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* **IN THE HIGH COURT OF DELHI AT NEW DELHI**

Date of Decision:- 06.02.2020

+ W.P.(C) 7157/2018

BALDEV SINGH AND ORS.

..... Petitioners

Through: Ms. Kanika Goel and Mr. R. S. Dalal,
Advs.

versus

UNION OF INDIA AND ORS.

..... Respondents

Through: Ms. Shobhna Takia Adv.for DDA.
Mr. Mohit Chaudhary, Adv. for R-4.
Mr. Wajeeh Shafiq, Standing counsel
for Delhi Waqf Board with
Mr.Hashmat Nabi and Ms.Ramsha
Shan, Advs. for R-6.

CORAM:

HON'BLE MR. JUSTICE VIPIN SANGHI

HON'BLE MR. JUSTICE SANJEEV NARULA

SANJEEV NARULA, J (Oral):

1. The Petitioners have filed the present petition under Article 226 of the Constitution of India, seeking declaration to the effect that the acquisition proceedings with respect to land of the petitioners admeasuring 3 bighas comprised in Khasra No.42/7/1 situated in revenue estate of Village Barwala Delhi (hereinafter “the subject land”), acquired vide Award bearing no. 12/2005-06, are deemed to have lapsed under Section 24(2) of the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013 (hereinafter as “the 2013 Act”).

2. The reliefs sought by the petitioners read as follows:

“(I) Issue writ of DECLARATION and/or any other appropriate Writ, Order or Direction in the like nature declaring the impugned acquisition proceedings lapsed, commenced vide notification under Section 4 of Act 1894 bearing notification No. F.11 (19) 2001/L & B /LA/20112 Dated 21/03/2003 under Section 4 of LA Act, 1894; declaration under Section 6 of the Act vide notification no.F.11(11)/2004/L&B /LA/28281, resulting in Award no. 12/2005-06 vis-a-vis land admeasuring 3 bighas comprised in Khasra No.42//7/l situated in revenue estate of Village Barwala Delhi;

(II) Consequently issue writ of CERTIORARI quashing the impugned acquisition proceedings commenced vide notification No. . F.11(19) 2001/L & B /LA/20112 Dated 21/03/2003 under Section 4 of LA Act, 1894; declaration under Section 6 of the Act vide notification no. F.11(11)/2004/L&B /LA/28281, resulting in Award no. 12/2005-06 vis-a-vis land land admeasuring 3 Bighas comprised in Khasra No.42//7/1 situated in revenue estate of Village Barwala, Delhi;

(III) Issue MANDAMUS and/or any other Writ, Order or direction in the like nature commanding the respondents not to interfere with and/or obstruct the Petitioner and his co-owners in peaceful enjoyment of the subject land i.e. land admeasuring 3 bighas comprised in Khasra No.42//7/1 situated in revenue estate of Village Barwala, Delhi;

(IV) Issue MANDAMUS and/or any other Writ, Order or direction in the like nature commanding the respondents to access the amount of compensation as per the New Act Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013.

(V) Pass any other or farther Writ(s), Order(s) or Direction(s) which this Hon'ble Court may deem fit and proper in the facts and circumstances of the present case.”

3. The notification under Section 4 of the Land Acquisition Act, 1894 (hereinafter 'the LAA') was issued on 21.03.2003 and the declaration under Section 6 of the LAA was issued on 19.03.2004 for the public purpose i.e. 'Rohini Development Scheme'. Subsequently, an Award bearing no. 12/2005-2006 was passed in respect of the subject land.

4. Though the Petitioners are not the recorded owners, they claim ownership over the subject land on the basis of a 99-year lease deed, purportedly executed in the year 1964, between the father of the Petitioners and the Delhi Wakf Board. Petitioners state that the ownership of the subject land was with the Delhi Wakf Board and the same was let out to the father of the Petitioners for the purpose of cultivation. The father of the Petitioners-Sh. Prem Singh S/o Sh. Dhara Singh expired on 24.10.2007, leaving behind the Petitioners as his only legal heirs. Petitioners have based their challenge to the acquisition proceedings on the ground that authorities have failed to take possession of the subject land and that they continue to be in possession thereof, till date. It is also stated that no compensation has been paid for the subject land.

5. On a careful perusal of the petition, it emerges that no valid title documents have been annexed with the petition. Petitioners have relied upon "khatoni" records to claim their right over the subject land. The said record reflects the owner of the subject land as "Delhi Wakf Board" and the father of the Petitioners has been shown as the cultivator. Therefore, there is no reliable title document to prove the Petitioner's title and ownership over the subject land. In absence thereof, the Petitioners cannot claim right and title

or interest over the subject land and do not have the *locus standi* to file the present petition.

