



2026 INSC 549

REPORTABLE
IN THE SUPREME COURT OF INDIA
INHERENT JURISDICTION
SUO MOTO WRIT PETITION (CIVIL) NO. 2 OF 2026

**“IN RE: ILLEGAL SAND MINING IN THE NATIONAL
CHAMBAL SANCTUARY AND THREAT TO
ENDANGERED AQUATIC WILDLIFE”**

WITH

TRANSFERRED CASE (C) NO(S). 151 OF 2026

ORDER

Mehta, J.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. This Court *vide* order dated 14th May, 2026, upon consideration of the compliance affidavits filed by the States of Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, the note submitted by the learned *Amicus Curiae*, and the report of the Central Empowered Committee, recorded that while certain preliminary measures had been initiated by the concerned States in

furtherance of the directions previously issued by the Court *vide* order 17th April, 2026, the compliances undertaken thus far remained at a nascent stage and substantial measures were yet to be effectively operationalised at the ground level. The Court noted that the State of Madhya Pradesh had commenced the process for strengthening surveillance and enforcement mechanisms by initiating tenders for procurement and installation of requisite infrastructure, including high-resolution CCTV surveillance systems and allied technological mechanisms intended to facilitate effective monitoring of vulnerable stretches and routes prone to illegal sand mining activities. At the same time, the Court observed that, having regard to the seriousness and emergent nature of the issues involved and the continuing concerns relating to rampant illegal sand mining activities, further directions in the matter had become imperative.

2. The Court further expressed serious displeasure at the lacklustre response of the State of Rajasthan in failing to comply with the directions issued *vide* earlier orders dated 2nd April, 2026 and 17th April, 2026, and observed that the material

placed on record disclosed an abysmal state of compliance and complete lethargy in implementation of even the core directions issued by the Court. Upon consideration of the report submitted by the Central Empowered Committee, the Court recorded that despite identification of several vulnerable locations, adequate surveillance mechanisms, live monitoring systems, GPS integration measures, inter-State coordination protocols, and enforcement infrastructure had not been effectively established, thereby reflecting a disturbing degree of administrative apathy and institutional paralysis in addressing organized and brazen illegal mining activities within protected forest and wildlife conservation areas, resulting in grave ecological degradation and failure of effective enforcement.

3. The Court also took note of the alarming circumstances brought on record regarding the continued operation of a substantial number of unregistered and unidentified vehicles and earth moving machinery suspected of being engaged in illegal mining and transportation activities in blatant violation of the provisions of the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988 and the Central Motor Vehicles Rules, 1989.

The Court observed that the continued and unchecked movement of such vehicles within and around the National Chambal Gharial Sanctuary demonstrated a serious failure of enforcement and regulatory oversight and had evidently facilitated illegal mining and transportation activities in complete disregard of law. The Court further recorded that the inability of the enforcement machinery to identify, trace, or verify the ownership of such vehicles severely impeded effective interception, seizure, investigation, and prosecution, while simultaneously enabling organized illegal mining networks to operate with impunity and evade legal accountability. The Court additionally took note of the grave concerns arising from the extensive illegal excavation activities carried out in dangerously close proximity to the pillars and supporting structures of the bridge situated on National Highway-44 near the Morena-Dholpur border, thereby posing a serious threat to its structural integrity and gravely endangering public safety. The Court noted that the said illegal excavation activities had been verified during inspection conducted by the Central Empowered Committee and that such indiscriminate

mining operations continued unabated in the vicinity of the bridge, which constituted a vital inter-State connectivity link carrying substantial vehicular traffic on a daily basis.

4. In view of the aforesaid circumstances and the grave concerns arising therefrom, the Court proceeded to issue further mandates and directed the Additional Chief Secretary, Home Department; the Principal Secretary, Department of Mining and Geology; the Principal Secretary, Finance Department; the Principal Secretary, Forest, Environment and Climate Change Department; and the Principal Secretary, Transport and Road Safety Department, State of Rajasthan, to remain personally present before the Court along with comprehensive individual compliance affidavits indicating the steps undertaken in furtherance of the directions previously issued and the timelines for implementation of the remaining measures. The Court further directed the Principal Secretary, Transport and Road Safety Department, State of Madhya Pradesh, to remain personally present along with a detailed affidavit specifically addressing the issue concerning operation of unregistered and

unidentified vehicles and earthmoving machinery and the enforcement measures undertaken in that regard. The Court also directed impleadment of the National Highways Authority of India¹ as a party respondent and called upon the said Authority to place on record the measures undertaken or proposed to safeguard the structural integrity and security of the aforesaid bridge, including installation of appropriate CCTV surveillance and monitoring mechanisms in the concerned area. The matter was, thereafter, directed to be listed on 20th May, 2026 for further consideration.

5. When the matter was taken up for hearing on 20th May, 2026, all the officers who had been directed to remain personally present before the Court pursuant to the order dated 14th May, 2026 were present in Court. The learned *Amicus Curiae* apprised the Court that the State of Rajasthan had filed five separate affidavits through the concerned departments in compliance with the directions previously issued, and that the States of Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh had also placed on record

¹ For short, "NHAI".

their respective affidavits specifically dealing with the issue concerning operation of unregistered and unidentified vehicles allegedly engaged in illegal mining and transportation activities, as well as the enforcement measures undertaken and proposed in that regard. The learned *Amicus Curiae* further submitted a note furnishing a consolidated summary of the compliance affidavits filed by the respective States. This Court was also apprised by the learned *Amicus Curiae* that two interlocutory applications had been filed in the present proceedings, one on behalf of a Non-Governmental Organization, Conservation Action Trust², and the other on behalf of the Madhya Pradesh Forest Employees Association.³ Learned counsel appearing on behalf of the National Highways Authority of India also submitted an affidavit addressing the concerns relating to the structural integrity and security of the bridge situated on National Highway-44 near the Morena-Dholpur border and the measures proposed to be undertaken in that regard.

² Interlocutory Application No. 143798 of 2026.

³ Interlocutory Application No. 143904 of 2026.

