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

% ***Judgment reserved on: 20.01.2026***

Judgment pronounced on: 31.01.2026

Judgment uploaded on: 31.01.2026

\+ W.P.(C) 18908/2025, CM APPL. 78730/2025, CM APPL. 78731/2025, CM APPL. 78732/2025

RAHUL SINGH TOLIA .....Petitioner

Through: Mr. Shakti Singh, Adv.

versus

UNION OF INDIA & ANR. .....Respondents

Through: Ms. Arunima Dwivedi, CGSC along with Mr. Abhiraj Singh, GP, Ms. Monalisha Pradhan and Ms. Priya Khurana, Advs.

\+ W.P.(C) 121/2026, CM APPL. 620/2026, CM APPL. 3753/2026

DARSHAN GATTANI .....Petitioner

Through: Ms. Aakriti Dhawan, Mr. Mayank Jain and Mr. Madhur Jain, Advs.

versus

UNION OF INDIA AND ORS. .....Respondents

Through: Mr. Akash Vajpai, CGSC along with Mr. Harsh Bajpai, Advs.

CORAM:

HON'BLE MR. JUSTICE ANIL KSHETARPAL

HON'BLE MR. JUSTICE AMIT MAHAJAN

J U D G M E N T

ANIL KSHETARPAL, J.

1. These Petitions assail the correctness of the Judgment and Order dated 22.05.2025 [hereinafter referred to as 'Impugned Judgment'] passed by the Central Administrative Tribunal, Principal

Bench, Delhi [hereinafter referred to as 'Tribunal'] in Original Applications which raised substantially similar challenges. Since, both the Petitions arise from the same *lis* and turn upon overlapping issues, they are being disposed of by way of this common judgment. However, for the sake of convenience, the W.P. (C) 18908/2025 is being treated as the lead case to extrapolate our decision in both the Petitions, while highlighting the distinct facts of W.P. (C) 121/2025, as and when relevant.

BRIEF BACKGROUND:

2. The dispute arose due to the wrongful cadre allocation of the Petitioners, as reflected in the Cadre Allocation List dated 05.04.2019 [hereinafter referred to as 'List of 2019'], which is alleged to be wrongful and contrary to the applicable Cadre Allocation Policy dated 05.09.2017 [hereinafter referred to as 'Policy of 2017'].

3. The Petitioner appeared in the Union Public Service Commission-Indian Forest Service (UPSC-IFS) Examination, 2017 and was selected for appointment to the Indian Forest Service (IFS) *vide* final result dated 19.02.2018. Upon selection, the Petitioner, duly submitted his preferences for cadre allocation, indicating, *inter alia*, his first preference as the Uttarakhand cadre. However, by way of the List of 2019, the Petitioner was wrongly allocated the Maharashtra cadre. Similarly, to point out very briefly, the Petitioner in W.P. (C) 121/2025, was allocated the Kerala cadre, as against his home cadre, i.e., Rajasthan Cadre.

4. Prior thereto, the Respondent No.1 had issued the Policy of

2017, under which, a candidate was to be allotted to his/her home cadre on the basis of merit, preference and availability of vacancy at his/her turn in the relevant category. Further, the policy also provided that for allocation to the home cadre against an insider vacancy, a candidate must (i) express his preference for the zone in which his home cadre falls, and (ii) indicate his first preference to the home cadre within that zone; failing which, the candidate shall not be considered for allocation to his home cadre at all.

5. It is pertinent to highlight, at this stage, that the cadre allocation pursuant to the Civil Services Examination (CSE) is carried out in two stages, namely, determination of vacancies and the procedure for allocation of cadres against such vacancies.

6. Aggrieved by the wrongful cadre allocation, the Petitioner in W.P.(C)18908/2025 and W.P.(C)121/2025, approached the Tribunal, in the years 2021 and 2022, respectively, seeking to set-aside the List of 2019, thereby allocating the Petitioners their preferred home cadre, i.e., the Uttarakhand cadre and Rajasthan cadre. However, the OAs filed by the Petitioners were dismissed by the Tribunal, resultantly, the Petitioners have assailed the impugned judgment before this Court.

7. This Court has heard learned counsel for the parties at length and with their able assistance perused the paper book.

CONTENTION OF THE PARTIES:

8. It is the case of the Petitioner that, at the first stage of determination of vacancies, there occurred an error in cadre-wise

vacancy distribution on part of the Respondent No.2. Further, it is also his case that on account of the said error in cadre-wise vacancy distribution at the stage of determination of vacancies, he was not considered for allocation to his first preference, i.e., Uttarakhand cadre, as an insider, in terms of the Policy of 2017.

9. It is contended that the Petitioner was wrongfully allocated Maharashtra Cadre, owing to no fault of his and purely on account of the alleged mistake committed by Respondent No.2 in the distribution of cadre-wise vacancies. Had the aforesaid error not occurred, the Petitioner would have been allocated to the Uttarakhand cadre in accordance with his merit, preference and the governing Policy of 2017.

10. *Per contra*, learned Counsel for the Respondents have argued that since the cadre allocation software for the Indian Administrative Services (IAS) was under process, the Respondents had to carry out a manual determination of vacancies, which led to a situation where the names of certain officers of the 2016 batch were erroneously taken into account twice, as their names had already been included in the 2018 list, resulting in double counting of 2016 batch officers. This double counting, in turn, affected the vacancy calculation for the 2017 batch and led to an artificial reduction of cadre gaps.

