

THE HON'BLE SRI JUSTICE BATTU DEVANAND
&
THE HONOURABLE SRI JUSTICE A. HARI HARANADHA SARMA

I.A.Nos.5 and 6 of 2025
IN
WRIT APPEAL No.274 of 2024

COMMON ORDER: *(Per Hon'ble Sri Justice Battu Devanand)*

These two Interlocutory Applications are filed seeking the following reliefs:

I.A.No.5 of 2025:

a) Call for and peruse the forensic examination reports, if any, already obtained by the Special Investigation Team from the Forensic Science Laboratory, insofar as they relate to the OMR sheets and corresponding Control Bundle slips forming part of the present proceedings Consequently;

b) Direct the concerned investigating authority/SIT to place such forensic reports before this Hon'ble Court, in a sealed cover if deemed appropriate, for the limited purpose of assisting adjudication in the present matters;

c) Grant liberty to the parties to address submissions after such material is placed on record.

d) And Pass such other or further order(s) as this Hon'ble Court may deem fit and proper in the interests of justice.

I.A.No.6 of 2025:

a. direct an appropriate forensic examination of the specific OMR sheets and the corresponding Control Bundle slips that were identified and inspected during the Committee proceedings conducted on 04.12.2025, or such of them as this Hon'ble Court may deem fit Consequently,

b. direct that the scope of such forensic examination be confined to scientific determination of:

- i. authorship of handwriting and signatures appearing on the OMR sheets and Control Bundle slips;
- ii. ink analysis and chronology of entries; and

iii. whether the entries and signatures were made contemporaneously and by distinct functionaries, as contemplated under the prescribed evaluation procedure;

c. direct that the forensic examination be carried out by an independent and competent forensic institution or laboratory, under the supervision of this Hon'ble Court or in such manner as this Hon'ble Court may deem appropriate;

d. grant liberty to all parties to address further submissions, if necessary, upon receipt of the forensic report, strictly without prejudice to their respective rights and contentions in the main Writ Appeal; and

e. and pass such other order or orders as this Hon'ble Court may deem fit and proper in the interests of justice.

2. **The facts giving rise for filing of these Interlocutory Applications are summarized as herein under:**

(i) APPSC issued a notification on 31.12.2018 for recruitment to 169 Group-I posts, comprising a preliminary examination, main examination and oral test.

(ii) The preliminary examination was conducted on 26.05.2019 and the results were declared on 01.11.2019 wherein 9,679 candidates were qualified for the mains examination.

(iii) The mains examination was held from 14.12.2020 to 20.12.2020 in which 6,807 candidates appeared.

(iv) The APPSC adopted digital valuation of the mains examination answer scripts between 16.01.2021 to 25.04.2021 and the results were declared on 28.04.2021.

(v) 326 candidates were declared as qualified for interviews and call letters were sent to them to attend the interviews as per the schedule fixed by the Commission.

(vi) At that stage, some of the candidates challenged the digital evaluation process by filing W.P.No.11000 of 2021 and batch.

(vii) A learned single Judge of this Court by a common order, dated 01.10.2024 holding that change in the mode of evaluation of answer scripts of the mains examination to digital evaluation is not correct and the same was contrary to the notification and accordingly directed APPSC to evaluate main answer scripts manually in the conventional mode within three months by setting aside the digital evaluation process adopted by the Commission.

(viii) At that relevant point of time, one Sri P. Sitaramanjaneyulu, IPS, was serving as Secretary, APPSC and the post of Chairman remained vacant from 27.11.2021 to 19.02.2022.

(ix) The stand of the writ petitioners is that the manual evaluation of the answer scripts of the mains examination was conducted from 05.12.2021 to 26.02.2022 at Avasa Resorts, Hailand, Peda Kakani, Guntur District.

(x) On 01.01.2022, the then Secretary of APPSC gave press statement stating that manual valuation is nearer completion and results will be announced soon.

(xi) As per the APPSC, manual evaluation of the answer scripts of the mains examination was conducted from 25.03.2022 to 26.02.2022 in the premises of APPSC and SRR & CVR Government College, Vijayawada and

results were announced on 26.05.2022 and 325 candidates were shortlisted for interview.

