

2025 SCC OnLine Ker 6855

In the High Court of Kerala at Ernakulam
(BEFORE VIJU ABRAHAM, J.)

WP(C) No. 38444 of 2022

Lulu Hyper Market Pvt. Ltd., Represented by its
Authorized Signatory ... Petitioner;

Versus

District Collector and Others ... Respondent.

And

WP(C) No. 1045 of 2023

T.N. Mukundan ... Petitioner;

Versus

District Collector and Others ... Respondents.

WP(C) No. 38444 of 2022 and WP(C) No. 1045 of 2023

Decided on August 27, 2025

Advocates who appeared in this case :

By Advs. Sri. S. Sreekumar (Sr.)

Sri. P.K. Soyuz

Sri. E.V. Babychan

By Advs. Sri. Renjith Thampan (Sr.)

Smt. Maya M.

Sri. V.M. Krishnakumar

Addl. AG Sri. K.P. Jayachandran

Sr. GP Sri. C.P. Pradeep

By Advs. Sri. Renjith Thampan (Sr.)

Smt. Maya M.

Sri. V.M. Krishnakumar

By Advs. Sri. P.K. Soyuz

Shri S. Vishnu

Sri. E.V. Babychan

Addl. AG Sri. K.P. Jayachandran

Sr. GP Sri. C.P. Pradeep

R 6 By Sc Sri. Vishnu Chempazhanthiyil

The Judgment of the Court was delivered by

VIJU ABRAHAM, J.:—

W.P.(C). No. 38444 of 2022

Petitioner is the owner and in possession of land having an extent of

161.45 Ares (398.94 cents) comprised in Survey Nos. 403, 405 and 406 of Ayyanthole Village in Thrissur Taluk.

2. The case of the petitioner is that the land comprised in Survey Nos. 403, 405 and 406 were included as converted land in the draft data bank prepared by the Local Level Monitoring Committee (LLMC), Thrissur Municipal Corporation and the lands were converted much before the commencement of the Kerala Conservation of Paddy Land and Wetland Act, 2008 (for short 'the Act, 2008'). 50 cents of land comprised in Survey No. 405 of Ayyanthole Village was permitted to be used for purposes other than paddy cultivation as per Ext P2 order, as per the provisions of Clause 6 of the Kerala Land Utilisation Order. Later on, the data bank was finalised, and the property owned by the petitioner was included as paddy land notified in the final data bank. The Kerala State Remote Sensing and Environment Centre (KSRSEC) report was obtained in respect of the said land, as Ext P3 to P5, which revealed that the property had been converted before the coming into force of the Act, 2008. Since the properties were included in the data bank, the petitioner submitted an application in Form-5 and the same was directed to be considered as per Ext.P6 judgment. Thereupon, by Ext.P7 order, the Form-5 application submitted by the petitioner was partially allowed, excluding the land comprised in Survey Nos. 403 and 406 of Ayyanthole Village from the data bank. But as regards the property in Survey No. 405, the 2nd respondent has not rejected or allowed the application, but took a stand that the property comprised in Survey No. 405 is covered by an order under the Kerala Land Utilisation Order. The petitioner would submit that, in fact, the KLU permission obtained as per Ext.P2 is only in respect of 50 cents of land comprised in Survey No. 405 of Ayyanthole Village, which was not taken into consideration while issuing Ext.P7 order. Ext.P7 order was challenged to the extent that it denied consideration of the land covered in Survey No. 405. While so, Ext.P8 stop memo was issued, to which Ext.P10 objection was filed, but the petitioner was informed by the Village Officer that the stop memo can be withdrawn only after the land in Survey No. 405 of Ayyanthole Village is deleted from the data bank. The petitioner relies on Exts.P11 and P12 judgments in support of its contention. Aggrieved by Ext.P7 order and Ext.P8 stop memo, the petitioner approached this Court, filing W.P.(C) No. 30405 of 2022 and the said writ petition was disposed of as per Ext.P13 judgment, directing the RDO to reconsider the Form-5 application submitted by the petitioner. In compliance with the direction issued by this Court, the 2nd respondent, as per Ext.P14 order, excluded the property comprised in Survey No. 405 of Ayyanthole Village from the data bank. Thereafter, the petitioner submitted an application under Section 27A of the Act, 2008, for changing the nature of land comprised in Survey

Nos. 403, 405 and 406 of Ayyanthole Village, which was also allowed as per Ext.P15. While so, Ext.P16 was issued whereby proceedings were initiated as per the provisions of Section 13 of the Act, 2008. Taking into consideration the fact that the property comprised in Survey Nos. 403, 405, and 406 of Ayyanthole Village has already been removed from the data bank, the petitioner submitted Ext.P17 request to drop all further proceedings initiated as per the provisions of Section 13 of the Act, 2008. The learned Senior counsel for the petitioner would further submit that, in view of the fact that the properties having been excluded from the data bank, Ext P16 proceedings initiated as per Section 13 of the Act, 2008, is liable to be interfered with. Therefore, the petitioner sought for the following reliefs:—