II. Consideration of the Compliance Affidavits filed on behalf of States of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and National Highways Authority of India

A. State of Rajasthan

6. The State of Rajasthan has filed five separate compliance affidavits through the concerned departmental officials, namely, the Home Department, Finance Department, Forest Department, Transport and Road Safety Department, and the Mines and Geology Department. The affidavits disclose that, pursuant to the directions issued by this Court, the State has initiated certain measures towards strengthening surveillance and enforcement mechanisms in the affected areas. It has been stated that financial approval amounting to approximately Rs. 65.47 crores has been accorded for installation of IT-enabled surveillance and monitoring systems by the Forest Department. The State has further proposed installation of 118 CCTV cameras across five vulnerable routes, which are

intended to be integrated with the existing “Abhay Command Centre” surveillance programme, for which additional financial sanction of Rs. 30 lakhs has also been granted. The material placed on record further indicates that financial approval to the tune of Rs. 2.5 crores has been accorded for hiring of vehicles and procurement of equipment necessary for enforcement operations and that CCTV monitoring on the transportation route from Dholpur to Agra has already been made operational through approximately 50 CCTV cameras.

7. The affidavits further disclose that Rajasthan Armed Constabulary battalions have been deployed at vantage points for effective prevention and control of illegal mining activities and that 40 vulnerable locations across the sanctuary region within the State have been identified for focused surveillance and enforcement action. It has also been stated that 24 permanent camps and 7 temporary check-posts have been established at critical locations to monitor and prevent illegal mining and transportation activities. The Forest Department has additionally stated that no action has been undertaken pursuant to the notification dated 23rd December, 2025 after

passing of the order dated 2nd April, 2026 and that all further proceedings pursuant thereto have been kept in abeyance subject to final orders of this Court.

8. The State of Rajasthan has further placed on record statistical data pertaining to FIRs registered, arrests effected and vehicles seized in relation to illegal mining activities in the concerned districts. According to the data furnished by the Home Department, in the district of Dholpur alone, 625 FIRs were registered, 630 arrests were effected and 688 vehicles were seized between the years 2023 to 2025, while during the year 2026, 105 FIRs have been registered, 95 arrests effected and 129 vehicles seized. Similarly, in Karauli district, 39 FIRs were registered, 88 arrests effected and 64 vehicles seized during the period 2023-2025, while in the year 2026, 13 FIRs have been registered, 11 arrests effected and 13 vehicles seized. The data further discloses that in Kota district, 28 FIRs were registered, 48 arrests effected and 31 vehicles seized during the period 2023-2025, whereas in the year 2026, 5 FIRs have been registered, 3 arrests effected and 5 vehicles seized. In Bundi district, 12 FIRs were registered, 18 arrests effected and 13 vehicles seized during the

period 2023-2025, while in the year 2026, 1 FIR has been registered, 1 arrest effected and 1 vehicle seized. The Forest Department has further placed on record that 55 cases of illegal mining were detected during the financial year 2023-2024, 50 cases during 2024-2025, 83 cases during 2025-2026 and 26 cases during 2026-2027, pursuant to which FIRs were registered and vehicles involved in such activities were seized by the concerned authorities.

9. The affidavits further indicate that steps have now been initiated towards implementation of the directions contained in the order dated 17th April, 2026. In this regard, directions have been issued authorising initiation of the tender process for installation of CCTV cameras across multiple districts, while the Director General of Police, Rajasthan, has issued instructions for continuous monitoring of transportation of illegally mined sand through the Abhay Command Centres and deployed enforcement squads. It has further been stated that the newly installed cameras shall in future also be linked to the centralised control system established by the Forest Department at its Headquarters. The Transport and Road Safety Department has issued

directions to the Regional Transport Officers for taking action under the provisions of the Motor Vehicles Act against vehicles involved in illegal mining activities, while the Department of Mines and Geology has directed immediate seizure of vehicles and machinery found involved in illegal sand mining operations. The State has also constituted District Level Task Forces in Dholpur, Sawai Madhopur, Kota, Bundi and Karauli under the chairmanship of the respective District Collectors for coordinated enforcement operations amongst the Forest, Police and district authorities and has sought assistance from the Wildlife Institute of India for preparation of an appropriate conservation plan.

B. State of Uttar Pradesh

10. The affidavit filed on behalf of the State of Uttar Pradesh indicates that action against vehicles operating without registration particulars or number plates is being undertaken through coordinated efforts of the Police Department, Transport Department and Mining Department. It has been stated that during the period from 1st April, 2026 to 15th May, 2026, the Transport Department in District Agra issued challans to 69 vehicles operating without

High Security Registration Plate (HSRP) number plates, seized or impounded 9 vehicles, and recovered approximately Rs. 1.70 lakhs by way of compounding fees. The affidavit further records that, according to the Senior Mines Officer, no case involving transportation of illegally mined material outside the National Chambal Gharial Sanctuary area had come to light during the financial years 2025-2026 and 2026-2027 up to the relevant date.

11. The affidavit additionally places on record details of criminal proceedings initiated in relation to illegal mining activities within the Agra Commissionerate region. It has been stated that in the West Zone, Commissionerate Agra, a total of 83 cases under the Mining Act were registered between the year 2021 and 30th April, 2026, out of which 81 chargesheets and 2 final reports have already been submitted before the competent Court, and 620 challans have been issued upon detection of irregularities. Similarly, in the City Zone, Commissionerate Agra, 36 cases under the Mining Act were registered during the said period, out of which 33 chargesheets and 2 final reports have been submitted, while investigation in one case remains

pending. The affidavit further records that 689 challans have been issued in the City Zone upon detection of irregularities.

C. State of Madhya Pradesh

12. The State of Madhya Pradesh has filed an affidavit in continuation of its earlier affidavit dated 9th May, 2026. The affidavit discloses that action taken reports were sought from the Collectors and Superintendents of Police of the concerned districts and that the same were received on 18th May, 2026. The material placed on record indicates that substantial enforcement action has been undertaken during the preceding month, particularly in the district of Morena, where approximately 1641 vehicles were challaned and an amount of approximately Rs. 23.55 lakhs was recovered by way of penalties and compounding fees.

13. The affidavit further states that the State has proposed establishment of static check-points at eight identified locations within the districts of Bhind, Morena and Sheopur for strengthening surveillance and enforcement mechanisms in the affected areas and has sought a period of thirty days for operationalisation of the said measures. However,

it is evident that the specific issue concerning operation of vehicles without registration number plates and other violations of the provisions of the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988 has not been comprehensively addressed in the affidavit placed on record.

