

IN THE HIGH COURT OF JUDICATURE AT MADRAS

DATED : 24.05.2016

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THE HONOURABLE MR.JUSTICE G.CHOCKALINGAM
and
THE HONOURABLE MR.JUSTICE M.V.MURALIDARAN

H.C.P.No.219 of 2016

C.Mathialagan

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Petitioner

Vs.

- 1.Government of Tamil Nadu, rep. by its
Secretary,
Co-operation, Food and Consumer,
Protection Department,
Fort St.George, Chennai 600 009.
- 2.The District Magistrate & District Collector
Dharmapuri District.
3. The Additional Secretary to Government of India,
Ministry of Consumer Affairs Food and Public Distribution,
Department of Consumer Affairs,
Room No.270, Krishi Bhavan,
New Delhi 110 001.

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Respondents

Petition filed under Article 226 of the Constitution of India, praying to issue a Writ of Habeas Corpus calling for the records in Detention Order in S.C.No.02/2016 dated 14.01.2016 on the file of the 2nd respondent and quash the same and direct the respondents herein to produce the body of his brother Thiru.Samikannau, son of Chinnapaiyan, aged 56 years, the detenu herein now confined in Central Prison, Salem before this Court and set him at liberty.

For Petitioner : Ms.R.Subhadra Devi
For R1 & R2 : Mr.M.Maharaja, APP
For R3 : Mr. S.Arockiam CGSC

O R D E R

[Order of the Court was made by G.CHOCKALINGAM, J.]

The petitioner herein is the brother of the detenu and he has filed this petition challenging the order of detention passed by the second respondent in S.C.No.02/2016 dated 14.01.2016, branding his brother as a "BLACK MARKETER" under

the Tamil Nadu Prevention of Black Marketing and Maintenance of Supplies of Essential Commodities Act, 1980 [Act 7 of 1980].

2. Even though the learned counsel for the petitioner raised many grounds in assailing the impugned order of detention in the petition, she confined her 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 dated 04.02.2016, has been received by the Government on 05.02.2016 and remarks have been called for from the detaining authority on 09.02.2016; but, the remarks have been received by the Government only on 14.03.2016, after a delay of 23 days. She adds that the file was dealt with by the Minister concerned on 23.03.2016 and the rejection letter was prepared and communicated to the detenu also on 24.03.2016. It is her further submission that as per the Proforma submitted by the learned Additional Public Prosecutor, there were 10 intervening holidays and even after giving concession as to the intervening holidays including Government Holidays, still there is a delay of 24 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, learned Additional Public Prosecutor submitted that the Government received the representation on 05.02.2016 and that was forwarded to the Detaining Authority, calling for remarks on 09.02.2016 and remarks were received by the Government on 14.03.2016 and ultimately, the representation was considered and rejected on 24.03.2016 and the result of the consideration was communicated to the detenu on the same day, i.e., on 24.03.2016. Therefore, according to the learned Additional Public Prosecutor, there is no inordinate delay in considering the representation of the detenu 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, on the representation of the detenu dated 04.02.2016 was received by the Government on 05.02.2016 and remarks have been called for from the detaining authority on 09.02.2016. But, remarks have been received by the Government only on 14.03.2016, i.e., after a delay of 34 days and the case of the detenu was dealt with by the Minister concerned on 23.03.2016 and the same was rejected on the same day, i.e., on

24.03.2016. From the above, it is clear that in between 09.02.2016 and 14.03.2016, [i.e., the intermittent days between the remarks called for and the remarks received] there is a delay of 34 days. Even if we give concession to the 10 intervening holidays including Government holidays, namely 13.02.2016, 14.02.2016, 20.02.2016, 21.02.2016, 27.02.2016, 28.02.2016, 05.03.2016, 06.03.2016, 12.03.2016 and 13.03.2016, still there is a delay of 24 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 24 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 24 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 passed by the second respondent is quashed. The detenu is directed to be set at liberty, forthwith, unless his presence is required in connection with any other case.

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s/d-
Assistant Registrar(J)

True Copy

Sub-Assistant Registrar

To

1. The Secretary,
Government of Tamil Nadu,
Co-operation, Food and Consumer,
Protection Department,
Fort St. George, Chennai 600 009.
2. The District Magistrate & District Collector
Dharmapuri District.
3. The Additional Secretary to Government of India,
Ministry of Consumer Affairs Food and Public Distribution,
Department of Consumer Affairs,
Room No.270, Krishi Bhavan,
New Delhi 110 001.
4. The Superintendent of Central Prison,
Salem.
5. The Public Prosecutor, High Court, Madras.
6. The Joint Secretary to Government,
Public (Law & Order) Department,
Fort St. George, Chennai 9.

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