- "(i) Issue a writ of certiorari or any appropriate writ, order or direction calling for the records leading to Ext.P16 notice and quash the same.*
- (ii) Issue a writ of mandamus or any other appropriate writ, order or direction commanding the 1st respondent consider and dispose of Ext.P17 petition along with documents enclosed, and drop all further proceedings pursuant to Ext.P16 notice, immediately. (iii) Issue a writ of mandamus or any other appropriate writ, order or direction commanding the 3rd respondent to consider and dispose of Ext.P19 application as per section 27C of Act 28 of 2008 and Rule 13 of the Rules and issue an order change the classification of the land owned by the petitioner as Purayidam in the BTR and other revenue records.*
- (iv) Issue a writ of mandamus or any appropriate writ, order or direction directing the 3rd respondent to issue an order/direction to the 4th respondent Village Officer, to change the classification of the lands, in the BTR and Revenue Records as Purayidam with respect to the land covered by Ext.P15 order issued by the 2nd respondent.*
- (v) Grant such other reliefs as this Court deems fit and proper in the circumstances of this case including the cost of this writ petition."*

WP(C) No. 1045 of 2023

3. The above writ petition is filed challenging Exts.P11, P12 and P13 orders (Exts.P7, P14 and P15 in W.P(C) No. 38444 of 2022), which are relied on by the petitioner in W.P(C) No. 38444 of 2022 seeking to drop all further proceedings leading to Ext.P16 notice issued under Section 13 of the Act, 2008. The petitioner contend that, he is a member of the District Level Authorised Committee in Thrissur District constituted under the Act, 2008 and he has filed this writ petition to bring to the notice of this Court that there is a large extent of paddy land known as

'Pannikkara Kini Kol Padavu Padasekharam' situated in Ayyanthole Village and the properties in Survey Nos. 403, 405 and 406 of Ayyanthole Village is part of the said padasekharam and there has been concerted efforts made by the owners of the aforesaid land in Survey Nos. 403, 405 and 406 of Ayyanthole Village to illegally reclaim and convert the paddy land in violation of the provisions of the Act, 2008. Petitioner has filed a complaint against the earlier owners of the said land, complaining about the unauthorised mining of clay from the said paddy land, and therefore, submits that he is a person interested and could maintain this writ petition. Petitioner would further contend that on 31.05.2016, the Village Officer, Ayyanthole, had issued a stop memo to the then owners of the land in Survey Nos. 403 and 406 of Ayyanthole Village not to fill up the said paddy land and also mine clay from the said property. Thereupon, owners of the property had filed an application on 13.03.2017 for permission to use the said land for other purposes, invoking Clause 6 of the Kerala Land Utilisation Order. On receipt of the said application, the Revenue Divisional Officer has directed the Village Officer, Ayyanthole, to conduct a site inspection of the property and prepare a report. Meanwhile, the petitioner has filed a complaint before the District Collector, Thrissur, complaining about the unauthorised mining of the subject property. The Revenue Divisional Officer also directed the Agricultural Officer, Ayyanthole Krishi Bhavan, to file a report and issued a stop memo directing the owners of the property not to conduct any activity in violation of the Act, 2008. While so, the then owners of the property had filed W.P (C) No. 20854 of 2017 before this Court seeking a direction to consider the application filed by them before the Revenue Divisional Officer/Sub Collector and pursuant to the direction issued by this Court, the Agricultural Officer, Ayyanthole, Krishi Bhavan, who is the Convenor of the Local Level Monitoring Committee obtained Ext.P1 report from the Kerala State Remote Sensing and Environment Centre (KSRSEC) and the said report was submitted to the Revenue Divisional Officer along with the KSRSEC report prepared by the 6th respondent. Relying on Ext.P1 KSRSEC report, the petitioner would contend that the property in Survey No. 405 is paddy land. Ext.P2 report of the Agricultural Officer is in respect of land comprised in Survey Nos. 403, 405 and 406 of Ayyanthole Village. It is reported as per Ext.P2 that the properties which are lying contiguous to the Survey Nos. 405 and 406 are paddy land and if the petitioners are allowed to use the land for other activities, it will seriously affect the nearby paddy fields and therefore recommended not to grant permission. The Sub Collector, by Ext.P3, rejected the application submitted by the petitioner on a finding that the conversion of the land would adversely affect the property in the neighbouring area. Meanwhile, the aforesaid property was purchased by the 5th