D. National Highways Authority of India

14. The affidavit states that the bridge situated at Chainage Km. 59+400 to Km. 60+000 on the Morena-Dholpur section of National Highway-44 over the Chambal River constitutes a vital inter-State connectivity structure carrying substantial vehicular traffic between the States of Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. It has been asserted that the NHAI remains conscious of the seriousness of the concerns expressed by this Court regarding illegal sand mining activities in the vicinity of the bridge foundations and has reiterated its commitment towards ensuring the safety, structural integrity and uninterrupted operation of the National Highway infrastructure under its jurisdiction. At the same time, the NHAI has stated that regulation and enforcement against illegal riverbed mining activities fall primarily within the jurisdiction of the concerned local and statutory

authorities, including the Mining Department, District Administration, Forest Department, Irrigation Department and other regulatory agencies, and that the role of the NHAI is confined to maintenance and management of National Highway infrastructure within the Right of Way.

15. The material placed on record further indicates that upon receipt of reports regarding alleged illegal excavation activities in the vicinity of the bridge foundations, the matter was examined by the NHAI through its field officials, Operation and Maintenance Contractor and the Independent Engineer. It has been stated that *vide* communication dated 10th April, 2026, the matter was brought to the notice of the District Collector, Morena, and that a preliminary report submitted by the Independent Engineer, namely, M/s L.N. Malviya Infrastructure Pvt. Ltd. in association with CASTA Engineering Pvt. Ltd., did not reveal any serious structural issue affecting the bridge as per the applicable technical parameters. Thereafter, the Regional Office of the NHAI at Bhopal constituted a Committee comprising representatives of the Public Works Department, MPRDC Morena, the Independent Engineer and officials of the NHAI for

conducting a detailed site inspection of the bridge foundations. Pursuant thereto, a joint inspection was carried out on 15th April, 2026, whereupon it was observed that the prevailing scour levels remained within permissible design limits and that the bridge continued to be safe for operation of present traffic. It has further been observed in the inspection report that, in accordance with prevailing Ministry of Road Transport and Highways/NHAI practices, no mining activity ought to be carried out within 1 kilometre upstream and 0.5 kilometre downstream of bridge structures so as to prevent adverse scouring and ensure long-term safety of bridge foundations.

16. The affidavit further discloses that, in view of the seriousness of the situation, the NHAI addressed communications to the Divisional Forest Officer, Morena, and other concerned local authorities requesting immediate intervention for protection of the riverbed, active water flow and ecology of the National Chambal Gharial Sanctuary from illegal and unauthorized excavation activities in the vicinity of the bridge structure. It has additionally been stated that upon receiving communication from the Deputy Conservator of Forest (Wildlife), Dholpur regarding

repair and monitoring of the Chambal bridge structure, the NHAI informed the concerned concessionaire, namely, M/s Agra Gwalior Highway Private Limited, that installation of CCTV surveillance infrastructure on the Morena-Dholpur section of National Highway-44, including the bridge area, was required to be implemented on priority. Directions in that regard were also issued to the Operation and Maintenance Contractor as well as the Independent Engineer for time-bound monitoring and compliance.

17. The affidavit further indicates that the NHAI has proposed and undertaken various structural safety, monitoring and surveillance measures in relation to the bridge in question. It has been stated that periodic technical inspections of the bridge foundations and surrounding riverbed profile shall continue to be undertaken through the NHAI officials, Independent Engineers and technical experts and that scour levels and hydraulic conditions around vulnerable piers shall be continuously monitored, particularly before and after monsoon periods. It has further been stated that immediate remedial and protective measures shall be

undertaken in the event any abnormal scour, erosion or structural vulnerability is detected. The NHAI has also stated that coordination mechanisms with the concerned local authorities shall continue for prompt reporting of illegal excavation activities noticed near the bridge structure and that highway patrolling teams have already been deployed on the Agra-Gwalior section of National Highway-44 for regular monitoring of the bridge area. The affidavit finally records that, as per the latest technical inspection available on record, the bridge presently remains structurally safe for operation and no immediate structural distress threatening operational safety has been reported.

III. Assessment of Compliance and Necessity of Further Judicial Intervention

18. We have heard the submissions advanced by the learned *Amicus Curiae*, Mr. Nikhil Goel, Senior Advocate, and Ms. Rupali Samuel, learned Advocate-on-Record; Mr. C.P. Goyal appearing on behalf of the Central Empowered Committee; Ms. Aishwarya Bhati, learned Additional Solicitor General and Mr. Shiv Mangal Sharma, learned Additional

Advocate General appearing for the State of Rajasthan; Mr. S.V. Raju, learned Additional Solicitor General appearing for the State of Madhya Pradesh; Ms. Ruchira Goel, learned counsel appearing for the State of Uttar Pradesh; and Ms. Madhu Sweta, learned counsel appearing for the NHA.

19. Having given anxious consideration to the compliance affidavits placed on record by the State of Rajasthan, this Court finds that, subsequent to the order dated 14th May, 2026, certain significant measures have now been initiated by the concerned departments towards strengthening surveillance, enforcement and inter-departmental coordination mechanisms in the affected regions. The material placed before this Court indicates that substantial financial sanctions have now been accorded for establishment of IT-enabled surveillance infrastructure, including installation of CCTV cameras across vulnerable stretches and transportation routes; District Level Task Forces have been constituted for coordinated enforcement operations; permanent camps and temporary check-posts have been established at critical locations; and directions have been issued for strict enforcement

action against vehicles and machinery found involved in illegal mining activities. The Court also takes note of the steps now being undertaken for integration of surveillance systems with centralized command and monitoring mechanisms as well as the efforts initiated towards preparation of an appropriate conservation plan in consultation with expert institutions.

20. At the same time, this Court cannot overlook the fact that the affidavits filed by the State of Rajasthan themselves indicate substantially prolonged timelines for implementation of several critical measures proposed therein. The material placed on record discloses that establishment and operationalisation of CCTV surveillance systems, integrated monitoring infrastructure and certain allied technological mechanisms are proposed to be completed over a period extending between 18 to 36 months. Similar timelines have also been indicated in relation to recruitment and augmentation of forest protection personnel, including Forest Guards. In the considered view of this Court, such timelines do not comport with the emergent nature of the situation presently prevailing in the affected regions. The

continuing illegal mining activities, ongoing ecological degradation, destruction of protected wildlife habitats and risks posed to public infrastructure cannot brook prolonged administrative delays in implementation of essential surveillance and enforcement mechanisms. Measures intended to secure ecologically sensitive areas and ensure effective enforcement of law must be undertaken with a sense of immediacy and institutional urgency and cannot remain deferred over extended periods while illegal activities continue unabated on the ground.

