

**IN THE HIGH COURT OF JUDICATURE AT BOMBAY
ADMIRALTY AND VICE ADMIRALTY JURISDICTION
INTERIM APPLICATION NO.2996 OF 2022
IN
ADMIRALTY SUIT NO.61 OF 2018**

Devaram Gaura and Ors. ... Applicants/Plaintiffs
Versus
M.V.PFS Supplier and Ors. ... Defendants

Mr. Abhishek Khare with Mr. R.P.Shirole i/by Khare Legal Chamber, for Plaintiffs.

CORAM : N.J.JAMADAR, J.

DATE : 20th AUGUST, 2022

P.C.:

1. The Plaintiffs have preferred this Application under Order XIII A and/or Order XII Rule 6 of the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908, as amended by the Commercial Courts Act, 2015 (the Code of 1908), for a summary judgment without recording oral evidence in favour of the Plaintiffs against the sale proceeds of M.V.PFS Supplier – Defendant Vessel for a sum of Rs.53,55,635/- along with further interest and hardship claim as well as the legal expenses.

2. The material averments in the plaint can be summerized as under :

2.1 The Defendant Vessel was flying an Indian flag. PFS Shipping India Limited – Defendant No.2 was the registered owner of PFS Supplier. Defendant No.3 was the Manager of the Defendant No.1 Vessel. The Plaintiffs were employed as crew members, in various capacities, on board the Defendant No.1 Vessel by the Defendant

No.3 in accordance with the provisions of the Merchant Shipping Act, 1958. Defendant Nos.2 and 3 had agreed to pay wages to the Plaintiffs in cash. As Defendant Nos.2 and 3 committed default in payment of wages and also failed to supply the essentials and make provisions for the necessities, the Plaintiffs were constrained to institute a Suit for recovery of the arrears of wages to the tune of Rs.53,55,635/- along with interest, hardship claim and legal expenses. The Plaintiffs annexed copies of the Articles of Agreements, Continuous Discharge Certificates and Passports to substantiate their claims. The Plaintiffs, inter alia, sought the arrest of the Defendant No.1 Vessel.

3. The Defendant No.2, the then registered owner of the Defendant No.1 Vessel, was served with the Writ of Summons. An Affidavit of Service dated 4th December, 2018 is filed by Mr. Ramesh Yadav, Bailiff attached to the Office of the Sheriff of Mumbai. The Defendant No.2 did not file Written Statement. The suit came to be transferred to the list of undefended Suit by an order dated 22nd November, 2019. By an order dated 29th November, 2019, the Suit came to be dismissed as withdrawn qua Defendant No.3.

4. In the meanwhile, Defendant No.1 Vessel was arrested by an order dated 22nd September, 2017. By a subsequent order dated 7th February, 2018 the Defendant No.1 Vessel was ordered to be sold. The sale was confirmed by an order dated 12th February, 2018. The sale consideration of Rs.4,30,00,000/-, after deducting the

Sheriff's expenses, came to be deposited in this Court.

5. The Plaintiffs have taken out this Application with the assertion that the liability to pay the crew wages is an admitted liability and there is no real prospect of Defendant Nos.1 and 2 succeeding in defending the claim. In the Application, the Plaintiffs have furnished particulars of the claim of each of the Applicants in a tabulated format.

6. Defendant No.2 has been served with the instant Application and an Affidavit of Service came to be filed on 26th April, 2022. Thereafter, pursuant to the directions of this Court, the Court Commissioner has verified the original Agreements in respect of the crew members. Post verification, this Application was taken up for hearing.

7. The Commissioner's Report records, inter alia, as under :

Sr. No.	Name of Crew Member	Plaintiff No	Claim (In Rs.)	Particulars of Documents	
				Seafarer Employment Contract with date	Seafarers Article of Agreement with dated
1	Mr. Devaram Gaura	1	6,53,937/-	Original Contract dated 20/03/2017	Original Article dated 20/03/2017
2	Mr. Susanta Roy Chowdhury	2	3,49,440/-	Original Contract dated 30/01/2017	Original Article dated 31/01/2017
3	Mr. Kaushal Narayan Prasad	3	4,62,000/-	Original Contract dated 30/01/2017	Original Article dated 20/03/2017
4	Mr. Raj Kashyap	4	1,23,200/-	Original Contract	Original Article

				dated 07/08/2017	dated 07/08/2017
5	Mr. Sanjay Kumar	5	2,95,680/-	Original Contract dated 27/03/2017	Original Article dated 27/03/2017
6	Mr. Ajay Kumar	6	98,560/-	Original Contract dated 07/08/2017	Original Article dated 07/08/2017
7	Mr. Kundan Kumar	7	4,78,912/-	Original Contract dated 01/08/2017	Original Article dated 01/08/2017
8	Mr. Veermany Chellappan	8	4,56,960/-	Original Contract dated 27/04/2017	Original Article dated 28/04/2017
9	Mr. Ankur Joshilkar	9	2,59,622/-	Original agreement dated 12/04/2016	Original Article dated 11/04/2016
10	Mr. Mahiban Soosainayaham	10	7,87,827/-	Original Contract dated 19/12/2016	Original Article dated 13/12/2016
11	M. Radha Krishnan	11	3,89,497/-	Original Contract of Employment dated 10 th March, 2017.	Notarized true copy of Original Article dated 10/03/2017
	Total		43,55,635/-		
Notarized True copies of relevant extract of the Continuous Discharge Certificates (CDC) of Plaintiff No. 1 to Plaintiff No. 11 (This document containing Signed on and Signed off on Defendant No. 1 Vessel and Identification of the Plaintiffs)					