respondent, who is the petitioner in W.P(C) No. 38444 of 2022. Aggrieved by the order of the Revenue Divisional Officer, an appeal was preferred before the Land Revenue Commissioner, which was also rejected as per Ext.P4. In Ext.P4, the Land Revenue Commissioner has also found that the Sub Collector, Thrissur has inspected the property along with the members of the LLMC on 13.08.2020 and found that the land in Survey Nos. 405 and 406 are fallow land and is adjacent to the paddy lands where paddy cultivation is being conducted in 'Pannikkara Kini Kol Padavu' and that there is no illegality in Ext.P3 order. While so, the data bank of Ayyanthole Village was published, and in the said data bank, the property in Survey Nos. 403, 405 and 406 of Ayyanthole Village was included as paddy land. Thereupon, the 5th respondent has filed an application in Form-5 on 26.03.2021. Based on the said application, the Agricultural Officer, Krishi Bhavan, Thrissur, has sent an application for obtaining the KSRSEC report, and the said report in respect of Survey No. 403 is Ext.P6, whereas the KSRSEC report in respect of Survey Nos. 405 and 406 are Exts.P7 and P8, respectively. Petitioner would submit that Exts.P6 to P8 reports are entirely different from the findings in Ext.P1 report obtained one year prior to the present report. Petitioner would submit that these reports were prepared under the influence of the 5th respondent, and to substantiate the same, the petitioner produced a comparative table in paragraph 5 of the reply affidavit, which reads as follows:—

"7. As a matter of fact, the illegality and incorrectness in Ext. P6, P7 and P8 reports is explained below.

Ext.P1 KSREC Report of 2019	Ext.P6, P7 and P8 KSREC Report of 2021		
Sy. No. 403	Survey plot was observed under fallow land in the imagery of 10.11.2006. The plot was observed as fallow land with sparse vegetation in the imagery of 21.12.2010. The existing land use pattern building/structure	Sy. No. 403	The plot was observed under scattered plantation/trees towards south with a linear feature represents road/construction in the east west direction while the northern part was observed with a road and parking area in the data of 20.06.2007. The 21.12.2010 data shows scattered

	towards was observed towards northern part in the imagery of 2013. The land use pattern continued in 2016		vegetation/plantation towards south, while the northern part continued to follow the prevailing land use. The same trend continued in the data on 07.02.2016 and 16.02.2020.
405	The survey plot was observed under fallow land in the imagery of 10.11.2006. The same trend of land use pattern was continued in the imageries of 21.12.2010, 21.12.2013 and 07.02.2016	405	The plot was observed under vegetation/crops in the data of 26.02.2007, the same land use practice were continued in the data of 21.12.2010, 07.02.2016 and 16.2.2020
406	The plot was observed as predominately fallow with buildings/structures towards north eastern part in the imagery of 10.11.2006. The plot was observed under fallow with sparse vegetation with the existing land use in the imagery of 21.12.2010 and 21.12.2013. The existing land use pattern was observed with water logged area towards western part in the imagery of 07.12.2016	406	The plot was observed under scattered plantation/trees with building/structures towards north-eastern side a linear feature represents pathway/road was also observed in the east west direction in 2007 data. The same land use pattern continued in the data for the year 2010 and 2016. 2020 data shows predominant area under scattered vegetation/plantation/trees.

So on the basis of Exts.P6 to P8 reports, the 5th respondent

approached this Court by filing W.P(C) No. 13535 of 2021 seeking a direction to the Revenue Divisional Officer to consider and pass orders on Ext.P5 application filed by the 5th respondent. When notice in the said writ petition was obtained by the Agricultural Officer, the Principal Agricultural Officer, Thrissur, has sent Ext.P9 report to the Agricultural Officer. In Ext.P9 report, the Principal Agricultural Officer has specifically mentioned that the land in Survey Nos. 403, 405 and 406 is paddy land and that part of the said paddy land was unauthorisedly filled up. It is further reported in Ext.P9 that the unauthorised filling up of part of the said paddy land is liable to be restored under Section 13 of the Act, 2008, and that, apart from the food security, the aforesaid land being restored as paddy land is necessary for avoiding flood during rainy season and also for maintaining the ground water table in the area. Based on Ext.P9 report, the Agricultural Officer has filed a report to the office of the Advocate General. This Court, as per Ext.P10 judgment, disposed of the writ petition, directing the Revenue Divisional Officer to pass orders on Ext.P5 on the basis of Exts.P6 to P8 reports issued by the KSRSEC. Petitioner would submit that, going by Rule 4(4d) of the Kerala Conservation of Paddy and Wetland Rules, 2008 (for short 'the Rules, 2008'), an application for removing the land from the final data bank is to be submitted to the Revenue Divisional Officer. As per Rule 4(4e) of the Rules, 2008, the Revenue Divisional Officer has to obtain a report from the Agricultural Officer regarding the merits of such an application. After obtaining the report, the Revenue Divisional Officer will make a site inspection if found necessary and pass orders on the application. Petitioner would contend that, it is without following any of the said procedures, which are statutory in nature, the Revenue Divisional Officer passed an order on 31.01.2022 removing the land in Survey Nos. 403 and 406 from the data bank as per Ext.P11. Since the land in Survey No. 405 was not removed by Ext.P11, the 5th respondent again approached this Court by filing W.P (C) No. 30405 of 2022, and this Court, by judgment dated 26.09.2022, directed the Revenue Divisional Officer to pass orders regarding the land in Survey No. 405. Pursuant to the said direction, the Revenue Divisional Officer passed Ext.P12 order, removing the property in Survey No. 405 also from the data bank. Petitioner would submit that while issuing Exts.P11 and P12, the procedures contemplated as per the Act and Rules, 2008, have not been followed. No report from the Agricultural Officer was obtained before issuing the said orders, and it is a clear violation of the statutory prescription. Thereupon, by Ext P13, the Revenue Divisional Officer has passed an order under Section 27A of the Act, 2008, directing the correction of the entry in the revenue records regarding the land in Survey Nos. 403, 405 and 406 of Avvanthole Village. Petitioner would contend that Exts.P11 and P12