(xii) In this background, some of the unsuccessful candidates have filed a batch of writ petitions before this Court in W.P.No.15844 of 2022 and batch challenging the selection process undertaken by the APPSC and sought to set aside the list of shortlisted candidates which was declared on 26.05.2022 pursuant to the manual evaluation conducted in the APPSC and SSR & CVR Government College, Vijayawada from 25.02.2022 to 26.05.2022 on the ground that conducting manual evaluation of the mains examination answer scripts twice is not permissible under law and contrary to the procedure to be followed by the APPSC as per its regulations.

(xiii) At that stage, a learned single Judge of this Court has passed a common order, dated 14.06.2022 in I.A.No.1 of 2022 in W.P.No.15844 of 2022 which reads as under:

“a) The conducting of the interviews and the selection process may go on but the results of final selection shall be subject to the outcome of these writ petitions only and the selectees shall be informed that their selection would be subject to outcome of these writ petitions.

b) The answer booklets of the petitioners in the main exam (written) of the Group-I service under the notification No.27/2018, dated 31.12.2018 and the marks obtained by the petitioners therein shall be produced before this Court in a sealed cover before the next date of hearing.”

(xiv) Against the said common order, dated 14.06.2022, some of the writ petitioners have filed writ appeals in W.A.No.532 of 2022 and batch. A Division Bench of this Court disposed the said writ appeals by a common judgment, dated 24.06.2022 with the following order:-

“(a) The interviews and the selection process shall go on as per schedule and the declaration of the results and appointments if any made shall be subject to the result of the Writ Petitions. The results declared and the posting orders, if any given to any of the selected candidates should reflect that their selection would be subject to result of the Writ Petitions.

(b) The Andhra Pradesh Public Service Commission shall take an undertaking from the selected candidates that they will not claim any equities; and they will get themselves impleaded in these Writ Petitions, if they intend to contest.

(c) The Andhra Pradesh Public Service Commission shall file their counter affidavit by first week of July, 2022 after serving on the learned counsel for the appellants and reply if any shall be filed by the appellants herein or the Writ Petitioners by 13.07.2022.

(d) We hope and trust that the learned counsel appearing for both parties will not seek any time and proceed with the case on the said date.

(e) The Commission shall preserve the answer sheets (booklets) of the candidates who appeared in the main examination (written) of Group-I Services under notification No.27/2018 dated 31.12.2018.

(f) Further, the answer sheets of the candidates who were qualified for interviews, in the digital evaluation along with the marks obtained by them in the manual evaluation shall be produced

before the Court in a sealed cover and kept with Registrar (Judicial) by the date of hearing of Writ Petitions.

(g) The answer sheets of candidates, qualified on manual evaluation shall also be kept in a sealed cover and placed before the Registrar (Judicial) by the date of hearing of the Writ Petitions on 14.07.2022. Apart from that, if the Court intends to see any answer sheet, the same may be made available forthwith.”

(xv) In compliance of the said directions, results were declared and selected candidates were issued appointment orders on submission of undertaking that they will not claim any equities.

(xvi) Thereafter, after hearing both sides and consideration of the material available on record, the learned single Judge of this Court by a common order, dated 13.03.2024 allowed the W.P.No.15701 of 2022 and batch with the following directions:

“a. The action of Respondent Nos.1 & 2 in conducting second and third valuation of Group-I (Mains) Examination for Notification No.27/2018 is declared as illegal, irregular, arbitrary and violative of Rule 3(ix) of the A.P.P.S.C Rules;

b. The impugned list of eligible candidates dated 26.05.2022 is hereby set-aside;

c. Respondent Nos.1 & 2 are directed to conduct Group-1 (Mains) Examination afresh for Notification No.27/2018 and value the papers strictly in accordance with the APPSC Rules, giving atleast two months time to the candidates and complete the process and selection within six (06) months from the date of receipt of copy of this order.”

3. Questioning the orders passed in a batch of Writ Petitions vide W.P.No.15701, 15757, 15765, 15844, 16646, 21894, 15745, 15758, 15806, 15750 of 2022, the Andhra Pradesh Public Service Commission (APPSC) and the selected candidates filed Writ Appeals Nos.258, 259, 269, 271, 274, 277, 279, 287, 314, 317, 318, 319, 338, 339, 341, 342, 343, 344, 345, 348, 349, 354, 357, 358, 360, 362, 363, 364, 369, 370, 371, 372, 373, 374, 375, 376, 377, 407, 420 and 442 of 2024.