21. This Court further notes that the affidavits now filed disclose a degree of administrative movement and institutional coordination which was conspicuously absent when the matter was previously considered. The fact that multiple departments of the State have now come forward with specific proposals, enforcement measures, budgetary allocations and operational plans demonstrates that the gravity of the situation has at least now been acknowledged at the appropriate administrative levels. The statistical data relating to FIRs registered, arrests effected and vehicles seized in connection

with illegal mining activities also indicates that enforcement measures are now being undertaken with greater seriousness in certain affected districts. These developments, though undoubtedly belated, constitute a step in the correct direction and deserve to be noticed by this Court.

22. However, while taking note of the aforesaid measures, this Court cannot ignore the disturbing fact that a substantial number of the actions now projected before this Court appear to have been initiated only after stringent directions were issued requiring personal presence of senior officers of the State of Rajasthan before this Court. The chronology emerging from the record *prima facie* indicates that several crucial decisions relating to surveillance infrastructure, constitution of enforcement mechanisms, operational coordination, seizure protocols and inter-departmental action plans were undertaken only after judicial intervention assumed a more coercive and supervisory character. Such a state of affairs reveals an apathic administrative tendency which responds to grave environmental and governance issues only upon direct judicial scrutiny

and compulsion, rather than through timely institutional initiative and responsible governance.

23. The issues arising in the present proceedings are not isolated instances of regulatory breach but concern continuing ecological destruction, degradation of protected wildlife habitats, organized illegal mining operations, erosion of public infrastructure, and a serious breakdown of the rule of law in ecologically sensitive regions. Such concerns require an unabated, sustained, vigilant and proactive institutional response from the State machinery at all levels. Environmental governance cannot be reduced to a reactive exercise undertaken only after repeated judicial intervention or upon threat of personal accountability before constitutional Courts. The constitutional obligations flowing from Articles 21, 48A and 51A(g) of the Constitution of India cast a continuing duty upon the State and its instrumentalities to anticipate environmental harm, prevent ecological degradation and ensure preservation of fragile ecosystems through effective governance and enforcement. This Court, therefore, expects that the measures now initiated by the States shall not remain confined to

affidavits, proposals or temporary compliance exercises as defensive responses to the present proceedings, but shall be translated into concrete, continuous and time-bound action on the ground through active monitoring, institutional accountability and sustained enforcement so as to effectively curb the continuing menace of illegal sand mining activities within and around the National Chambal Gharial Sanctuary.

24. At this stage, this Court is constrained to observe that the compliance affidavits filed by the States of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh do not satisfactorily address the specific issue concerning operation of unregistered and unidentified vehicles allegedly engaged in illegal mining and transportation activities, nor do they disclose any concrete or effective enforcement framework evolved for dealing with such violations. While the affidavits broadly refer to challans issued, penalties recovered and general enforcement measures undertaken by the authorities concerned, the material placed on record does not indicate the existence of any systematic mechanism for identification, seizure, blacklisting, confiscation of

vehicles or prosecution of owners of the vehicle operating without registration particulars in blatant violation of the provisions of the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988 and the Central Motor Vehicles Rules, 1989. The continued operation of such unidentified vehicles in ecologically sensitive regions and protected sanctuary areas raises serious concerns regarding both regulatory failure and possible facilitation of organized illegal mining activities through deliberate evasion of legal accountability.

25. The statistics placed on record by the State of Madhya Pradesh themselves reveal the inadequacy of the enforcement measures presently being undertaken. The material furnished before this Court indicates that during the first five months of the current year, more than 250 vehicles were challaned for violations under Section 192 of the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988 which deals with operation of vehicles without valid registration. However, it appears that the said vehicles were merely released upon payment of fines to the tune of approximately Rs. 5,000/- and no further coercive or deterrent action was initiated either against the drivers or the owners of such vehicles. The record does not disclose initiation of

prosecution proceedings, seizure and confiscation measures, suspension of permits, investigation into ownership patterns, or any attempt to identify whether such vehicles were repeatedly involved in illegal mining and transportation activities.

26. This Court also takes note of the submission made on behalf of the State of Madhya Pradesh that static check-points are proposed to be established at eight identified locations within the districts of Bhind, Morena and Sheopur for strengthening surveillance and enforcement mechanisms in the affected areas. It has further been submitted on behalf of all the concerned States that measures are also being contemplated to ensure that no fuel is supplied to vehicles not displaying authentic registration particulars or otherwise found operating in violation of the provisions of the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988 and the Central Motor Vehicles Rules, 1989 and involved in illegal mining and transportation activities. While such measures may constitute preliminary superficial regulatory and monitoring mechanisms, this Court is of the considered opinion that the same, by themselves, would be wholly insufficient to effectively address the magnitude,

organized nature and continuing impunity with which illegal mining operations are being carried out in the region. Mere establishment of check-posts, issuance of challans or ancillary restrictions relating to fuel supply, without stringent and immediate coercive action against the offending vehicles and their operators, and more particularly, the behind the scene kingpins is unlikely to produce any meaningful deterrent effect. In the considered view of this Court, unless vehicles found repeatedly involved in illegal mining and transportation activities are subjected to immediate seizure, confiscation and denial of release except in accordance with law, the existing enforcement framework would continue to remain ineffective and incapable of curbing organized environmental crime being perpetrated in the affected regions.

27. This Court is of the considered view that the issue under consideration transcends the realm of routine traffic regulations or isolated instances of statutory non-compliance. The operation of vehicles without registration particulars in and around regions affected by rampant illegal mining activities constitutes a serious law enforcement concern

having direct nexus with organized illegal mining operations and systematic evasion of regulatory oversight. Permitting such vehicles to continue operations merely upon payment of nominal monetary penalties not only defeats the object and purpose of the statutory framework but also creates an atmosphere of complete impunity wherein illegal mining networks are able to treat penal consequences as insignificant operational costs. Effective enforcement in such matters necessarily requires a far more stringent, coordinated and deterrent approach involving immediate seizure, prosecution, tracing of ownership networks, cancellation of permits and accountability of officials responsible for permitting continued operation of such unidentified vehicles in the affected regions.

28. Another serious issue which was highlighted during the course of hearing concerns the substantial vacancies presently existing in the Forest Departments of the concerned States, particularly in relation to field-level personnel, including Forest Guards and other frontline enforcement staff entrusted with protection and monitoring duties within the sanctuary and adjoining regions. The

material placed on record *prima facie* indicates that a significant number of sanctioned posts continue to remain vacant for prolonged periods, thereby severely affecting the capacity of the field machinery to undertake effective surveillance, patrolling, interception and enforcement operations in areas affected by rampant illegal mining activities.

