



IN THE HIGH COURT OF JUDICATURE AT MADRAS

DATED: 07.06.2021

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CORAM:

THE HON'BLE MR.JUSTICE M.NIRMAL KUMAR

Crl.RC.No.316 of 2021

Udhayakumar
S/o.Nagarajan

... Petitioner

Versus

State Rep.by Inspector of Police
Vaitheeswarankovil Police Station,
Nagapattinam District.

... Respondent

PRAYER: Criminal Original Petition has been filed under Sections 397 and 401 of Cr.P.C, to call for the records on the file of the learned District and Sessions Judge, Nagapattinam, Nagapattinam District in Crl.MP.No.2491/2020 dated 25.09.2020 and set aside the order.

For Petitioner : Mr.E.Kannadasan

For Respondent : Mr.Damodharan
Counsel for Government of
Tamil Nadu (Crl side)

ORDER

This Criminal Revision Petition had been filed against the order dated 25.09.2020 passed by the learned District and Sessions Judge, Nagapattinam, Nagapattinam District in Crl.MP.No.2491 of 2020 , by the said order, the Trial Court dismissed the petition filed by the Revision Petitioner seeking return of property.

2.It is seen that in majority of the cases, either the case has been registered by the respondent Police based on the complaint given by the Revenue Authorities or by the officials of the Mines and Minerals Department, the case properties/vehicles are taken into custody. After registration of FIR, despite specific order of the Division Bench of the Madurai Bench of Madras High Court in Review Applications (MD) Nos.80 to 82 of 2019 in W.P(MD).No.19936 of 2017, 7595 and 21485 of 2018 that the Police as well the authorized officers are



directed to inform the registration of the case to each other within a week, the same is followed in breach. Due to which, there have been no complaint filed as per Section 22 of the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957. The prosecution under the Indian Penal Code and the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957 are distinct as held by the Hon'ble Apex Court in the case of "State (NCT of Delhi) Versus Sanjay reported in (2014) 9 Supreme Court Cases 772", which has been reiterated by the Division Bench of this Court and gave various guidelines that the complaint by the authorized person to be made immediately not later than one week from the date of seizure. Both the complaint registered by the Police and the complaint of the authorized person to be tried by the same Court. As per Section 30 (B), the Special Courts have come in place.

3. In most of the cases, FIR's are filed before the Magistrate Court in which charge sheet are yet to be filed and committed to the Special Court. The authorized person have not initiated any complaint. It is seen that the authorized persons, who lodged complaint to the jurisdictional Police have not filed any complaint under Mines and Minerals Act. This is in clear violation of the directions of this Court.

4. The learned Counsel for Government of Tamil Nadu (Crl.side) produced G.O.(Ms).No.170 (Industries (MMC.2) Department), dated 05.08.2020 and submitted that the guidelines have been issued to all the officers concerned, including the authorized officer to follow the directions of the Division Bench of the Madurai Bench of Madras High court. Despite the same, the anomaly still exists. He further submitted that in the Government Order, in addition to the authorised authorities, jurisdictional Inspector of Police are also authorised to make a complaint in writing by way of affidavit under Section 22 of the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957. As per Section 2(d) of Cr.P.C., the complaint does not include the police report. No doubt the cases under the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957 are cognizable offence. The inclusion of Police personnels viz., the Inspector of Police as authorized, had created a grey area. The Division Bench of the Madurai Bench of Madras High Court, had clearly held revenue official/officer authorized is only to seize and not confiscate or dispose the mineral, tool, equipment, vehicle etc., and the same to be dealt only by the Special Court. It is seen that despite issuance of G.O.(Ms).No.170 (Industries (MMC.2) Department), dated 05.08.2020, the situation has not improved. Further, the Madurai Bench of this Court, as early in the year 2012, in the case of "Sengol & others Versus State reported in 2012 Crl.J 1705" had clearly held that the ingredients under Section 378



IPC and offence punishable under Section 21 of the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957 are distinct and there is no quarrel about it. The Apex Court in the case of "State (NCT of Delhi) Versus Sanjay" (cited supra), issued guidelines in this regard and highlighted the importance of curbing illicit sand mining and plundering of natural wealth and it would be beneficial to extract relevant paragraphs:-

"69. Considering the principles of interpretation and the wordings used in Section 22, in our considered opinion, the provision is not a complete and absolute bar for taking action by the police for illegal and dishonestly committing theft of minerals including sand from the riverbed. The Court shall take judicial notice of the fact that over the years rivers in India have been affected by the alarming rate of unrestricted sand mining which is damaging the ecosystem of the rivers and safety of bridges. It also weakens riverbeds, fish breeding and destroys the natural habitat of many organisms. If these illegal activities are not stopped by the State and the police authorities of the State, it will cause serious repercussions as mentioned hereinabove. It will not only change the river hydrology but also will deplete the groundwater levels.