6. The respondents have relied upon the decision of this court in the case of ***Raj Singh v. Union of India*** bearing W.P (C) 12983/2018. In the said case, the petitioner therein had impugned the acquisition proceedings with regard to Village Barwala, which is the same village where the subject land in the present writ petition is situated. The land was acquired for the purpose of Rohini Residential Scheme. This court, while taking note of the decision of the Supreme Court in ***Rahul Gupta v. Delhi Development Authority & Ors*** being SLP (Civil) Nos.16385-88/2012 dismissed the writ petition on the ground that the acquisition proceedings were for the purpose of the Rohini Residential Scheme and the possession of the land therein was deemed to be with the DDA and it is not open to contend that the actual physical possession of the land in question was with the petitioner therein.

7. Similarly, in the instant case, it is the admitted position that the impugned acquisition was for the public purpose of “Rohini Residential Scheme”. The acquisition proceedings in the instant case are covered by the decision of the Supreme Court in ***Rahul Gupta*** (supra). A series of interim orders were passed by the Supreme Court in the abovenoted matter. In the last of such interim orders dated 18.10. 2016, the specific direction issued by the Supreme Court was that “*We granted liberty to the Delhi Development Authority to produce a copy of this order in all matters, pertaining to land acquisition relating to the Rohini Residential Scheme, pending before the High Court, for vacation of similar interim directions.*”

8. It was further clarified by the Supreme Court as under: -

“It is made clear that in case the applicants have re-entered possession or otherwise, they shall vacate the said land and hand over its possession forthwith to the Delhi Development Authority, failing which it shall be assumed to be in possession of the Delhi Development Authority, after the expiry of ten days from the passing of the instant order.”

9. In view of the directions of the Supreme Court in **Rahul Gupta** (supra), the DDA is deemed to be in possession of the subject land. Thus, the contention of the Petitioners that they continue to remain in possession of the subject land is of no avail.

10. The Petitioners were also queried about the delay in filing the present petition. However, no purposeful explanation has been tendered in the petition to justify the inordinate delay in coming forward to challenge the present acquisition proceedings. The notification under Section 4 of the LAA was issued on 21.03.2003 and the declaration under Section 6 of the LAA on 19.03.2004, whereas the present petition has been filed after about fifteen years. The petition is obviously barred by laches.

11. The Supreme Court has dealt with the issue of delay and laches in **Mahavir v. Union of India**, (2018) 3 SCC 588, in the context of the 2013 Act. The said judgment is unambiguous in emphasising that claims where there is total inaction are not meant to be revived by the 2013 Act. The relevant observations of the Supreme Court in the said decision read as

under:

“22. In our opinion, the cases in which there is deliberate action of the owners for not collecting the compensation and they do not want to receive it, Section 24(2) of the 2013 Act does not come to their rescue as provisions are to help those persons who are deprived of compensation but not for those who deliberately had not received it and litigated for decades for quashing of proceedings avoiding to receive compensation by willful act. The failure to deposit in court under Section 31(1) in such cases would attract only interest as envisaged under Section 34 of the Act and the provisions of Section 24 cannot be so invoked in such cases.

23. In the instant case, the claim has been made not only belatedly, but neither the petitioners nor their previous three generations had ever approached any of the authorities in writing for claiming compensation. No representation had ever been filed with any authority, none has been annexed and there is no averment made in the petition that any such representation had ever been filed. The claim appears not only stale and dead but extremely clouded. This we are mentioning as additional reasons, as such claims not only suffer from delay and laches but courts are not supposed to entertain such claims. Besides such claims become doubtful, cannot be received for consideration being barred due to delay and laches.

24. The High Court has rightly observed that such claims cannot be permitted to be raised in the court, and cannot be adjudicated as they are barred. The High Court has rightly observed that such claims cannot be a subject matter of inquiry after the lapse of a reasonable period of time and beneficial provisions of Section 24 of the 2013 Act are not available to such incumbents. In our opinion, Section 24 cannot revive those claims that are dead and stale.

26. The provision of Section 24 does not invalidate courts judgments/orders in which right have been finally lost or due to inaction is barred. Law does not permit examination of barred or totally fraudulent claims. The provisions of the law cannot be permitted to be defrauded or misused. Section 24(2) of the 2013 Act cannot be invoked in such cases. The High Court has rightly declined to entertain the writ petitions filed by the petitioners. It is not conceivable how the petitioners could file such a petition in a laconic manner relating to the prime locality at New Delhi that too for hundreds of acres with the delay of more than 100 years. ”

(emphasis supplied)

12. The aforesaid Judgment has been considered by the Supreme Court in the decision of *Indore Development Authority v. Shailendra* reported at (2018) 3 SCC 412, relevant portion of which is reproduced hereinunder:-

“128. In our considered opinion section 24 cannot be used to revive the dead or stale claims and the matters, which have been contested up to this Court or even in the High Court having lost the cases or where reference has been sought for enhancement of the compensation. Compensation obtained and still it is urged that physical possession has not been taken from them, such claims cannot be entertained under the guise of section 24(2). We have come across the cases in which findings have been recorded that by which of drawing a Panchnama, possession has been taken, now again under Section 24(2) it is asserted again that physical possession is still with them. Such claims cannot be entertained in view of the previous decisions in which such plea ought to have been raised and such decisions would operate as res judicata or constructive res judicata. As either the plea raised is negatived or such plea ought to have been raised or was not raised in the previous round of litigation. Section 24 of the Act of 2013 does not supersede or annul the court’s decision and the provisions cannot be misused to reassert such claims once over again. Once Panchnama has been drawn and by way of drawing the Panchnama physical possession has

been taken, the case cannot be reopened under the guise of section 24 of Act of 2013.