orders were issued only relying on Exts.P6 to P8 KSRSEC reports, and no further enquiry was conducted and contend that Exts.P6 to P8 reports are not scientific reports and are totally contrary to Ext.P1 report. Aggrieved by Ext.P14, the petitioner has preferred Ext.P15 statutory appeal before the District Collector, Thrissur, which is stated to be pending consideration. It is aggrieved by the same that the petitioner has approached this Court.

4. Petitioner relies on the Google Earth picture of Survey No. 405, which is produced as Ext.P16 and submits that a perusal of Ext.P16 would reveal that the land is a part of large 'padasekharam' and is a paddy cultivating area and even in the Google Earth picture of September, 2022, the construction of a boundary wall in the aforesaid land in Survey No. 405 can be clearly seen and that it is also revealed from Ext.P16 that the land in Survey No. 405 is a paddy land even in November, 2022. In Ext.P14, the Google Map photographs of the property in Survey Nos. 403, 405 and 406 would reveal that even trees which are found in the said land appear to be recently planted, and the land is surrounded by paddy land. Ext.P17 is the mahazar prepared by the Village Officer, Ayyanthole, on 30.04.2022 which reveal that even on 30.04.2022, the land in Survey No. 405 is a paddy land, and after harvest, it is seen that the said land, which is a paddy land, is being rapidly converted. Ext.P18 is the register maintained by the Village Officer regarding illegal conversion, wherein a specific entry was made in respect of the property comprised in Survey No. 405 of Ayyanthole Village. A report was also filed by the Village Officer to the Taluk Officer as Ext.P19, and from the said report, it could be seen that the land in Survey No. 405, having an extent of 0.4046 hectares which is a paddy land was found in the process of conversion and that traces of paddy plants after harvest was also found and further that huge quantities of mud is brought into the land for filling the same. Petitioner would submit that while the property was in the ownership and possession of the previous owner, the LLMC, as per Ext.P20, has taken a decision that the property cannot be excluded from the data bank. The LLMC has also filed a report before the Revenue Divisional Officer intimating that the order passed by the Revenue Divisional Officer as per Exts.P11 and P12 by which the land in Survey Nos. 403, 405 and 406 of Ayyanthole Village were excluded from the data bank is without obtaining a report from the Agricultural Officer or the Local Level Monitoring Committee, which is mandatory as per Rule 4(4d) to 4(4f) of the Rules, 2008, as evident from Ext.P21 report submitted before the Revenue Divisional Officer. Petitioner, relying on Ext.P22 validation report, would submit that the land in question is a paddy land as on the coming into force of the Act, 2008. It is further submitted that by Ext.P22, the LLMC has recommended to include the property comprised in Survey Nos. 403,

405 and 406 as paddy land in the data bank. The validation report, Ext.P22, was considered by the LLMC in the meeting held on 16.10.2020, based on which the final data bank was prepared as per Ext.P24, wherein these properties were included in the data bank. The learned counsel would further submit that the properties comprised in Survey Nos. 403 and 405 were subjected to paddy cultivation in the year 2019-2020, as evident from Ext.P25, the statement showing the details of SDR of rice of the year 2019-2020, which revealed that paddy cultivation was undertaken in the land in Survey Nos. 403 and 405 of Ayyanthole Village. The case of the petitioner is that along with Ext.P20 minutes of the LLMC, the Agricultural Officer has submitted all the details, including Exts.P22, P23, P24 and P25, and the Agricultural Officer went to the spot and has taken Ext.P22 photographs and also prepared Ext.P21 report. The learned Senior counsel appearing for the petitioner would submit that on a perusal of Ext.P26, nobody can have any doubt that the land is paddy land. The Agricultural Officer, as per Ext.P27, reported about the illegal conversion of the land in Survey No. 405, and the Village Officer issued Ext.P28 stop memo. A report was also filed by the Agricultural Officer addressed to the District Collector, pointing out all these aspects, including the fact that the properties have been ordered to be removed from the data bank without obtaining a report from the Agricultural Officer. Petitioner also relies on Ext.P30 series of satellite photographs in respect of the property comprised in Survey Nos. 403, 405 and 406 of Ayyanthole Village from the 'BHUVAN'S' website, and based on Ext.P30, it is contended that even in the data of 2009-2010, the land was paddy land and not a converted land.'