29. This Court is of the considered view that effective environmental governance and protection of ecologically sensitive regions cannot be ensured merely through issuance of administrative directions or installation of technological infrastructure in the absence of an adequately staffed and functional field enforcement mechanism. Frontline personnel such as Forest Guards constitute the first and most critical layer of protection against illegal mining, encroachments and destruction of wildlife habitats. Persistent vacancies in such posts inevitably weaken institutional capacity on the ground and substantially impede timely detection, prevention and enforcement action against illegal activities being carried out within protected areas.

30. The continuing existence of large-scale vacancies in the enforcement machinery, despite the

grave and recurring nature of the issues involved in the present proceedings, reflects a serious institutional deficiency which requires immediate attention at the highest administrative levels. The States are under a continuing obligation to ensure adequate augmentation and strengthening of the enforcement machinery entrusted with protection of ecologically sensitive regions and implementation of environmental and mining laws. Effective surveillance, patrolling and enforcement operations cannot be sustained in the absence of sufficient field-level personnel and functional administrative infrastructure. The existence of huge vacancies in critical posts such as Forest Guards and other frontline enforcement personnel inevitably weaken the capacity of the State machinery to effectively monitor vulnerable areas, prevent illegal mining activities and ensure timely enforcement action on the ground.

31. During the course of hearing, this Court also interacted with the Additional Chief Secretary, Forest, Environment and Climate Change Department, State of Rajasthan, who fairly conceded that substantial vacancies presently exist in the

cadre of Forest Guards and other field-level personnel entrusted with enforcement and protection duties in the affected regions. It was further submitted that the last recruitment for the post of Forest Guards had been undertaken approximately four years ago and that requisitions for recruitment to various posts within the Forest Department had already been forwarded to the concerned recruitment agency in the year 2025. However, despite the continuing and grave concerns arising from rampant illegal mining activities and degradation of protected forest areas, no effective progress appears to have been made in expediting the recruitment process, which *prima facie* appears to be proceeding at an unduly slow pace. The aforesaid state of affairs reflects a disturbing degree of administrative lethargy and lack of institutional urgency in addressing critical deficiencies within the enforcement machinery entrusted with protection of ecologically sensitive regions and implementation of environmental laws.

32. This Court is of the considered view that any level of technological initiatives such as CCTV surveillance systems, monitoring infrastructure and control centres, though necessary, cannot by

themselves act as a substitute for an adequately staffed and operational field enforcement mechanism. The efficacy of surveillance and enforcement ultimately depends upon the existence of trained personnel capable of carrying out regular patrolling, interception, seizure operations and coordinated enforcement action in difficult and vulnerable terrain. The States must, therefore, undertake urgent and time-bound measures for filling up vacant posts in the Forest Department and allied enforcement agencies and ensure that the enforcement framework in the affected regions is meaningfully strengthened both in terms of infrastructure as well as manpower so as to effectively curb the continuing menace of illegal mining activities.

33. Now, coming to the issue concerning extensive excavation and illegal mining activities in and around the bridge situated on the Morena-Dholpur section of National Highway-44 over the Chambal River, as well as the affidavit filed by the National Highways Authority of India pursuant to the directions issued by this Court *vide* order dated 14th May, 2026. It emerges from the material placed on record that,

upon receiving information regarding illegal excavation activities in the vicinity of the bridge foundations, the matter was examined through field officials, the Operation and Maintenance Contractor and the Independent Engineer. The affidavit discloses that communications were addressed to the concerned District Authorities and Forest Officials highlighting the issue and seeking immediate intervention. A joint inspection of the bridge foundations was also conducted through a Committee comprising representatives of the NHAI, the Public Works Department, MPRDC and the Independent Engineer, pursuant where to it was opined that the prevailing scour levels remained within permissible limits and that the bridge presently continued to remain structurally safe for flow of traffic. The affidavit further indicates that directions have been issued to the concerned concessionaire, namely, M/s Agra Gwalior Highway Private Limited, for installation of CCTV surveillance infrastructure on the Morena-Dholpur section of National Highway-44, including the bridge area, and that highway patrolling teams have also been

deployed for regular monitoring of the stretch concerned.

34. The NHAI has further sought to contend that regulation and enforcement against illegal mining activities primarily fall within the domain of the concerned departments and statutory authorities of the respective States, including the Mining Department, Forest Department, District Administration and Police Authorities, and that the role of the NHAI is essentially confined to maintenance and management of the National Highway infrastructure within the Right of Way. It has additionally been stated that surveillance and monitoring obligations in relation to the highway stretch are being undertaken through the concerned concessionaire and the Operation and Maintenance Contractor entrusted with maintenance of the said National Highway section.

35. While this Court takes note of the stand taken by the NHAI that regulation and enforcement against illegal mining activities primarily fall within the domain of the concerned State authorities, it cannot lose sight of the fact that the NHAI, being a statutory authority entrusted with development, maintenance

and management of National Highway infrastructure, cannot absolve itself of the responsibility of safeguarding infrastructure under its control from activities that pose a foreseeable threat to its safety, stability and long-term structural integrity. The material placed on record, including the inspection reports and observations recorded in the earlier orders of this Court, *prima facie* indicates that extensive illegal excavation and mining activities have been carried out in dangerous proximity to, and in certain instances even beneath, the pillars and supporting structures of the bridge situated on National Highway-44 near the Morena-Dholpur border.

36. The indiscriminate and continuing excavation of riverbed material in the vicinity of the bridge is liable to alter the river morphology, aggravate scouring around the foundations and adversely affect the stability of the bridge over a period of time. The issue, therefore, transcends a mere question of routine maintenance and directly implicates concerns relating to public safety, uninterrupted inter-State connectivity and protection of critical public infrastructure. Once serious concerns regarding

illegal excavation activities in the immediate vicinity of the bridge were brought to the notice of the NHAI, a corresponding obligation arose upon the Authority, as well as the concessionaire entrusted with operation and maintenance of the highway stretch, to take all reasonable preventive, protective and surveillance measures necessary to safeguard the bridge and ensure its long-term structural security. The obligation to maintain safe transportation infrastructure necessarily includes a duty to anticipate and address external threats capable of compromising such infrastructure and cannot be confined to undertaking remedial measures only after damage has already occurred.