4. In fact, this Division Bench heard these matters in detail and reserved for judgment on 19.09.2025. While drafting judgment, it is noticed that certain procedural defects in compliance of the order, dated 24.06.2022 passed in W.A.No.532 of 2022 by the Coordinate Division Bench of this Court. Accordingly, these matters are posted for clarification.

5. Across the Bench, it is clarified that the said order with respect to production of the answer scripts before the Court as directed are not complied by APPSC.

6. Then, it is directed the APPSC in order, dated 05.11.2025 to produce the answer scripts and OMR sheets, etc., before this Court and accordingly it was produced before the Court as per the report of the Registrar (Judicial), dated 11.11.2025 and those are kept under safe custody of the Registrar (Judicial) of this Court.

7. After noticing the order, dated 01.10.2021 in W.P.No.11000 of 2021 and batch wherein the APPSC stand is recorded stating that they are digitally evaluated the answer scripts by scanning and that the marks are on a separate sheet. At that stage, to ascertain the truth or otherwise with regard to the conducting evaluation of answer scripts between 05.12.2021 to 26.02.2022 at Avasa Resorts, Hailand, Peda Kakani, Guntur District, this Court intended to ascertain what happened to the OMR sheets originally attached to the answer scripts of the candidates qualified for mains examination.

8. To ascertain the truth so as to whether the OMR sheets attached to the answer scripts are used or not, this Court constituted a Committee consisting 3-Members headed by a former Judge of this Court by order, dated 26.11.2025. This Court also permitted the Advocates appearing on either side to be there at the time of Committee verifying the OMR sheets.

9. On 04.12.2025 the Committee submitted its report which reads as herein under:

“In accordance with the observation made physically by the Committee in the presence of the learned Advocates for both sides, the Committee finds that the OMR sheets contained marks awarded in the alleged valuation done at Hailand.”

10. On perusal of the report of the Committee, it proves that the original OMR sheets attached to the answer scripts were used and marks are entered therein.

11. At that stage, an Interlocutory Application was filed in I.A.No.2 of 2025 in W.A.No.274 of 2024 seeking to reopen the appeals for fresh hearing. This Court by order, dated 15.12.2025 allowed the I.A.No.2 of 2025 and ordered for reopening of the appeals.

12. Thereafter, the selected candidates are filed I.A.No.1 of 2025 in W.A.No.271 of 2024 and I.A.Nos.4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 of 2025 in W.A.No.274 of 2024 seeking different interim reliefs. The Interlocutory Applications in I.A.No.1 of 2025 in W.A.No.271 of 2024 and I.A.Nos.4 and 7 of 2025 in W.A.No.274 of 2024 are disposed of today i.e., on 11.02.2026.

13. The substantial relief prayed for in I.A.No.5 of 2025 is to call for and peruse the forensic examination reports, if any, already in the custody of the SIT and to direct the concerned investigating authority/SIT to place such forensic reports on record, whereas the substantial relief prayed for in I.A.No.6 of 2025 is to direct an appropriate forensic examination of the OMR sheets as well as the corresponding control bundles, and also to direct the scope of such forensic examination shall include authorship of handwriting and signatures on the OMR sheets, ink analysis and contemporaneous nature of the signatures, etc., and further to direct that such forensic examination be conducted by an independent and competent forensic institution or laboratory under the supervision of the Court.

