admission to Ph.D. programmes only. According to the petitioner's case, the said notice contemplated different admission methodologies for these categories, with Category 1 candidates being assessed on the basis of interview performance and Category 2 and Category 3 candidates being evaluated on the basis of a combined weightage of 70% for the NET score and 30% for the interview. For the sake of handiness the relevant extract from the public notice dated 27.03.2026 is reproduced hereinbelow:

> *"The determination of the eligibility of NET for different categories is summarised below:*

Qualified for	***Eligible for***		
	JRF	***Assistant Professor***	***PHD Admission***
Category-1: Award of JRF and appointment as Assistant	*Yes*	*Yes*	*Yes*
Category-2: Appointment as Assistant Professor and admission to PHD	*No*	*Yes*	*Yes*
Category-3: Admission to PHD only	*No*	*No*	*Yes*

> *The result of NET will be declared in percentile along with the marks obtained by a candidate to utilise the marks for admission to PhD.*
>
> *The JRF-qualified students are admitted into the PhD programme based on an interview as per the University Grants Commission (Minimum Standards and Procedures for PhD Degree) Regulations, 2022.*
>
> *For students who qualify in Categories 2 and 3, 70% weightage will be given for test scores and 30% weightage for the interview for admission to PhD programmes. The PhD admission will be based on the*

combined merit of NET marks and the marks obtained in the Interview/viva voce."

19. The distinction between these categories cannot be treated as merely descriptive or incidental. Where a competent regulatory authority has prescribed distinct categories accompanied by different evaluation methodologies, the authority entrusted with implementing the admission process is required to give due effect to such distinction. The expression *generalia specialibus non derogant,* which signifies that a general provision does not ordinarily override a special provision dealing with a specific subject, may appropriately guide the interpretation of the University's general admission provisions vis-a-vis the category-specific requirements, provided that the latter are found to be applicable and binding in the circumstances of the case.

20. Consequently, the absence of a separate category-wise quota or allocation of seats, as contended by the respondents, does not, by itself, resolve the controversy. The allocation of seats and the determination of merit are distinct aspects of the admission process. A common pool of seats may exist without necessarily requiring candidates belonging to different eligibility categories to be evaluated through an identical methodology, where the governing framework prescribes otherwise. The respondents were therefore required to demonstrate that the procedure adopted under Rule 5(iv) of Information Bulletin and 5.4 of the Ordinance 124 (Annexure 7) was consistent with the applicable UGC requirements and did not nullify the distinction recognised by the

UGC. For the sake of handiness the relevant extract from the Information Bulletin is reproduced hereinbelow:

> "5. The final merit list shall be prepared by the respective department based on the following criteria:
> (i) to (iii) xxx xxx xxx
> (iv) The Interview Score shall be 100 marks, and the Scheme of the interview shall be as provided under Table 1 of Clause 5.2.

Qualification For	**Marks Obtained (in NET or Equivalent National Test)**	**Interview**	**Total Score**
Category – I Candidates who qualify for similar National level tests fellowship/scholarship in UGC-NET /UGC-CSIR NET/GATE/CEED and and similar National level tests	Not applicable	100% weightage to Interview Score	100
Category-II Candidates who are eligible for (I) admission to PhD without JRF and (ii) appointment as Assistant Professor.	70% weightage of score/percentile obtained in the UGC-NET/UGC-CSIRNET /GATE CEED and similar National level tests	30% weightage to Interview Score	100
Category-IIII Candidates are eligible for admission to the PhD Programme only, and not for the award of JRF or appointment as Assistant Professor	70% weightage of score/percentile obtained in the UGC-NET/UGC-CSIRNET /GATE CEED and similar National level tests	30% weightage to Interview Score	100

21. This Court is also conscious of the settled principle that judicial interference in academic matters must be exercised with due restraint. Nevertheless, such restraint cannot be construed as an exemption from compliance with statutory or regulatory requirements. The issue before this Court is not whether the

University's academic assessment ought to be substituted by the Court's own assessment, but whether the selection procedure adopted by the University conformed to the applicable regulatory framework. The distinction is material; judicial review does not ordinarily extend to re-evaluating academic merit, but it does extend to examining whether the authority concerned acted within the limits of its legal powers and applied the prescribed criteria uniformly and lawfully.

22. The respondents' contention that the petitioner had participated in the selection process and could not subsequently challenge it merely because he remained unsuccessful also requires consideration in this context. However, the aforesaid principle cannot be applied mechanically without examining the nature of the challenge raised. In the present case, the petitioner has not sought to invalidate the UGC Regulations or the University's Ordinance on the ground that the prescribed criteria are inherently unreasonable. Rather, his grievance is that the respondents failed to implement the applicable regulatory framework in the manner contemplated therein. The petitioner had participated in the interview and, immediately upon publication of the merit list dated 10.08.2026, submitted a representation by email to the Vice-Chancellor on 11.08.2026. The present challenge, therefore, is directed against the legality of the implementation of the admission criteria and not merely against an unfavourable assessment of the petitioner's interview performance.

23. Accordingly, the principle of waiver or acquiescence cannot, by itself, foreclose judicial examination of an allegation that an admission authority has acted contrary to binding regulatory provisions. Participation in a selection process does not confer upon an authority the power to disregard mandatory legal requirements, nor does it necessarily validate an otherwise unlawful procedure.

24. This Court further finds that the petitioner's claim cannot be rejected merely on the ground that he possesses no vested right to admission. It is undoubtedly true that qualification in the UGC NET-JRF examination does not, by itself, confer an automatic or indefeasible right to secure admission to a Ph.D. programme. The petitioner nevertheless possesses the right to have his candidature considered in accordance with the eligibility conditions and evaluation methodology lawfully applicable to his category. The distinction is between claiming an unconditional right to admission and claiming a lawful and fair consideration for admission. The latter claim is amenable to judicial scrutiny where non-compliance with binding rules is established.

25. In view of the foregoing discussion, this Court is of the considered opinion that the impugned merit list cannot be sustained if, as alleged and borne out by the applicable provisions, the respondents have placed candidates belonging to all three categories in a common merit list and evaluated them exclusively on the basis of interview marks, without adhering to the distinct admission methodology prescribed for the respective categories. The respondents' reliance upon the absence of a category-wise

quota and upon the petitioner's participation in the selection process does not, in itself, answer the central question concerning compliance with the governing regulatory framework.

26. Consequently, the writ petitions are **allowed**. The impugned merit list dated 10.08.2026 is hereby quashed and set aside insofar as it affects the petitioner's candidature. The respondents are directed to reconsider the petitioner's candidature for admission to the Ph.D. programme in Economics under the JRF category in accordance with the applicable UGC Regulations, the public notice dated 27.03.2024, and the RUPA 2025 Information Bulletin, read with the corrigendum issued thereto.

27. The respondents shall undertake the requisite exercise by applying the evaluation methodology legally applicable to the petitioner's category. In undertaking such exercise, the respondents shall also ensure that the applicable criteria are interpreted consistently with the governing regulatory framework.

28. The provisional admission granted to the petitioner pursuant to the interim order dated 14.08.2026 shall abide by the outcome of the aforesaid exercise and the consequential decision taken by the respondents in accordance with law.

29. No orders are passed as to costs. Pending applications, if any, shall stand disposed.

30. A copy of the present judgment be separately placed in the connected petition.

(SAMEER JAIN),J

Preeti Asopa