

S/L 2
11.08.2021
Court. No. 19
GB

W.P.A. 12553 of 2021

Smt. Sumitra Mandal
VS
The State of West Bengal & Ors.

(Through Video Conference)

*Mr. Dipankar Pal,
Ms. Kakali Naskar.*

...for the Petitioner.

*Mr. Partha Sarathi Bhattacharyya,
Mr. Partha Sarathi Deb Barman,
Mr. Raju Bhattacharyya,
Ms. Ankita Dey.*

...for Respondent Nos.5 to 11, 13 & 14.

*Mr. Raja Saha,
Ms. Rupsha Chakraborty.*

...for the State.

The writ petition has been filed by the Pradhan of Sirkabad Gram Panchayat. The contention of the petitioner is that the requisition was brought on July 28, 2021 by the respondent nos.5 to 11, 13 and 14 expressing their intention to remove the Pradhan. The requisitionists had lost confidence in the Pradhan. Allegation was made in the motion that the Pradhan did not do any developmental work. Further allegation had been levelled that the Pradhan had taken unilateral decisions on many occasions and did not cooperate with the members.

According to Mr. Pal, learned advocate appearing on behalf of the petitioner, the said requisition contains a stigma.

Reliance has been placed on a decision of this Court in the matter of Ujjal Mondal vs. State of West Bengal reported in 2013 (1) CHN (CAL) and Sourendra Nath Das vs. The State of West Bengal & Ors. passed in WPA 11903 of 2021.

According to Mr. Bhattacharyya, learned senior advocate and Mr. Deb Barman, learned advocate, who appear on behalf of the requisitionists, the intention to remove would suffice the requirement of law and the allegations against the Pradhan of not doing any developmental work and not cooperating with the members, could easily be ignored. Thus, it is submitted on behalf of the requisitionists that the provisions of Section 12(2) of the West Bengal Panchayat Act, 1973 allows such kind of a requisition when the only requirement was an intention to remove the Pradhan on account of loss of confidence. They submit that the other portions of the requisition are redundant and neither the prescribed authority nor the Court can take cognizance of such statement. The said statements do not have any impact on the requisition.

Mr. Saha, learned advocate for the state respondents submits that the notice was not stigmatic as such. He distinguished the decision of Ujjal Mondal (supra) on the ground that in Ujjal Mondal (supra), the allegations were more serious. According to him, in this case, the allegation was inaction and incompetence which were not stigmatic, and as such, the foundation of the 'no confidence motion' was not allegations of misconduct or mis-appropriation. Mr. Saha

refers to a decision of a Division Bench of this court in the matter of Ujjwal Kumar Singha Vs. State of West Bengal, reported in (2017) 2 CHN 258 (DB). In the said decision, the court observed that in an institution which runs on democratic principles, a person can continue to be its head so long he/she enjoys the confidence of the persons who comprised such a body. According to Mr. Saha, one of the challenges before the Division Bench was that the requisition notice carried a stigma, but the Division Bench did not set aside the requisition.

I have heard the learned Advocate for the respective parties.

In the matter of Ujjal Mondal (supra) the Hon'ble Division Bench of this Court held that the requisition notice/no confidence motion was entertainable only when there was no foundation for bringing the motion. The relevant portion is quoted below:

“24. Having regard to section 101 of the said Act, we are of the view that a ‘no confidence motion’ is entertainable for removal of Prodhan where there should not be any ground or foundation of bringing ‘no confidence motion’ and if ‘no confidence motion’ is carried on that ground, it will invite civil consequence or evil consequence to the Office Bearers relating to his political career naturally and as such, natural justice principle will have play in the matter, thereby a breach of Article 14 of the Constitution of India.”

Having perused the judgment of the Division Bench in Ujjwal Kumar Singha (supra), I do not find that the Division Bench decided the point as to whether the requisition which carries some allegation against the Pradhan could be entertained. It appears that there was a challenge to the no confidence motion on the ground that the same was carrying allegations, but the Hon'ble Division Bench held that the learned Single Judge had dealt with the issues and had dismissed the writ petition with reasons. However, there is no observations as to whether the requisition, even if, it contains any allegation or stigma could be entertained contrary to what was decided in Ujjal Mondal (supra).