70. There cannot be any dispute with regard to restrictions imposed under the MMDR Act and remedy provided therein. In any case, where there is a mining activity by any person in contravention of the provisions of Section 4 and other sections of the Act, the officer empowered and authorised under the Act shall exercise all the powers including making a complaint before the Jurisdictional Magistrate. It is also not in dispute that the Magistrate shall in such cases take cognizance on the basis of the complaint filed before it by a duly authorised officer. In case of breach and violation of Section 4 and other provisions of the Act, the police officer cannot insist the Magistrate for taking cognizance under the Act on the basis of the record submitted by the police alleging contravention of the said Act. In other words, the prohibition contained in Section 22 of the Act against prosecution of a person except on a complaint made by the officer is attracted only when such person is sought to be prosecuted for contravention of Section 4 of the Act and not for any act or omission which constitutes an offence under the Penal Code.



73. After giving our thoughtful consideration in the matter, in the light of the relevant provisions of the Act vis-à-vis the Code of Criminal Procedure and the Penal Code, we are of the definite opinion that the ingredients constituting the offence under the MMDR Act and the ingredients of dishonestly removing sand and gravel from the riverbeds without consent, which is the property of the State, is a distinct offence under IPC. Hence, for the commission of offence under Section 378 IPC, on receipt of the police report, the Magistrate having jurisdiction can take cognizance of the said offence without awaiting the receipt of complaint that may be filed by the authorised officer for taking cognizance in respect of violation of various provisions of the MMDR Act. Consequently, the contrary view taken by the different



High Courts cannot be sustained in law and, therefore, overruled. Consequently, these criminal appeals are disposed of with a direction to the Magistrates concerned to proceed accordingly."

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5. It is clearly held that compounding the offence under section 23(A) of the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957, would no way absolve the offender. Further despite this Court's specific direction to the concerned authorities, the authorities failed to get sensitized and become aware of seriousness of the offence. Hence, the issuance of G.O.(Ms).No.170 (Industries (MMC.2) Department), dated 05.08.2020, appears to be only in paper, not in action.

6. It is submitted by the learned Counsel for Government of Tamil Nadu (Crl.side) that in view of Section 23(A) of Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957, after compounding the offence, it would be difficult for the authorities to file a complaint. Further, authorizing the Police personnel to file a complaint would be against Section 2 (d) of Cr.P.C. The inclusion of Police Officials to file a complaint may be abrasion. The Police personnel referred in G.O.(Ms).No.170 (Industries (MMC.2) Department), dated 05.08.2020, are only in addition to the Revenue Authorities, the officials of the Mines and Minerals and authorised officers. The addition of Police Officials as authorised officers would no way take away the right and be an obstacle to the other authorised officers to file a complaint as contemplated. Further, compounding of offence under Section 23(A) of the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act is only with regard to the loss of revenue to the State and not the offence. The anomaly, if any felt, in issuance of Government Order, the same can be rectified. The Act is clear on these aspects, which is further clarified by the Division Bench of Madurai Bench of Madras High Court in its order.

7. The learned counsel for Government of Tamil Nadu (Crl.Side) relied on the judgment of the Apex Court in the case of "Jayant Etc., Versus The State of Madhya Pradesh in Criminal Appeal Nos.824-825 of 2020", for the preposition that once the case under MM DR Act is compounded, whether a complaint can be filed under Section 22 of MM DR Act.