11. While acknowledging that there were errors in the vacancy calculations, it was contended by the learned counsel for the Respondents that any re-allocation at this stage would have a cascading impact on the subsequent cadre allocation exercises

undertaken by the Ministry and would, consequently, jeopardise the overall cadre management.

ANALYSIS AND REASONING:

12. We have heard the rival submissions advanced by the learned counsel for the parties and have duly perused the paper book.

13. At the outset, we deem it appropriate to note the chronology of events. The Petitioner in W.P. (C) 18908/2025 approached the Tribunal by filing his OA only in the year 2021, whereas the Petitioner in W.P. (C) 121/2025, filed his OA even later, in the year 2022. Evidently, as on date nearly a period of 7 years has elapsed since the cadre allocation was finalized and implemented in compliance of List of 2019 dated 05.04.2019. Therefore, any interference at this belated stage is not found appropriate, since such interference would amount to unearthing coffins long buried in the sands of time, thereby unsettling what has, by now, been laid to final rest.

14. As far as the validity of the Impugned Judgment is concerned, in the considered view of this Court, the same does not merit any interference. It is for the reason that the foundation of the challenge before this Court as well as the Tribunal, is the admitted error in the vacancy determination process, which according to the Petitioner, deprived him of allocation to his first preference, i.e., Uttarakhand Cadre, against an insider vacancy.

15. However, the question which arises in the aforesaid backdrop,

is whether such error, in the facts of the present case, warrants judicial interference, at this stage, by way of directing a re-allocation of cadre in favour of the Petitioner.

16. It is not disputed that cadre allocation is carried out on a batch-wise, all-India basis, by adopting a uniform methodology for determination of vacancies and for allotment, while taking into consideration the merit and overall cadre strength and requirements of all participating States. Accordingly, any correction or re-working in respect of one batch, or one officer within a batch, would necessarily lead to a re-calibration of the entire allocation exercise for that batch, in turn, impacting the allocations made in the successive batches on the existing vacancy and cadre position.

17. In the present case, the Respondents have explained that the error resulted from manual processing when cadre allocation software was still under development, and that the double counting of certain 2016 batch officers affected the vacancy computation for the 2017 batch, thereby altering the cadre gap figures.

18. If this Court were to accept the contention of the Petitioner and direct a re-allocation in his favour on the basis of a corrected vacancy computation, it would inevitably open the floodgates to similar claims from other officers of the same batch as well as subsequent and prior batches who might, on a retrospective recalculation, assert that they too were prejudiced in terms of their cadre allocation. However, in view of this Court, such an exercise would, in effect, require a wholesale re-opening of past cadre allocation exercises across

multiple years, resulting in cascading consequences for cadre management throughout the nation.

19. Therefore, this Court is not persuaded that such a large-scale unsettling of settled allocations will either be feasible or advisable in the exercise of writ jurisdiction, particularly where the cadre allocation, as it stands, is broadly in conformity with the Policy of 2017 and where rectification is no longer confined to a narrow, individualised correction.

20. It is equally significant to note that it is not the case of the Petitioner that, the allocation to Maharashtra Cadre has adversely affected him, leading to civil consequences in terms of diminution of his pay, seniority, status, promotional avenues or other substantive service incidents *vis-à-vis* what he would have enjoyed had he been allocated to Uttarakhand Cadre. The Petitioner has merely disputed the location and preference of cadre, which, by itself, does not confer an enforceable, vested right warranting judicial intervention in a highly structured, policy-driven, all-India allocation exercise.

21. The Supreme Court in ***Union of India & Ors. v. Rajiv Yadav, IAS & Ors.***[1], has held that cadre allocation is merely an incidence of service, to be effected in accordance with the applicable policy and overall administrative exigencies. It is in this backdrop, that Courts have consistently exercised restraint in unsettling such allocations, except in cases where egregious illegality or mala fides have been demonstrated, thereby affecting the very process of allocation.

[1] (1994) 6 SCC 38

However, in the present case, no such circumstances have been established, warranting a departure from the settled principle of judicial interference.

22. Moreover, this Court cannot remain oblivious to the fact that the Tribunal, by way of the Impugned Judgment, has already taken a serious view of the errors in the vacancy determination process. In that context, the Tribunal has also directed the Central Government to prepare an appropriate report and place it before the Cabinet Secretary for the purpose of developing an online system for calculation of vacancies, thereby reducing scope for human error in future exercises.

23. Further, the Tribunal has also directed the constitution of an enquiry committee to identify the person or persons responsible for such miscalculation and to examine whether such error was deliberate or otherwise. To put it in other words, systemic corrective and accountability measures have already been set in motion by the Tribunal, which this Court finds to be a sufficient institutional response to the lapse, without embarking upon a batch-wise or individual re-engineering of cadre allocations already made.

24. In these circumstances, while the error in vacancy calculation may be a matter of concern from the standpoint of administrative robustness and fairness in future exercises, however, it does not, justify the grant of individual relief to the Petitioner by way of re-allocation of cadre after a passage of almost 7 years. To do so would not only unsettle settled positions but also invite a multitude of similar petitions from officers across different batches, rendering the

entire cadre management exercise vulnerable to continuous litigation and uncertainty.

CONCLUSION:

25. In view of the foregoing discussions, this Court is of the considered view that the impugned judgment warrants no interference.

26. Accordingly, having found no merit, the present petitions, along with pending applications, stand disposed of.

ANIL KSHETARPAL, J.

AMIT MAHAJAN, J.

JANUARY 31, 2026
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