129. Section 24 is not intended to come to the aid of those who first deliberately refuse to accept the compensation, and then indulge in ill-advised litigation, and often ill-motivated dilatory tactics, for decades together. On the contrary, the section is intended to help those who have not been offered or paid the compensation despite it being the legal obligation of the acquiring body so to do, and/or who have been illegally deprived of their possession for five years or more; in both the scenarios, fault/cause not being attributable to the landowners/claimants.

*130. We are of the view that stale or dead claims cannot be the subject-matter of judicial probing under section 24 of the Act of 2013. The provisions of section 24 do not invalidate those judgment/orders of the courts where under rights/claims have been lost/negated, neither do they revive those rights which have come barred, either due to inaction or otherwise by operation of law. Fraudulent and stale claims are not at all to be raised under the guise of section 24. Misuse of provisions of section 24(2) cannot be permitted. Protection by the courts in cases of such blatant misuse of the provisions of law could never have been the intention behind enacting the provisions of section 24 (2) of the 2013 Act; and, by the decision laid down in *Pune Municipal Corporation (supra)*, and this Court never, even for a moment, intended that such cases would be received or entertained by the courts.”*

(emphasis supplied)

13. This Court has also dealt with the issue of delay and laches in the case of *Mool Chand v. Union of India* (W.P. (C) 4528/2015) dated 17th January 2019, wherein the Court while elaborating the decision of *Mahavir v. Union of India*, (2018) 3 SCC 588 and *Indore Development Authority v. Shailendra*, (2018) 3 SCC 412, on the aspect of delay and laches, made the following observations:

"34. The question then arises whether only the points of difference between the decisions in Pune Municipal Corporation (supra) and Indore Development Authority v. Shailendra (supra) and all issues incidental thereto have been referred to the Constitution Bench? In this context it requires to be noted that although several questions were framed in Indore Development Authority v. Shailendra (supra), it is only on Question I, viz., on whether the deposit in the RD Account would amount to having tendered compensation for the purposes of Section 24 (2) of the 2013 Act, that there was a difference of opinion between the view expressed in the two decisions viz., Pune Municipal Corporation (supra) and Indore Development Authority v. Shailendra (supra).

35. The other point of difference was that arising in Yogesh Neema v. State of MP (supra) where the correctness of the decision in Sree Balaji Nagar Residential Association v. State of Tamil Nadu (supra) as regards exclusion of the period covered by the interim orders from the calculation of the period of five years under Section 24 (2) of the 2013 Act was questioned. On this point the three-Judge Bench in Indore Development Authority v. Shailendra (supra) unanimously overruled the decision in Sree Balaji Nagar Residential Association v. State of Tamil Nadu (supra). On this issue no subsequent Bench of the Supreme Court of co-ordinate strength appears to have taken a contrary view. It is doubtful, therefore, whether this issue would be examined by the Constitution Bench.

36. Relevant to the issue on hand, there was no difference of view qua Question III addressed in Indore Development Authority v. Shailendra (supra) i.e. "Whether section 24 of Act of 2013 revives barred and stale claims?" On this question there was no view (much less a contrary view) expressed in Pune Municipal Corporation (supra) or for that matter in any other subsequent decision of a smaller, co-ordinate or even larger Bench of the Supreme Court. This question, therefore, was not the subject matter of reference before the Constitution Bench.

37. Consequently, this Court is of the view that although the order passed by the Constitution Bench refers to “all the aspects” being considered by the Constitution Bench, that expression would not include questioning the correctness of the decision of the three-Judge Bench in Indore Development Authority v. Shailendra (supra) as far as it holds by a unanimous opinion that Section 24 (2) of the 2013 Act cannot revive old and stale claims.”

(emphasis supplied)

14. Similar orders have been passed in several other cases, such as in the case of ***Sushma Purthi v. Union of India*** (W.P. (C) 586 of 2016) dated 31st January 2019, ***Krishan v. Union of India*** (W.P. (C) 4919 of 2014) dated 25th January 2019, ***Mohd. Mian v. Union of India*** (W.P. (C) 2702/2019) dated 5th February 2019. The aforementioned cases have been dismissed by this court on the ground of delay and laches. Challenge against these judgments have been dismissed by the Supreme Court vide SLP (C) No. 11481/2019, SLP (C) No. 13423/2019 and SLP (C) No. 8848/2019, respectively.

15. Thus, in view of the foregoing discussion, the present petition is not maintainable on merits as well on the ground of delay and laches. Accordingly, the present petition is dismissed. Interim orders stand vacated.

SANJEEV NARULA, J

VIPIN SANGHI, J

FEBRUARY 06, 2020

Pallavi