14. Admittedly, the Special Investigation Team (SIT) constituted by the State Government is not a party in these appeals. Basing on the material available on record, it appears that a complaint was filed by the Secretary, APPSC, dated

22.04.2025 for finding out exactly what was done by the firm Cansin Media Private Limited at Hyderabad Resorts under instructions and supervision of P. Sitaramanjaneyulu, IPS, the then Secretary, APPSC. Basing on the said complaint, dated 22.04.2025, the State Government has constituted a Special Instigation Team (SIT) for conducting a detailed investigation into the allegations of misappropriation of funds, conspiracy, cheating, breach of Trust of public office, manipulation of official records, and joint criminal conduct etc., pertaining to the affairs of the APPSC, incidentally covering the allegation of entrustment of the valuation to a private agency and the payments thereof. It is an admitted fact that a case in Crime No.56 of 2025 was registered at Suryaraopet Police Station on 25.04.2025 under Sections 409, 477-A, 420 and 120-B r/w 34 of the Indian Penal Code and during the process of investigation, the Special Investigation Team arrested the then Secretary, APPSC, Sri P. Sitaramanjayulu, I.P.S., and produced before the concerned Judicial Magistrate on 08.05.2025 and he was remanded to judicial custody and later he was enlarged on bail. The status of the investigation being conducted by the Special Investigation Team is not known and the learned Advocate General for the State of Andhra Pradesh appearing for the APPSC submits that the investigation is under process.

15. Since the reliefs sought in both the applications in I.As.No.5 and 6 of 2025 overlap to some extent, both the applications are answered together.

16. Now, the points for consideration are:

1) *Whether detailed examination of OMR sheets, answer scripts etc., by forensic experts through an Investigation Agency under the supervision of this Court, is necessary?*

2) What is the result of I.A.Nos.5 and 6 of 2025?

17. As per the material available on record, it is an admitted fact that the original answer scripts were kept in a private resort at Avasa Resorts, Hailand, Peda Kakani, Guntur District from 05.12.2021 to 26.02.2022 by the then Secretary of the APPSC without any authority. When this Court enquired with the learned Advocate General, he replied that no file is available in the APPSC to prove that who took the decision to shift the answer scripts to private resort and keeping there for more than 65 days.

18. The admitted facts that shifting the original answer scripts of the mains examination to a private resort and keeping there for 65 days and contending by the APPSC that evaluation was not taken place during that time and as per the report of the Committee constituted by this Court under Chairmanship of one retired Judge of this Court wherein it is proved that the original OMR sheets are containing the marks awarded to the candidates and printing of OMR sheets and control bundles afresh to conduct evaluation afresh at Vijayawada throw doubts on the fairness and reliability of the APPSC and as such there is a *prima facie* material to accept the allegation of the unsuccessful candidates that the sanctity of evaluation was compromised. Serious doubts arise on the fairness of the process adopted by the APPSC. The above admitted facts forced this Court to come to a *prima facie* opinion that the sanctity of the

evaluation of the answer scripts by the APPSC has been vitiated at a systematic level.

19. When there are serious allegations of mismanagement and misappropriation of funds, irregularities and illegalities in the valuation process, detailed examination of the issue becomes inevitable. Larger public interest is involved in the present case, as the posts to which the selection process has taken place are prime in the administration of the State. Group-I category posts are not ordinary one and the task of conducting the examination, is taken up by a statutory independent body, like APPSC. When the allegations are strong with equally strong prima facie base, looking for certain strong jurisdictional facts to interfere with the process adopted is necessary. The contentions that – (i) the selected candidates have no role and they are innocent, (ii) Candidates, who got selection but found their names missing when the valuation mode and places are shifted, if seen in the light of the inability of APPSC to place certain material information and the record, one can entertain strong suspicion against the fairness adopted in valuation process.

20. [i] The learned counsel appearing for the parties before this Court, while referring to certain features noticed on the face of the OMR sheets and control bundle slips such as apparent uniformity of handwriting and ink across entries and striking, similarity in signatures, overwriting and usage of whitener, absence of initials at points of correction, and inconsistencies between numerical entries and the bubbled marks - contended that all these are not matters of mere interpretation or argument but require further investigation.

They further submitted that the presence of marks on OMR sheets is indicating that the evaluation process was not conducted in accordance with the prescribed procedure, and that forensic examination of the OMR sheets is also necessary.

[ii] Submissions are also made by the learned counsel appearing for the parties across the Bar, while referring to the evaluation process, that tampering in respect of the answer scripts of two candidates was noted during valuation at Vijayawada, that the material was entrusted to the Committee for proper verification, but proper report is not submitted so far.

