

IN THE HIGH COURT OF JUDICATURE AT MADRAS

DATED : 04.03.2016

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THE HON'BLE MR.JUSTICE M.JAICHANDREN

and

THE HON'BLE MR.JUSTICE M.SATHYANANARAYANAN

H.C.P.No. 2398 of 2015

Elamathi .. Petitioner

Vs.

1.The State rep by
The Secretary to Government (Home)
Prohibition and Excise Department
Government of Tamil Nadu
Fort St.George, Chennai 600 009.

2.The District Magistrate and District Collector
Salem District. .. Respondents

Petition filed under Article 226 of the Constitution of India, praying to issue a Writ of Habeas Corpus, to call for the records pertaining to the order of detention dated 09.09.2015 passed by the 2nd respondent in CMP No.37/GOONDA/C2/2015, quash the same and produce the detenu, Ramu aged about 28 years, S/o Mathaiyan before this Court and set him at liberty and the detenu now confined in Central Prison, Salem.

For Petitioner : Mr.S.Manoharan
For Respondents : Mr.A.N.Thambidurai
Addl. Public Prosecutor

O R D E R

[Order of the Court was made by M.JAICHANDREN, J.]

This Habeas Corpus Petition has been filed by the mother of the detenu to issue a Writ of Habeas Corpus, to call for the records relating to the impugned order passed by the 2nd respondent in CMP No.37/GOONDA/C2/2015, dated 09.09.2015, detaining the detenu, namely, Ramu, aged about 28 years, S/o Mathaiyan, under Section 3(1) of the Tamil Nadu Prevention of Dangerous Activities of Bootleggers, Drug Offenders, Forest

Offenders, Goondas, Immoral Traffic Offenders, Sand Offenders, Sexual Offenders, Slum Grabbers and Video Pirates Act, 1982 (Tamil Nadu Act 14/1982), branding him as a "Goonda" as contemplated u/s 2(f) of the Tamil Nadu Act 14 of 1982, and to quash the same and to direct the respondents to produce the body and person of the detenu and set him at liberty.

2. Even though, Mr.S.Manoharan, the learned counsel for the petitioner, raised many grounds in assailing the impugned order of detention in the petition, he confined his arguments only to the ground of delay in considering the representation of the detenu. According to the learned counsel for the petitioner, the representation of the detenu has been received by the Government on 31.12.2015 and remarks have been called for from the detaining authority on the same day i.e., 31.12.2015. However, the remarks have been received by the Government only on 29.01.2016, after a delay of 29 days. He adds that the file was dealt with by the Minister concerned on 14.02.2016 and the rejection letter was prepared on 15.02.2016. It is his further submission that as per the Proforma submitted by the learned Additional Public Prosecutor, there were 11 intervening holidays and even after giving concession as to the intervening holidays, still there is a delay of 18 days, which remains unexplained. The unexplained delay in considering the representation of the detenu vitiates the detention order. In support of his contention, the learned counsel for the petitioner relied on the judgment of the Hon'ble Apex Court in Rajammal Vs. State of Tamil Nadu, reported in (1999) 1 SCC 417.

3. Resisting the contention of the learned counsel for the petitioner, Mr.A.N.Thambidurai, the learned Additional Public Prosecutor had submitted that the impugned detention order has been passed on cogent and sufficient materials and there is no illegality or infirmity in the impugned order of detention. The learned Additional Public Prosecutor had further submitted that there was no deliberate delay on the part of the authorities concerned to consider and dispose of the representation of the detenu. It is contended that such a delay is not fatal to the impugned detention order, as the authorities concerned are dealing with the file right from the date of receipt of the representation and therefore, he prayed for dismissal of the petition.

4. We have considered the rival submissions carefully with regard to facts and citation and perused the materials available on record.

5. As per the Proforma submitted by the learned Additional Public Prosecutor, the representation of the detenu was received by the Government on 31.12.2015 and remarks have been called for from the detaining authority on the same day i.e.,

31.12.2015. However, remarks have been received by the Government only on 29.01.2016, i.e., after a delay of 29 days and the case of the detenu was dealt with by the Minister concerned on 14.02.2016 and the same was rejected on 15.02.2016. From the above, it is clear that in between 31.12.2015 and 29.01.2016, [i.e., the intermittent days between the remarks called for and the remarks received] there is a delay of 29 days. Even if we give concession to the 11 intervening holidays including Government Holidays viz., 01.01.2016 ; 02.01.2016 ; 03.01.2016 ; 09.01.2016 ; 10.01.2016 ; 15.01.2016 ; 16.01.2016 ; 17.01.2016 ; 23.01.2016 ; 24.01.2016 ; and 26.01.2016, still there is a delay of 18 days, which remain unexplained.

6. It is trite law that the representation should be very expeditiously considered and disposed of with a sense of urgency and without avoidable delay. Any unexplained delay in the disposal of the representation would be a breach of the constitutional imperative and it would render the continued detention impermissible and illegal. From the records produced, we find that no acceptable explanation has been offered for the delay of 18 days. Therefore, we have to hold that the delay has vitiated further detention of the detenu.

7. In the judgment of the Hon'ble Supreme Court in Rajammal's case (cited supra), it has been held as follows:

"It is a constitutional obligation of the Government to consider the representation forwarded by the detenu without any delay. Though no period is prescribed by Article 22 of the Constitution for the decision to be taken on the representation, the words "as soon as may be" in clause (5) of Article 22 convey the message that the representation should be considered and disposed of at the earliest."

8. As per the dictum laid down by the Supreme Court in above cited Rajammal's case, number of days of delay is immaterial and what is to be considered is whether the delay caused has been properly explained by the authorities concerned. But, here 18 days delay has not been properly explained at all.

9. Further, in a recent decision in Ummu Sabeena vs. State of Kerala - 2011 STPL (Web) 999 SC, the Supreme Court has held that the history of personal liberty, as is well known, is a history of insistence on procedural safeguards. The expression 'as soon as may be', in Article 22(5) of the Constitution of India clearly shows the concern of the makers of the Constitution that the representation, made on behalf of the detenu, should be considered and disposed of with a sense of

urgency and without any avoidable delay.

10. In the light of the above fact and law, we have no hesitation in quashing the order of detention on the ground of delay on the part of the Government in disposing of the representation of the detenu.

11. Accordingly, the habeas corpus petition is allowed and the detention order dated 09.09.2015, passed by the 2nd respondent is quashed. The detenu is directed to be set at liberty, forthwith, unless his presence is required in connection with any other case.

-s/d-
Assistant Registrar

True Copy

Sub-Assistant Registrar

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To

1.The Secretary to Government (Home)
Prohibition and Excise Department
Government of Tamil Nadu
Fort St.George, Chennai 600 009.

2.The District Magistrate and District Collector
Salem District.

3.The Superintendent Central Prison, Salem
(In duplicate for Communication to Detenu)

4.The Joint Secretary to Government
Public Law and Order Fort St.George Chennai-9

5. The Additional Public Prosecutor
High Court, Madras.

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H.C.P.No.2398 of 2015

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