37. In the considered view of this Court, the prevailing circumstances necessitate a far more vigilant, proactive and technologically integrated surveillance framework in and around the bridge area. The NHAI and the concerned concessionaire cannot adopt a passive approach by merely reporting instances of illegal mining to the State authorities. Effective protection of the bridge requires continuous monitoring, timely detection of violations and coordinated preventive action aimed at ensuring that

illegal mining and excavation activities are not permitted to endanger the structural integrity of the bridge and the National Highway infrastructure connected therewith. The material placed on record indicates that installation of robust surveillance infrastructure and real-time monitoring systems has now become indispensable not only for purposes of curbing illegal mining activities but equally for ensuring long-term protection of the bridge and the safety of the travelling public. In this regard, the NHAI, in consultation/collaboration with the concerned concessionaire, shall ensure the establishment and augmentation of surveillance infrastructure, including installation of CCTV cameras, monitoring systems and allied protective measures in and around the bridge area.

38. The Central Empowered Committee has also highlighted another matter of serious concern relating to dumping of waste into the Chambal River from the bridge spanning the river. The Central Empowered Committee has recorded that during its site visit, substantial quantities of waste were found being discarded into the river from the bridge by commuters and travellers. It was observed that

various kinds of waste material were being thrown through gaps and openings in the protective railings and barriers installed on both sides of the bridge. The material placed on record, including photographic evidence, reveals accumulation of waste at the base of bridge piers and the existence of visible gaps in the protective structures through which such waste is being routinely discarded. The photographs also depict aquatic wildlife, including crocodiles and muggers, in close proximity to such accumulated waste, thereby underscoring the adverse impact of such activities upon the fragile riverine ecosystem. The observations of the Central Empowered Committee disclose a disturbing state of affairs and indicate a continuing threat to the ecological integrity of the Chambal River and the National Chambal Gharial Sanctuary.

39. Another issue of considerable significance has been highlighted by the Central Empowered Committee in its Report dated 7th May, 2026, concerns the maintenance of Environmental Flows (“E-Flows”) in the Chambal River and its tributaries. The material placed on record indicates that environmental flow is not merely a question of water

availability but relates to maintenance of the quantity, timing, depth and seasonal flow patterns necessary to sustain the ecological integrity of the riverine ecosystem, including habitat connectivity, breeding grounds, nesting islands, aquatic biodiversity and overall geomorphological stability of the National Chambal Gharial Sanctuary. The Central Empowered Committee has, in this regard, relied upon the scientific assessment undertaken by the Wildlife Institute of India concerning the ecological status of the Chambal River and the requirements necessary for maintaining viable habitats for endangered riverine species.

40. The scientific assessment referred to by the Central Empowered Committee indicates that while monsoon flows in the Chambal River have not witnessed any substantial long-term decline, there has been a significant reduction in lean-season and summer flows over the last three decades. The report records that discharge levels progressively decline from November onwards and approach critically low levels during the summer months, resulting in habitat fragmentation, reduction in dissolved oxygen levels, increase in water temperatures and severe

restrictions upon movement of aquatic fauna. The report further highlights that major hydraulic structures and water regulation projects (Dams) have significantly affected downstream flows and that the Chambal River is becoming increasingly dependent upon its tributaries for maintenance of ecological flows during the lean season. The assessment cautions that any further interception, abstraction or diversion of tributary flows may result in seasonal fragmentation of the river system with serious ecological consequences for species such as gharials, dolphins, freshwater turtles and several avian species dependent upon the riverine ecosystem.

41. The Central Empowered Committee has also drawn attention to the deliberations of the Standing Committee of the National Board for Wildlife in its 90th meeting held on 6th April, 2026, wherein the findings of the Wildlife Institute of India were considered in the presence of the Central Water Commission and other stakeholders. The material placed on record indicates that both the Wildlife Institute of India and the Central Water Commission emphasized the necessity of maintaining scientifically determined environmental flows in the

Chambal River and recommended a basin-level assessment involving all relevant stakeholders. The recommendation of the Central Empowered Committee is that the Wildlife Institute of India, in coordination with the Ministry of Jal Shakti, the Central Water Commission and the concerned States, should undertake a basin-level assessment regarding maintenance of minimum environmental flows in the Chambal River and its tributaries and that, pending such assessment, no project adversely affecting ecological flows within the National Chambal Gharial Sanctuary should be permitted except essential drinking water projects where no viable alternative exists.

42. Another issue which merits consideration concerns the notification issued by the State of Rajasthan seeking de-notification of a portion of land forming part of the National Chambal Gharial Sanctuary. This Court was earlier apprised that approximately 732 hectares of land falling within the Sanctuary area was sought to be de-notified by virtue of the notification dated 23rd December, 2025, published on 9th March, 2026 under Section 18 of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972. Having regard to the

serious environmental implications arising from the proposed reduction of the Sanctuary area, this Court, *vide* order dated 2nd April, 2026, directed that the aforesaid notification shall remain stayed.

43. Pursuant thereto, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change⁴ has placed on record its reply dated 19th May, 2026 stating that this Court, by order dated 13th November, 2000 passed in Writ Petition (Civil) No. 337 of 1995, had directed that, pending further orders, no de-reservation of forests, sanctuaries or national parks shall be effected. The MoEF&CC has further pointed out that under the Guidelines dated 15th March, 2011 issued by it, any proposal for de-notification of a wildlife sanctuary, after obtaining recommendation of the Standing Committee of the National Board for Wildlife, is required to be placed before this Court for obtaining final approval in view of the aforesaid order dated 13th November, 2000. The Ministry has specifically relied upon the stipulation contained in the said Guidelines that, after recommendation by the Standing Committee of the National Board for Wildlife, the

⁴ For short, "MoEF&CC".

State Government or user agency is required to approach this Court for final clearance before any de-notification of a wildlife sanctuary can be undertaken.

44. The stand taken by the MoEF&CC raises substantial issues touching upon the legality of the impugned notification and the procedure required to be followed before any portion of a notified wildlife sanctuary can be de-notified. Since the notification presently remains stayed by virtue of the order dated 2nd April, 2026, the issue shall be considered on the next date after the concerned parties place their respective stands on record.

IV. Operative Directions and Further Measures

45. In view of the aforesaid discussion, the material placed on record, the compliance affidavits filed by the respective States and the NHAI, and having regard to the continuing and grave concerns relating to rampant illegal sand mining activities, degradation of protected wildlife habitats, operation of unregistered and unidentified vehicles, inadequacy of enforcement mechanisms and the threat posed to critical public infrastructure in the affected regions,

this Court is of the considered opinion that further directions have become necessary to ensure effective enforcement, institutional accountability and immediate operationalisation of surveillance and preventive measures on the ground. Accordingly, in exercise of the powers conferred upon this Court under Article 142 of the Constitution of India, and with a view to ensuring complete justice and effective implementation of environmental and statutory safeguards in the affected regions, the following directions are issued: -

A. The States of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh are directed to undertake immediate and effective steps for augmentation of the field-level enforcement officials in the respective Forest Departments, including recruitment to vacant posts of Forest Guards and other frontline enforcement personnel entrusted with protection, surveillance and patrolling duties in the affected regions. The recruitment process in respect of such posts shall be expedited and the concerned States shall ensure that the process for recruitment and filling up of vacant posts is initiated forthwith and completed, as far as

practicable, within a period of one year from the date of this Order. We, therefore, direct the Chief Secretaries of all the three States i.e., Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, to file affidavits detailing concrete measures for advance identification of vacancies and initiation of recruitment process so that these crucial posts do not remain vacant except under compelling circumstances.