8. The view of this Court is that the grey area pointed out found in G.O.(Ms).No.170 (Industries (MMC.2) Department), dated 05.08.2020, will no way absolve the rights and duties of the authorized officers in filling the complaint before the designated Special Court. The case property if already handed over to the Police and the Police investigation is pending, the seizure report, panchnama, Form-95 or other documents, a



9. The answer to the contention of the learned Counsel for Government of Tamil Nadu (Crl.side) is available in the case of "Jayant Etc., Versus The State of Madhya Pradesh in Criminal Appeal Nos.824-825 of 2020" and the relevant portion is extracted hereunder:-

It is the duty cast upon the State to restore the ecological imbalance and to stop damages being caused to the nature. As observed by this Court in the case of Sanjay (supra), excessive in stream sand and gravel mining from river beds and like resources causes the degradation of rivers. It is further observed that apart from threatening bridges, sand mining transforms the riverbeds into large and deep pits, as a result, the groundwater table drops leaving the drinking water wells on the embankments of these rivers dry. Even



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otherwise, sand/mines is a public property and the State is the custodian of the said public property and therefore the State should be more sensitive to protect the environment and ecological balance and to protect the public property the State should always be in favour of taking very stern action against the violators who are creating serious ecological imbalance and causing damages to the nature in any form. As the provisions of Section 23A are not under challenge and Section 23A of the MMDR Act so long as it stands, we leave the matter there and leave it to the wisdom of the legislatures and the concerned States."

10. In view of the above, the directions of Division Bench of Madurai Bench of Madras High Court has to be followed without any deviation. This Court following the case of "Sunderbhai Ambalal Desai Vs. State of Gujarat reported in MANU/SC/1110/2002 and AIR 2003 638", is inclined to return the vehicle to the petitioner.

11. The respondent police is directed to grant custody of the said vehicle (TATA ACE) bearing Registration No. TN 51 AZ 9685 to the petitioner within a period of 7 days from the date of compliance of the below mentioned condition Nos. (i) to (iii):-

(i) The petitioner shall deposit a sum of Rs.25,000/- before the jurisdictional Tahsildar as non-refundable deposit. After receipt of the above said amount, the same will have to be deposited by the Tahsildar, to the credit of the District Mines and Minerals Foundation Trust, Nagapattinam, Nagapattinam District as non-refundable deposit;

(ii) The petitioner shall execute a personal bond for a sum of Rs.25,000/- with two sureties each, for a like sum to the satisfaction of the District and Sessions Judge, Nagapattinam, Nagapattinam District. The petitioner and the sureties shall affix their photographs and give the copies of their Aadhaar Card;

(iii) The petitioner shall give an undertaking before the respondent/ authority concerned stating that he will not use the vehicle in question for any illegal activities in future and shall produce the same as and when required by the respondent and also the trial Court, failing which the respondent/trial Court is at liberty to confiscate the vehicle;



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(iv) The petitioner shall not alienate the vehicle in question till the disposal of the proceedings before the authority concerned;

(v) The petitioner shall take photograph of the vehicle and submit the same along with Compact Disc duly certified under Section 65-B of the Indian Evidence Act, 1872;

(vi) The petitioner shall surrender the original R.C. book before the the District and Sessions Judge, Nagapattinam;

(vii) The petitioner is also directed to participate in the enquiry to be conducted by the respondent.

12. Petition relating to return of R.C. Book for any purpose in the future, may be filed before the District and Sessions Judge, Nagapattinam, Nagapattinam District who may consider the same on merits, though this order has been passed by the High Court.

13. This Court hereby directs the authorized Officers to file complaint before the Special Court and the Special Court to take the same on file, try it along with the Police case and to dispose both the cases. The Special Court is also directed to initiate and conclude the confiscation proceedings.

14. In the result, the order dated 25.09.2020 in Cr.M.P.No.2491 of 2020 passed by the District and Sessions Judge, Nagapattinam, Nagapattinam District is set-aside and the revision is, accordingly, allowed.

Sd/-
Assistant Registrar(CS VI)

//True Copy//

Sub Assistant Registrar

klt/vv

To

1. The District and Sessions Judge,
Nagapattinam,
Nagapattinam District.



2. The Inspector of Police
Vaitheeswarankovil Police Station,
Nagapattinam District.

3. The Public Prosecutor,
High Court, Madras.

4. The Section Officer,
Criminal Section,
High Court, Madras.

Crl.RC.No.316 of 2021

LN(CO)
HS(18/08/2021)