

**IN THE HIGH COURT OF PUNJAB & HARYANA
AT CHANDIGARH**

101-6

CRM-M-24885-2020

Date of decision : 31.08.2020

Harsimranjot Singh

.....Petitioner

Versus

State of Punjab

.....Respondent

CORAM: HON'BLE MR. JUSTICE ARUN KUMAR TYAGI

Present : Mr. Gurbir Singh Pannu, Advocate
for the petitioner.

Mr. Lavinder Sofat, Asstt. AG, Punjab
for the respondent-State.

ARUN KUMAR TYAGI, J (ORAL)

(The case has been taken up for hearing through video conferencing.)

The petitioner has filed the present petition under Section 438 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 for grant of anticipatory bail in case FIR No.52 dated 26.05.2020 registered under Section 379 of the Indian Penal Code, 1860 (for short 'the IPC') and Sections 21(1) and 4(1) of the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957 (for short 'the MMDR Act') at Police Station Rahon, District SBS Nagar.

Briefly stated the facts relevant for disposal of the petition are that on 26.05.2020 S.I. Balwinder Singh, Incharge Police Post Sheikh Majra, Police Station Rahon with police party was present for patrolling duty at village Saidpur. Secret information was received about illegal mining of sand from bed of river Satluj in the area of Shamashpur. Written information was sent to S.H.O. Police Station Rahon, S.B.S. Nagar on the basis of which the above-said FIR was registered. Information was also given to Harjinder Singh, Mining Officer, authorized by the Punjab Government to initiate legal action under Section 22 of the MMDR Act against the persons indulging in illegal mining who joined the police party at the time of raid. Raid was

accordingly conducted. During raid 29 Tippers (out of which 8 Tippers were filled with sand), 2 Poclain machines, one tractor trolley and one motorcycle were seized on the spot. On seeing the police party, the owners/drivers of the above-said vehicles fled from the spot. On receipt of information regarding presence of two drivers of tippers namely Harjit Singh @ Jeeta and Manmohan Singh and parking of two Canters filled with sand near Mehfil One Dhaba, Sheikhan Majara, the police arrested Harjit Singh @ Jeeta and Manmohan Singh and also seized two canters and arrested their drivers namely Sikander Khan and Bikharjit Singh @ Bikkar.

Apprehending his arrest, the petitioner has filed the present petition for grant of anticipatory bail.

The petition has been opposed by learned State Counsel but no separate reply has been filed by the respondent-State.

I have heard learned Counsel for the petitioner and learned State Counsel and gone through the relevant record.

Learned Counsel for the petitioner has argued that the petitioner has been falsely implicated in the case. There is no incriminating evidence available on record against the petitioner. The petitioner is owner of Tipper No.PB-10-DS-4495 which was driven by Harjit Singh. The tipper was empty when the raid was conducted and no one was arrested from the spot. Harjit Singh used to drive the tipper involved on the basis of oral contract with the petitioner. Harjit Singh has been granted regular bail by the trial Court.

Learned Counsel for the petitioner has further argued that in the presence of the MMDR Act which is a special enactment, no offence under Section 379 of the IPC is made out. The offence under Section 21 of the MMDR Act is also not made out. Even otherwise cognizance thereof cannot be taken by the Court except on written complaint of the person authorized by the Central/State Government as provided by Section 22 of the MMDR Act. The police could not register FIR and can not investigate the case and the FIR and subsequent proceedings are wholly illegal. The petitioner is ready to join the investigation and his custodial interrogation is not required.

Therefore, the petitioner may be ordered to be released on anticipatory bail.

On the other hand, learned State Counsel has argued that the petitioner is owner of the vehicle used for illegal mining from unauthorized place. As provided by Section 21(6) of the MMDR Act offence under Section 21(2) of the MMDR Act is cognizable and FIR could be registered by the police on the basis of secret information received. Further illegal mining of sand from bed of river Satluj without consent of the State/grant of licence by the State constitutes theft under Section 378 of the IPC punishable under Section 379 of the IPC and the police was not debarred by the provisions of Section 22 of the MMDR Act from taking action against persons who had committed theft of sand and could register FIR and can investigate the case and submit final report regarding the same in accordance with the provisions of the Cr.P.C. Harjinder Singh, Mining officer had joined the team which conducted the raid. Filing of written complaint under Section 22 of the MMDR Act by the authorized officer is required only at the time of taking of cognizance of offence under Section 21(1) of the MMDR Act by the Judicial Magistrate First Class. Custodial interrogation of the petitioner is required to unearth the nexus with the mafia indulging in illegal mining on such a large scale. The petitioner does not deserve grant of anticipatory bail. Therefore, the petition may be dismissed.