B. The States of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh shall take immediate and effective steps for establishment and operationalisation of surveillance and monitoring infrastructure in the affected regions, including CCTV surveillance systems, integrated monitoring mechanisms, control centres and allied technological infrastructure. The said process shall be undertaken on a war footing and all substantial surveillance measures proposed pursuant to the earlier orders of this Court shall be fast-tracked and operationalised, as far as practicable, within a period of six months from the date of this Order.

C. The concerned authorities of the States of Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh

are directed to undertake stringent, continuous and coordinated enforcement action against vehicles and machinery involved in illegal mining and transportation activities within and around the affected regions of the National Chambal Gharial Sanctuary. The concerned authorities shall ensure immediate interception, seizure and initiation of confiscation proceedings, in accordance with law, against all vehicles including tractors, trolleys, excavators, dredgers, dumpers, loaders and other machinery found operating without valid registration particulars, with fake or tampered number plates, without display of registration marks, or otherwise in violation of the provisions of the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988 and the Central Motor Vehicles Rules, 1989.

D. The concerned States shall ensure initiation of appropriate criminal prosecution under the relevant provisions of the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988; the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023; the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957; and other applicable statutory enactments, not merely against the drivers of the vehicles involved in illegal mining and

transportation activities, but also against the owners, financiers, operators, contractors and all other persons forming part of, facilitating or otherwise connected with the organized illegal mining network operating in the affected regions.

E. The concerned States shall ensure that all FIRs and criminal proceedings relating to illegal mining and transportation activities are effectively and comprehensively investigated not merely against the drivers of the vehicles involved, but also against the owners, financiers, operators, contractors and all other persons involved in organizing, facilitating, financing or otherwise benefiting from such illegal mining operations, including identification of ownership networks and financial beneficiaries connected therewith. The concerned authorities shall further maintain complete digital records pertaining to seizure operations, confiscation proceedings, ownership details, prior violations, criminal antecedents and consequential enforcement action undertaken in respect of such vehicles and machinery so as to facilitate coordinated investigation, monitoring

and effective prosecution of persons involved in organized illegal mining activities.

F. Having regard to the nature of duties discharged by Forest Guards and other frontline enforcement personnel and the increasing instances of attacks upon such personnel while undertaking anti-illegal mining, wildlife protection and forest enforcement operations, the States of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh shall examine the need for issuing appropriate notifications under Section 218(3) of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023 [corresponding to Section 197(3) of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973], in respect of such categories of enforcement personnel as may be considered appropriate, so as to afford protection in respect of *bona fide* actions undertaken by them in discharge of their official duties. The decision taken by the respective States in this regard shall be placed on record by way of affidavits by the next date of hearing.

G. The NHA shall, in consultation with the Central Empowered Committee, undertake installation of high-resolution CCTV surveillance cameras equipped with night vision capability on

appropriate high-mast structures on the bridge and covering the area extending up to 1 kilometre upstream and 500 metres downstream of the bridge situated on National Highway-44 near the Morena-Dholpur border. The surveillance infrastructure shall be positioned in a manner that effectively covers the riverbed and vulnerable stretches falling within the aforesaid zone so as to deter and detect illegal mining and excavation activities in the vicinity of the bridge foundations and supporting structures.

- H.** The live feed and surveillance access of the CCTV cameras installed pursuant to the aforesaid directions shall be made available by the NHAI to the Police Department, Forest Department and/or any other concerned enforcement authorities of the States of Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh so as to facilitate coordinated monitoring, interception and enforcement action in relation to illegal mining and transportation activities in the affected region. The NHAI shall further ensure that appropriate access and connectivity mechanisms are established for uninterrupted sharing of surveillance data with the concerned authorities.

- I.** The surveillance infrastructure established by the NHAI shall remain operational on a 24-hour basis. The NHAI shall further ensure that the surveillance system is equipped with adequate storage, backup and connectivity facilities so as to facilitate continuous monitoring, preservation of footage and effective coordination with the concerned enforcement agencies in the event of any illegal activity being detected in the area concerned.
- J.** The NHAI, the concerned State Authorities and the District Administrations shall undertake immediate measures to prevent dumping of waste, debris and other materials into the Chambal River from bridges and other public infrastructure falling within or adjoining the National Chambal Gharial Sanctuary. The NHAI shall install tamper-proof fencing, protective mesh or such other appropriate structures on the bridge concerned and shall ensure sealing of all gaps, openings and vulnerable locations so as to completely block all avenues through which waste material may be discarded into the river. The concerned authorities shall further undertake regular monitoring of such

locations, install appropriate warning and awareness signage, and ensure strict enforcement action, including imposition of penalties in accordance with law, against persons found responsible for dumping waste or otherwise polluting the river ecosystem.

K. The concerned States shall examine the feasibility of formulating appropriate special employment schemes, skill-development programmes and livelihood generation initiatives, or effectively operationalising and strengthening existing welfare and employment schemes, for providing sustainable employment opportunities to persons residing in the sensitive regions affected by rampant illegal mining activities, so as to reduce economic dependence upon and local participation in such unlawful mining operations. The States shall particularly endeavour to create employment opportunities for local youth and economically vulnerable sections residing in and around the affected areas so as to reduce economic dependence upon illegal mining activities and discourage local participation, facilitation and

support extended to organized illegal mining networks operating in the region.

L. The concerned States shall also explore the feasibility of involving local communities in conservation, afforestation, eco-tourism, eco-restoration, surveillance support and other environmentally sustainable activities connected with protection and preservation of the National Chambal Gharial Sanctuary and adjoining ecologically sensitive regions, so as to promote community participation in environmental protection and strengthen grassroots-level conservation efforts in the affected areas.