5. The petitioner also relies on Ext.31, which is the counter affidavit filed by the 1st respondent in W.P(C) No. 38444 of 2022, wherein the District Collector has vouched to Ext.P14 report and stated that the Sub Collector has reported that a site inspection was conducted and the satellite pictures of the land were examined in detail and in the site inspection it has found that property in Survey No. 405 was a paddy land before and the same is being converted by filling the same and further that the trees in the land appears to be recently planted and that it is surrounded by paddy land which are low lying and a part of the land in Survey No. 405 is surrounded by a wall constructed recently. Based on the same, the petitioner has prayed for quashing Exts.P11, P12 and P13 orders.

6. A detailed statement has been filed by the 2nd respondent, Sub Collector, wherein it is stated that it is strictly based on the KSRSEC report that the applications were considered and therefore, no interference is called for. Further, it is contended that the petitioner has no *locus standi* to challenge Exts.P11, P12 and P13 orders.

7. A detailed statement has been filed by the 6th respondent. As regards the conflict in Ext.P1 KSRSEC report and subsequent reports filed as Exts.P6 to P8, it is explained by the 6th respondent that earlier a joint report was submitted in respect of Survey Nos. 403, 405 and 406 of Ayyanthole Village but later when a request for obtaining KSRSEC report was obtained from the Agricultural Officer, Ayyanthole again in respect of properties comprised in Survey Nos. 403, 405 and 406 of Ayyanthole Village, three separate reports were filed in respect of each of the survey numbers. The discrepancies noted were enquired into by the District Collector, as per Annexure-R6 (7), and in response to the same, the Director of the KSRSEC clarified the same as per Annexure-R6(8), which reads as follows:

"7. It is submitted that in response to Annexure R 6(7), the Director, KSREC sent a clarification to District Collector vide Lr. No. A -113/2023/KSREC dated 21/01/2023, a true copy of which is produced and marked as Annexure R 6(8). Annexure R 6(8) clarified the following aspects:

- (i) The report No. 14740/18 at Annexure R 6(2) was drawn up in respect of combines of land in Survey No. 403, 405&406 while the reports of 2021 vide No. 3430/21 (Annexure R 6(4)), report No. 3431/21 (Annexure R 6(5)) and report No. 3432/21 (Annexure R 6(6)) were drawn up based upon individual fee payment in respect of each of the survey number separately.*
- (ii) It was indicated that the report No. 14740/2018 (Annexure R 6(2)) was based upon data from satellite imagery of the year 2006, 2010, 2013 and 2016 whereas in the report of the years 2021 (Annexure R 6(4), R 6(5) & R 6(6)) was drawn up based upon satellite imagery of the year 2007, 2010, 2016 & 2020. It was also pointed out that in respect of Survey No. 405, the report in respect of only part of survey No. 405 was sought for in the requisition and thus the report was drawn up in respect of part of Survey No. 405*
- (iii) In report No. 14740/18 (Annexure R 6(2), in respect of survey No. 403 it was indicated that the same was fallow land (2006 data), sparse vegetation (2010 data), building structure towards north (2013 data). In the report of 2021 (No. 3430/21, Annexure R 6(4)) it was indicated that in the south portion of the plot there were scattered plantation/trees, and in the northern portion road and parking area were detected in the satellite imagery of 2007, 2010, 2016 & 2020. That in the report No. 14740/18 (Annexure R 6(2), it was indicated that the building structure towards north (2013 data) and a temporary structure and therefore the 2013 data was excluded*

and the 2016 data was included in the report of 2021 (No. 3430/21, Annexure R 6(4).

(iv) That in respect of Survey plot 405 in report No. 14740/18 (Annexure R 6(2), the report was drawn up in respect of the combined property in terms of the requisition while in 2021 report i.e. No. 3431/2021 (Annexure R 6(5) was in respect of part of the Survey No. 405 in terms of the requisition and FMB Sketch sent by the Agricultural Officer.

(v) That in respect of Survey plot 405 in report No. 14740/18 (Annexure R 6(2), it was indicated that as per 2006 data it was fallow land and in 2021 report i.e. No. 3431/2021 (Annexure R 6(5) in respect of part of the Survey No. 405, it was indicated COURT that the plot was with vegetation/crops based upon 2007 data.