The legal position which emerges from analysis of the relevant statutory provisions is that in view of the provisions of Section 21(6) of the MMDR Act as to offence under Section 21(1) of the MMDR Act being cognizable, FIR for the commission of said offence can be registered and case can be investigated by the Police but in view of Section 22 of the MMDR Act cognizance cannot be taken by the Court except on the complaint of the authorised officer. Report under Section 173(2) of the Cr.P.C. can be filed along with the complaint of the authorised officer and cognizance can be taken by the Court on the basis of complaint filed in accordance with Section 22 of the MMDR Act. Section 22 of the MMDR Act is not a complete and absolute bar for taking of action by the police for illegally and dishonestly

committing theft of minerals including sand from the river bed and the ingredients constituting the offence under Section 21(1) of the MMDR Act and the ingredients of dishonestly removing sand and gravel from the river beds, which is the property of the State, without its consent constituting theft under Section 378 punishable under Section 379 of the IPC are different and on receipt of the police report, the Judicial Magistrate having jurisdiction can take cognizance of the offence of theft punishable under Section 379 of the IPC without awaiting the receipt of complaint that may be filed by the authorized officer for taking cognizance in respect of violation of various provisions of the MMRD Act. Reference in this regard may be made to judgments passed in ***State of NCT of Delhi Vs. Sanjay : 2014(4) RCR (Criminal) 211*** and ***CRM-M-4211-2014 Hardeep Singh and another Versus State of Haryana and others decided on 04.12.2014*** and ***order dated 14.08.2020 passed by this Court in CRM-M-14956-2020 titled as 'Balwinder Singh Vs. State of Punjab and others.***

The Courts have been granted power to grant anticipatory bail to protect against motivated criminal litigation instituted at the instance of unscrupulous litigants animated by malice or political vendetta. Grant of anticipatory bail is an extra-ordinary remedy and is not, therefore, intended to be granted in every case. Number of factors including nature and gravity of the offences, quantum of sentence, likelihood of the accused absconding, intimidating or influencing the witnesses or tempering with the evidence or committing similar offences have also to be taken into consideration. Further, socio-economic offences constitute a class apart and need to be visited with different approach in matter of bail. Since socio-economic offences have deep rooted conspiracies affecting the moral fibre of society and causing irreparable harm, the same have to be viewed seriously. Reference in this regard may be made to ***State of Bihar and another Vs. Amit Kumar @ Bachaha Rai : 2017 (13) SCC 751*** and ***Rohit Tandon Vs. Directorate of Enforcement : 2018(11) SCC 46***. Illegal mining/theft of sand from river beds not only involves loss of public exchequer but also endangers ecological balance resulting in

enundating floods causing huge loss of lives and property and other devastating consequences as noticed by Hon'ble Supreme Court in its judgment in *State of NCT of Delhi Vs. Sanjay : 2014(4) RCR (Criminal) 211*. Persons involved have to be sternly dealt with and effective steps have also to be taken to deny the fruits of crime to them. Therefore, the Courts cannot be liberal in the matter of grant of bail to persons allegedly involved in offence of illegal mining/theft of sand.

Keeping in view the facts and circumstances of the case, the fact that custodial interrogation of the petitioner is required for thorough investigation of the crime committed and also keeping in view the possibility of the petitioner influencing the witnesses or tempering with evidence and fleeing from justice, I am of the considered view that the petitioner does not deserve the concession of anticipatory bail.

In view of the above discussion, the present petition for grant of anticipatory bail to the petitioner is dismissed.

31.08.2020
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(ARUN KUMAR TYAGI)
JUDGE

Whether speaking/reasoned	:	Yes/No
Whether reportable	:	Yes/No