21. Under these circumstances, conspicuous differences on comparison of the answer scripts of the selected candidates with that of unselected candidates, with focus on age of paper, age of ink, matching of bar codes, specific striking or over-writings if any, similarity of the hand-writing of over-writings, and original writing and any other factors the forensic experts adopts as a tool to detect the tampering in respect of answer sheets will clear the clouds and doubts projected. The consistent argument of the some of the advocates is that innocence and fairness of some of the selected candidates cannot be the basis to ignore or allow the taintedness or fraud if any resorted to some other selected candidates and some amount of poison is enough to make whole milk poison. Therefore, clarification through forensic examination is found necessary.

22. All the circumstances mentioned above, are not ordinary. In the light of the extra-ordinary circumstances, the extra-ordinary measure of enquiry and

investigation is found as the justified way to find the truth. Strong *prima facie* case is found for calling for enquiry as to tampering if any and whether the answer scripts are intact in all respects through an independent agency by taking assistance of scientific and forensic experts of any forensic laboratory situate outside the State.

23. Accordingly, point Nos.1 and 2 are answered.

24. We are conscious of the fact that the subject matter under investigation by Special Investigation Team (SIT) is pertaining to the fraud alleged regarding the funds. The scope of present writ proceedings is relating to irregularities and illegality in valuation of the answer scripts of Main Examination, for selection to the posts of Group-I through APPSC.

25. Accordingly, we intend to direct the State Government to constitute a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to conduct investigation on certain aspects and submit a report for proper adjudication of the case on hand.

26. Accordingly, we pass the following order:

(i) The State Government is directed to constitute a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to conduct investigation or re-constitute the present SIT.

(ii) The Special Investigation Team should be headed by an Officer not below the rank of Additional Director General of Police.

(iii) The learned Advocate General shall furnish the details of SIT within three (03) days to the Registrar (Judicial), for the purpose of impleadment.

(iv) Registrar (Judicial) shall implead the Special Investigation [SIT] as party - Respondent No.30 in the W.A.No.258 of 2024.

27. The respondent No.30/SIT in W.A.No.258 of 2024 is directed to investigate by taking assistance of scientific and forensic experts of any Central Forensic Science Laboratory situate outside the State on the following aspects:-

- 1) Whether the answer scripts of all the selected candidates are intact and whether there is any tampering in any form.
- 2) Whether the Bar codes on answer sheets, original OMR sheets and OMR sheets used during physical valuation at Vijayawada, and the details retrieved from such bar codes, are same in respect of selected candidates.
- 3) The answer sheets of the unselected candidates, who are parties before this Court and in the writ petitions, shall be examined in the same lines, as how the answer sheets of the selected candidates are examined.
- 4) The answer sheets of the candidates up to 100 numbers below in the merit list, from the last selected candidate shall be examined in the same lines, as that of selected candidates.
- 5) The material already collected by Special Investigation Team (SIT) investigating the matter so far can also be used for further probe as directed in the lines herein above.
- 6) Apart from the above any other relevant information, which suggests tampering with the original answer sheets may be detected adopting the scientific and other techniques.

7) The report shall be submitted by SIT on or before 16.03.2026.

28. It is strongly contended by the learned counsel appearing for the unselected candidates that, the selected candidates being in focal post are in a position to manage everything and any information called for from this Court through any agency is likely to be some way or the other influenced by using their official positions.

29. In view of the peculiar facts and circumstances of the case and in the light of the orders passed herein above, we direct the State Government to post all the selected candidates in non-focal posts until further orders and the Chief Secretary to the Government of Andhra Pradesh shall ensure to issue necessary orders forthwith and submit compliance report before the Registrar (Judicial) within a week.

30. Registry shall communicate a copy of this order to the Chief Secretary, Government of Andhra Pradesh by special messenger forthwith.

31. These two applications in I.A.Nos.5 and 6 of 2025 are disposed of accordingly.

JUSTICE BATTU DEVANAND

JUSTICE A.HARI HARANADHA SARMA

Dated: 11.02.2026

PGR

**THE HON'BLE SRI JUSTICE BATTU DEVANAND
&
THE HONOURABLE SRI JUSTICE A. HARI HARANADHA SARMA**

I.A.Nos.5 & 6 of 2025 in W.A.NO.274 OF 2024

Dt. 11.02.2026

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