It can be seen that in the 2021 reports, the satellite imagery of 2007 was available and was made use of as is evident from the imagery included in the reports whereas the 2007 satellite imagery was not available when the report No. 14740/18 (Annexure R 6(2) was drawn up. Still further, in respect of Survey plot No. 405, it can be seen from the report at Annexure R 6(5) that the imagery and the satellite data interpretation is in respect of part of Survey No. 405 as required in the requisition. These facts have been made clear in Annexure R 6 (8) communication of the Director KSREC."

Based on the same, the learned counsel for the 6th respondent submits that there is no anomaly in the reports filed and sought for dismissal of the writ petition.

8. I have considered the rival contentions on both sides.

9. The competency of the petitioner in W.P.(C) No. 1045 of 2023 to file writ petition challenging the orders issued in favour of the petitioner in W.P.(C) No. 38444 of 2022 is to be considered first. The petitioner in W.P.(C) No. 1045 of 2023 would submit that he has filed a complaint against the owners of the land in question while it was in the possession of the erstwhile owners, complaining about unauthorised mining of clay from the said paddy land. It is also stated that the petitioner is a member of the District Level Authorised Committee of Thrissur District, constituted as per the provisions of the Act, 2008 and that he has approached this Court to bring to its notice regarding the concerted effort made by the owners of the property in survey Nos. 403, 405 and 406 of Ayyanthole Village to illegally reclaim and convert the paddy land in violation of the provisions of the Act, 2008. In view of the above facts and circumstances and the documents filed by the petitioner in support of his contentions, I am not inclined to non-suit the petitioner on the ground of *locus standi* to challenge the impugned

orders.

10. The contention of the petitioner in W.P.(C) No. 38444 of 2022 is that after the whole of the property has been removed from the data bank as per Exts.P7 and P14, the proceedings initiated as per Ext.P16 by the District Collector invoking the power under Section 13 of the Act, 2008 is absolutely arbitrary and unjust and it is challenging the same that the said writ petition has been filed. On the other hand, the petitioner in W.P.(C) No. 1045 of 2023 would contend that the application submitted by the petitioner in W.P.(C) No. 38444 of 2022 under Form-5 for removing the property from the data bank was allowed as per Exts.P7 and P14, and the same was without following the procedures as contemplated as per Act, 2008 and the Rules appended thereto. Rule 4(4e) of the Rules, 2008 mandates that before the Revenue Divisional Officer takes a decision on a Form-5 application, and if it is related to the paddy land, the application should be forwarded to the Agricultural Officer, and a report on the same shall be obtained from the Agricultural Officer. Rule 4 (4e) of the Rules, 2008 reads as follows:

"4ഇ) (4ഡി) ഉപചട്ടത്തിൽ വ്യക്തമാക്കിയ പ്രകാരം ലഭിക്കുന്ന അപേക്ഷകൾ നെൽവയലുകളെ സംബന്ധിച്ചുള്ളതാണെങ്കിൽ ബന്ധപ്പെട്ട കൃഷി ഓഫീസർക്കും തണ്ണീർത്തടങ്ങളെ സംബന്ധിച്ചുള്ളതാണെങ്കിൽ ബന്ധപ്പെട്ട വില്ലേജാഫീസർക്കും റിപ്പോർട്ടിനായി അയച്ചു കൊടുക്കേണ്ടതും, അത് സംഗതിപോലെ, കൃഷി ഓഫീസർ അല്ലെങ്കിൽ വില്ലേജ് ഓഫീസർ ഒരു മാസത്തിനകം അതിൻമേലുള്ള റിപ്പോർട്ട് റവന്യൂ ഡിവിഷണൽ ഓഫീസർക്ക് സമർപ്പിക്കേണ്ടതുമാണ്."

A perusal of the Exts.P7 and P14 orders allowing the Form-5 application, produced in W.P.(C) No. 38444 of 2022 and impugned in W.P.(C) No. 1045 of 2023 as Exts.P11 and P12 would reveal that no such report was called for from the Agricultural Officer and any such report is seen referred to or considered while issuing the said orders. Ext.P21 produced in W.P. (C) No. 1045 of 2023 is the report of the Local Level Monitoring Committee (LLMC), which has specifically reported to the Revenue Divisional Officer, Thrissur, that while considering the application under Form-5, no report from the Agricultural Officer concerned was called for. Ext.P29 is the report of the Agricultural Officer addressed to the District Collector, Thrissur, wherein also it is specifically stated that a report from the Agricultural Officer has not been called for before passing orders on the Form-5 applications. In the counter affidavits filed by the official respondents, the said aspect is not seen controverted. In view of the above facts and circumstances, I am of the view that the issuance of Exts.P11 and P12 orders produced in W.P.(C) No. 1045 of 2023 is without following the mandatory provisions in Rule 4(4e) of the Rules, 2008.