This court in the matter Sourendra Nath Das v. The State of West Bengal & ors. (WPA 11903 of 2021) held as follows:

“Having considered the submissions made by the petitioner and the learned advocates for the prescribed authority, this court is of the opinion that a reading of the requisition notice (which is in bengali), as a whole, would indicate that in the opinion of the members, the pradhan has proved to be incompetent as he did not perform his duties and developmental works, causing deprivation to the people of the locality from the benefits all governmental projects, and thus the members had lost confidence in their leader and wanted his removal.

The effect of such a requisition is that the pradhan being incompetent to perform his duties had caused suffering to the people and would be consequently removed as the members lost confidence on account of such non-performance. The pradhan has a career. If the requisition is allowed to stand, it would be a reflection of his inability and incompetence in performing his duties as a leader of the gram panchayat. This is the foundation of the requisition. The ‘no confidence’ is based on the allegation of incompetence and inability of the pradhan and the suffering caused to the people in the

locality due to such incompetence. This is not a simple requisition for removal of the pradhan. The removal if carried through in the meeting will carry a stigma that the pradhan was removed as he failed to perform his duties and developmental works.

In my opinion, the decision of Ujjal Mondal (supra) applies. Even if the allegations are not as serious as misappropriation or misconduct, incapacity or incompetence of a political leader to perform works in the locality which has cause disillusionment, unhappiness and suffering to the people in the locality are allegations which can be viewed with seriousness. The future prospects of the pradhan might be jeopardized. He will also not get a chance to explain his conduct. Thus, the requisition notice and subsequent notice are set aside for the reasons stated hereinabove.”

Another interim decision of a Division Bench has been placed by the respondents, in the matter of Prasanta Mitra Vs. The State of West Bengal passed in MAT 1086 of 2019. Having perused the interim order, this court is of the opinion that the consideration before the Hon’ble Division Bench was not with regard to any stigma or allegation in the requisition notice.

Having considered the rival submissions of the learned advocates for the respective parties, this Court is of the opinion that the issue before the Hon’ble Division Bench in Ujjal Mondal (supra) with regard to the removal of the Pradhan was similar to the one raised by the petitioner in the writ petition. The foundation of the no confidence and the intention to remove the Pradhan was inability of the Pradhan to do any developmental work, non-cooperation with the members and imposition of unilateral decisions on the members.

The Pradhan can be removed by the requisitionists if they have lost confidence in him by bringing a requisition with the intention to remove. As soon as there is an allegation of incapacity, incapability, arrogance or non-cooperation, the same becomes stigmatic. The Pradhan is a politically appointed representative of the people and allegations of such nature may have a negative effect on her future prospects and her credibility as a member of the Panchayat may be affected.

Thus, having considered the requisition notice as a whole, I of the view that it indicates that the lack of confidence on the Pradhan was due to the incompetence of the Pradhan, to perform developmental work in the locality non-cooperation and imposition of unilateral decisions. Such allegations can also enrage and turn the people in the locality against the Pradhan.

Thus, in my view, with due respect to the submissions made by the learned advocates of the requisitionists, the requisition cannot be sustained in law only on the ground that there are allegations against the Pradhan, which form the foundation of the no-confidence.

Under such circumstances, the requisition as also the notice dated August 3, 2021 and all subsequent actions are set aside and quashed. This matter is entertained solely for the reasons indicated hereinabove.

However, the court is conscious of the rights of the requisitionists.

In my opinion, the provision for removing an elected representative such as the Pradhan is of fundamental importance to ensure the democratic functioning of the institution as well as to ensure the transparency and accountability in the functions performed by the elected representatives. These institutions must run on democratic principles. In democracy, all persons heading public bodies can continue provided they enjoy the confidence of the persons who comprise such bodies. This is the essence of democratic republicanism. If the Pradhan has lost support of the majority of the members, he cannot remain in office for a single day.

I do not find that the petitioner has any statutory or legal right to stall any meeting except in accordance with law. Such meetings have not been barred by the Government. The Government offices have resumed functioning.

The requisitionists are granted liberty to bring a fresh requisition as per Section 12(2) of the West Bengal Panchayat Act, 1973. If such requisition is brought, the prescribed authority shall act and proceed in terms of the provisions of Sections 12(3) and 12(4) onwards of the said Act and reach the requisition to its logical conclusion within the time limit prescribed by the statute. The bar under Section 12(11) of the said Act shall not be applicable.

Accordingly, the writ petition is disposed of.

However, there will be no order as to costs.

Parties are directed to act on the communication of the learned advocates.

(Shampa Sarkar, J.)