M. The concerned Departments of the States of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh dealing with water resources, irrigation, environment and forests, along with the Ministry of Jal Shakti, Union of India and the Central Water Commission, shall file separate affidavits by the next date of hearing indicating the measures presently being undertaken and the further steps proposed to be taken for maintenance, preservation and augmentation of environmental flows in the Chambal River and its tributaries. The

affidavits shall specifically indicate the existing flow management mechanisms, ongoing and proposed projects having potential impact upon ecological flows, inter-departmental coordination measures, and the action plan formulated for ensuring maintenance of adequate environmental flows necessary for protection of the National Chambal Gharial Sanctuary and its dependent riverine ecosystem.

N. The States of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Ministry of Jal Shakti and Central Water Commission shall also specifically respond to the recommendation made by the Central Empowered Committee concerning maintenance of Environmental Flows in the Chambal River and its tributaries. The affidavits shall indicate the stand of the respective States on the recommendations made by the Central Empowered Committee, the feasibility and manner of implementation thereof, and the proposed timelines within which such measures can be operationalised and whether any existing or proposed water diversion, abstraction, irrigation or river regulation projects are likely to have an adverse impact upon the ecological flows

of the Chambal River and the steps proposed to mitigate such impacts.

O. The Chief Secretaries of the States of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh shall periodically review compliance of the directions issued by this Court at least once every two months and place status reports before this Court indicating the progress made in implementation of surveillance, enforcement and recruitment measures.

P. The Registry shall, forthwith, implead the Ministry of Jal Shakti, Union of India, and the Central Water Commission as party respondents in the present proceedings. The Registry shall also transmit a copy of this order to the Ministry of Jal Shakti and the Central Water Commission for compliance and for filing their respective affidavits in terms of the directions contained hereinabove.

46. In the event of any difficulty arising in implementation of the directions issued by this Court, the States of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, the Ministry of Jal Shakti, Union of India, the Central Water Commission, the National Highways Authority of India and any other concerned

authority shall be at liberty to seek assistance from and consult the Central Empowered Committee for purposes of facilitating effective compliance with the directions contained in the present order. The Central Empowered Committee shall extend such assistance as may be necessary and appropriate in that regard.

47. The aforesaid directions are being issued in furtherance of, and in continuation with, the directions previously issued by this Court *vide* order dated 17th April, 2026, having regard to the continuing and emergent nature of the issues arising in the present proceedings and the necessity of ensuring effective implementation of surveillance, enforcement and environmental protection measures in the affected regions.

48. The States of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh shall furnish fresh status/progress reports indicating compliance with the directions issued by this Court *vide* orders dated 17th April, 2026 as well as the directions contained in the present order, including the steps undertaken towards strengthening surveillance infrastructure, enforcement mechanisms, recruitment of field-level

personnel, seizure and confiscation proceedings, and action taken against vehicles and persons involved in illegal mining and transportation activities. The NHAI shall also place on record a detailed progress report indicating the steps undertaken pursuant to the directions issued in the present order, particularly with regard to installation and operationalisation of surveillance infrastructure in and around the bridge situated on National Highway-44 near the Morena-Dholpur border. The aforesaid reports shall be filed by the next date of hearing.

V. Interlocutory Application No. 143798 of 2026 [Filed by: Conservation Action Trust]

49. Having regard to the pleadings made in the application, the submissions advanced by the learned *Amicus Curiae* and the learned counsel appearing on behalf of the intervenor (Conservation Action Trust), and considering the nature of the proceedings in seisin of this Court, the said interlocutory application is disposed of with liberty to the intervenor (Conservation Action Trust), to share such information, material, inputs and suggestions as it may consider appropriate with the learned

Amicus Curiae for assisting this Court in the present proceedings.

VI. Interlocutory Application No. 143904 of 2026 [Filed by: Madhya Pradesh Forest Employees Association]

50. The instant Interlocutory Application has been filed on behalf of the Madhya Pradesh Forest Employees Association, an association representing Forest Guards, Forest Rangers, Foresters and other frontline forest personnel engaged in protection of forests, wildlife and natural resources within the State of Madhya Pradesh. The applicants have sought intervention in the present proceedings primarily on the ground that the issues involved in the instant matter concerning illegal mining, forest protection and wildlife preservation are intrinsically connected with the safety, welfare and service conditions of frontline forest personnel entrusted with enforcement and protection duties in ecologically sensitive regions.

51. The application highlights the hazardous conditions under which Forest Guards and other field personnel are required to discharge their duties,

including risks arising from illegal mining operations, poaching activities and attacks by organized groups involved in forest offences. It has been contended that despite several incidents involving death and fatal injuries suffered by forest personnel while performing official duties, there exists no comprehensive and uniform policy within the State of Madhya Pradesh governing compensation, compassionate appointment, insurance coverage and other welfare measures for the families of such personnel. The applicants have further pointed out instances where *ex gratia* compensation publicly announced by the State authorities was allegedly not disbursed despite lapse of considerable time and have sought formulation of a comprehensive policy framework for recognition, compensation and welfare measures in respect of forest personnel who lose their lives in the line of duty.

52. Having considered the pleadings made in the application, the submissions advanced by the learned *Amicus Curiae* and the learned counsel appearing on behalf of the intervenor, namely, the Madhya Pradesh Forest Employees Association, we are of the considered opinion that the issues raised

in the present application disclose genuine concerns affecting frontline forest personnel engaged in protection and preservation of forests and wildlife in vulnerable regions affected by illegal mining activities and other environmental offences. The concerns raised in the application also bear direct nexus with the efficacy of enforcement and protection mechanisms forming subject matter of the present proceedings. Though the present application has been instituted primarily in relation to the State of Madhya Pradesh, we are of the considered opinion that the issues highlighted therein are not confined to one State alone but appear to be pervasive in nature and have direct bearing upon frontline forest personnel and enforcement staff functioning in all the concerned States involved in the present proceedings.

53. Accordingly, we issue notice in Interlocutory Application No. 143904 of 2026. The States of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh shall file their respective replies to the aforesaid interlocutory application by the next date of hearing, specifically indicating therein the existing policy framework, if any, governing compensation, *ex gratia*

assistance, compassionate appointment, insurance coverage, welfare measures and other service benefits extended to Forest Guards and other frontline forest personnel who suffer death or fatal injuries in the course of discharge of official duties, together with details of implementation of such policies and the measures proposed to be undertaken for strengthening the welfare and protection framework applicable to such personnel.

54. List the matters on 22nd July, 2026 for further consideration.

.....**J.**
(VIKRAM NATH)

.....**J.**
(SANDEEP MEHTA)

NEW DELHI;
MAY 26, 2026.