11. When attempts were made by the erstwhile owners of the land in survey Nos. 403 and 406 of Ayyanthole Village to fill up the said land and also to mine clay from the property, a stop memo was issued by the Village Officer, Ayyanthole, on 31.05.2016. Thereupon, the owners approached the Revenue Divisional Officer seeking permission to use the land for other purposes as per Clause 6 of the Kerala Land Utilisation Order. The said application was considered by the Revenue Divisional Officer based on the direction issued by this Court in W.P.(C) No. 20854 of 2017. The KSRSEC report was obtained, and the same was forwarded by the Agricultural Officer to the Revenue Divisional Officer as per Ext.P1. It is contended that a perusal of Ext.P1 KSRSEC report would reveal that the land in survey No. 405 is a paddy land. Ext.P2 report was submitted by the Agricultural Officer, and as per the said report, the LLMC has deliberated the issue and held that the land in survey Nos. 403 and 405 is paddy lands and left fallow. Based on the said report, the Revenue Divisional Officer considered the application filed by the previous owners and rejected the same as per Ext.P3. As averred in paragraph 5 of W.P. (C) No. 1045 of 2023, in Ext.P3 the following facts were found:

- "i. Land in Sy. No. 403 is a paddy land kept fallow in 2006 and with sparse vegetation in 2010 and in 2013, there is a building structure on the northern side of the said land.*
- ii. Land in Sy. No. 405 in 2006-210, 2013 and 1026 land is paddy land kept fallow.*
- iii. Land in Sy. No. 406 there is a building on the north western portion and on the western portion it is filled up with water even in 2016. It is on the basis of said finding that the Revenue Divisional Officer as per Ext.P3 has rejected the application under the Kerala Land Utilisation Order."*

It is while so the petitioner in W.P.(C) No. 38444 of 2022 purchased this property and challenged Ext.P3 order of the Revenue Divisional Officer, rejecting the application under the Kerala Land Utilisation Order by filing a revision before the Land Revenue Commissioner. The Land Revenue Commissioner considered the contentions of the petitioner in W.P.(C) No. 38444 of 2022, who is the 5th respondent in WP(C) No. 1045 of 2023 and rejected the revision by Ext.P4 order. While so, the data bank of Ayyanthole Village was published, wherein these properties were included as paddy land. It is in the said circumstance an application in Form-5 was filed by the 5th respondent, petitioner in W.P.(C) No. 38444 of 2022, for removing the properties comprised in survey Nos. 403, 405 and 406 from the data bank. Separate reports were called for from the KSRSEC, 6th respondent herein, and pursuant to the direction issued by this Court in W.P.(C) No. 13535 of 2021, the

application was considered. When notice in W.P.(C) No. 13535 of 2021 was received by the Agricultural Officer, a report was sent by the Principal Agricultural Officer, Thrissur to the Agricultural Officer as Ext.P9, wherein it is specifically mentioned that the land in survey Nos. 403, 405 and 406 are paddy lands and part of the said paddy lands was unauthorisedly filled up and that the unauthorised filling up of the paddy land is liable to be restored under Section 13 of the Act, 2008. As stated earlier, the applications were allowed without following the procedures as contemplated in Rule 4(4e) of the Rules, 2008 in as much as the report of the Agricultural Officer was never called for and considered while issuing the impugned orders. Petitioner would submit that removal of the land from the data bank is only on the basis of Exts.P6 to P8 reports submitted by the KSRSEC and no further enquiry was conducted in the matter. It is the contention of the petitioner that Exts.P6 to P8 reports are contrary to Ext.P1 report submitted by the KSRSEC in respect of the very same land on an earlier occasion. When the impugned orders were issued removing the property from the data bank, there were serious objections from the public in this regard and in the said circumstance, the Sub Collector on 08.12.2022 filed Ext.P14 report to the District Collector, Thrissur, along with the satellite map. A perusal of Ext.P14 would reveal that the Sub Collector has visited the property and reported that, as per satellite pictures the lands in survey Nos. 403, 405 and 406 are paddy lands, and it is seen that on March 2022, most of these lands continued to be paddy land.

12. A detailed statement was filed by the 2nd respondent, Revenue Divisional Officer in W.P.(C) No. 1045 of 2023, wherein it is stated that the orders have been issued strictly in compliance with the findings in the KSRSEC report. Petitioner filed a detailed reply to the said statement wherein a comparative table was produced regarding the differences in the findings in the KSRSEC report of 2019 (Ext.P1) and the KSRSEC report of 2021 (Exts.P6, P7 and P8), which has already been extracted in paragraph 3 of this judgment. There is marked variation in the scientific data for the same period, which is impossible by scientific standards. Petitioner relies on Ext.P16, which is the satellite data of Google Earth for plot No. 405, which revealed that the land is a part of large padasekharam and is a paddy cultivating area. As per Ext.P16, even as on November 2022, the aforesaid land is a paddy land. Petitioner brought to the notice of this Court Ext.P17 mahazar prepared by the Village Officer on 30.04.2022, which clearly shows that even as on 30.04.2022, the land comprised in survey No. 405 is a paddy land and paddy stubbles after harvest were seen in the said land and that the paddy land is being rapidly converted. When the property was in the ownership and possession of the previous owner, the Local Level Monitoring Committee had taken a decision on the basis of Ext.P1

report of the KSRSEC as well as site inspection that the land in question is a paddy land and cannot be excluded from the data bank. Ext.P22 is the relevant pages of the validation report of the agricultural data bank for Ayyanthole Krishi Bhavan, which revealed that the lands in Survey Nos. 403, 405 and 406 were found to be paddy land as per Act, 2008 and were to be included in the land data bank and recommended that the property comprised in survey Nos. 403, 405 and 406 should be included in the data bank as per Ext.P23 decision. Ext.P22 validation report was considered by the Local Level Monitoring Committee, and when the data bank was prepared by the Local Level Monitoring Committee, which is published as per Ext.P24 gazette notification, the properties were included as paddy land in the land data bank. It is also pertinent to note that the properties in Survey Nos. 403 and 405 were subjected to paddy cultivation even in the year 2019-2020, as revealed from Ext.P25 statement showing the details of SDR of rice 2019-2020, which would reveal that paddy cultivation was conducted in the land in Survey Nos. 403 and 405. It is to be further noted that along with Ext.P20 minutes of the Local Level Monitoring Committee, the Agricultural Officer has furnished all the details including Exts.P22, P23, P24 and P25 and the Agricultural Officer went to the spot and took the photographs of the land in survey No. 405, which would clearly reveal that the property comprised in survey No. 405 is a paddy land.

13. The 6th respondent has filed a statement wherein it is stated that the discrepancies in Exts.P1 and P6 to P8 reports were brought to the notice of the 6th respondent by the District Collector as per Ext.R6 (7), to which Ext.R6(8) clarification was submitted stating that the earlier report was a combined report in respect of the lands in survey Nos. 403, 405 and 406, while the subsequent reports were drawn up based on individual fee payment in respect of each of the survey numbers separately. But, even if it is a separate report or a combined report, the fact that is revealed from the satellite images of the relevant point of time can not have any variation as pointed out by the petitioner in the table produced along with the reply affidavit.

Taking into consideration the above facts and circumstances, I am of the view that the matter requires reconsideration at the hands of the Revenue Divisional Officer. Accordingly, Exts.P11, P12 and P13 orders impugned in W.P.(C) No. 1045 of 2023 are quashed, and the matter is remitted back to the 2nd respondent/authorised officer for reconsideration as follows:

- (i) The 2nd respondent/authorised officer shall consider the Form-5 applications submitted by the 5th respondent, petitioner in W.P. (C) No. 38444 of 2022, strictly in accordance with the provisions

of Rule 4, especially Rules 4d, 4e and 4f of the Rules, 2008, which mandates calling for a report from the Agricultural Officer concerned. Before taking a decision in the matter as directed above, a fresh report from the 6th respondent, i.e., Kerala State Remote Sensing and Environment Centre, shall be obtained by the 2nd respondent/authorised officer and the Director of the 6th respondent shall personally supervise the preparation of the report and submit a clear and authentic report to the 2nd respondent/authorised officer regarding the nature of the land, strictly in accordance with the satellite images obtained for the relevant period.

- (ii) After obtaining such a report, the 2nd respondent/authorised officer shall consider the matter afresh and pass appropriate orders thereon within an outer limit of four months from the date of receipt of a copy of the judgment, after affording an opportunity of being heard to the petitioner as well as the 5th respondent in W.P.(C) No. 1045 of 2023.
- (iii) The application submitted by the petitioner in W.P.(C) No. 38444 of 2022 under Section 27A of the Act, 2008 shall be re-considered by the Revenue Divisional Officer/Authorised Officer in accordance with law, subject to the decision to be taken on the Form-5 applications submitted by the petitioner in W.P.(C) No. 38444 of 2022, as directed above.
- (iv) Since this Court has also quashed Ext P13 order of the Revenue Divisional Officer under Section 27A of the Act, 2008, any amount paid by the petitioner, in W.P.(C) No. 38444 of 2022 as conversion fee, shall be returned by the Revenue Divisional Officer, on an application filed by the petitioner in W.P.(C) No. 38444 of 2022.
- (v) In W.P.(C) No. 38444 of 2022, the petitioner challenges Ext.P16 notice, which is issued by the 1st respondent District Collector invoking the power under Section 13 of the Act, 2008. It is ordered that all further proceedings pursuant to Ext.P16 shall be kept in abeyance till a decision is taken as directed above.

With the abovesaid observations and directions, the writ petitions are disposed of.