8. The Plaintiffs claim of having rendered services on board the Defendant No.1 Vessel finds support in the respective Employment Agreements and Sea-farers Articles of Agreements duly verified by the Court Commissioner. The claim of the respective Plaintiffs is further substantiated by the true copies of Continuous Discharge Certificates (CDCs) and Passports. Continuous Discharge Certificates of

Plaintiff Nos.1 to 11 are annexed at Exhibits F-1 to F-11 (pages 172 to 199) of the plaint. The entries in the Continuous Discharge Certificates reflecting the dates of 'sign in' and 'sign off', lend support to the claims of the respective Plaintiffs as regards the services rendered on board the Defendant No.1 Vessel. The claim of the respective Plaintiffs is further substantiated by the true copies of the Passports Exhibits E-1 to E-11 (pages 153 to 171 of the Plaint).

9. In the light of the aforesaid material of unimpeachable character, the learned Counsel for the Plaintiffs submitted that the claim of the crew members is incontrovertible and the Defendant Nos.1 and 2 have no real prospect of successfully defending the claim of the crew members.

10. I am persuaded to agree with the aforesaid submissions. The fact that the Plaintiffs had rendered services on board the Defendant No.1 Vessel, in varying capacities, is established beyond the pale of controversy by the aforesaid documents namely the Employment Agreements, Sea-farers Articles of Agreements, Continuous Discharge Certificates and Passports. To add to this, crew salary claim as per Section 129 of the Merchant Shipping Act, 1958 (Exhibit G to the Plaint) is furnished by the Master of the Defendant No.1 Vessel. It indicates the date of joining, date of sign off, wages per day/month, advance, if any, paid and the period since which the wages are due. Interest is charged @ 18% p.a. on unpaid wages. A scanned copy of the certificate issued by the Master of PFS Supplier is appended below :

UPDATED CREW SALARY CLAIM AS PER SEC 129 OF MERCHANT SHIPPING ACT

2018/19

Ex-G

200

LIST	NAME - M.V. PPS SUPPLIER	REVISED WAGES										TOTAL	
	NAME	BANK	DOC No.	P.P NO	DATE OF JOINING	DATE OF SIG OFF	WAGES NOT PAID SINCE	WAGES PER DAY/MONTH	NO. OF DAYS	ADVANCED RYCD FROM PPS/CG	ADVANCED RYCD FROM PPS/CG	BALANCE OF WAGES	WAGES + 12% INTEREST
	DEVJAM DALDA	KICCF	MIM180899	H61873	20.01.2017	17.06.2017	May-2017	65800	90	NIL	NIL	Rs. 5,03,475/-	Rs. 4,83,875/-
	SUBANTA ROY CHAKRABORTY	KICCF	CL31403	P8106299	01.02.2017	20.03.2017	Feb-2017	60000	48	NIL	NIL	Rs. 1,12,000/-	Rs. 1,09,440/-
	KARNAL NADYAN PRASAD	IndeNG	M61M4443	03739106	01.02.2017	27.03.2017	Feb-2017	75000	55	NIL	NIL	Rs. 4,12,000/-	Rs. 4,02,000/-
	RAJ KASHYAP	SURENG	M01M18037	07162899	07.08.2017	10.11.2017	Aug-2017	50,000	96	NIL	Rs. 50,000/-	Rs. 1,10,000/-	Rs. 1,20,700/-
	SANJAY KUMAR	2601362	M01M01000	1085697	29.06.17	28.09.2017	March-2017	80000	33	NIL	NIL	Rs. 2,64,000/-	Rs. 2,60,480/-
	ALAY KUMAR	0146	M01M221902	K9104683	07.08.2017	10.11.2017	Sept-2017	40,000	96	NIL	Rs. 40,000/-	Rs. 88,800/-	Rs. 98,560/-
	KUNDAN KUMAR	KICCF	M01M4854	05237666	01.08.2017	10.11.2017	Sept-2017	58600	102	NIL	Rs. 1,54,000/-	Rs. 4,27,000/-	Rs. 4,78,010/-
	DELLIPAN VEERANAY	261 ERO	M01M157691	03101011	28.04.2017	12.07.2017	May-2017	86600	76	NIL	NIL	Rs. 4,08,000/-	Rs. 4,56,960/-
	ANILUR JOSEPH K	261 ERO	M01M16071	0739006	22.04.2016	01.06.2016	June-2016	96600	51	2,37,000	NIL	Rs. 2,51,000/-	Rs. 2,59,420/-
	Mahesh Sureshwaran	Marine	CH22112	L027623	23.12.2016	11.02.2017	Dec-16	12000	55	20,000	NIL	Rs. 7,00,410/-	Rs. 7,87,870/-
	M. Radha Krishna	EIO	M01M2508	M0152016	11.03.2017	21.07.2017	May-17	40000	33	217,14	NIL	Rs. 3,47,960/-	Rs. 3,80,480/-
	TOTAL											Rs. 38,88,940/-	Rs. 42,17,000/-

True Copy

Not. A. P. Shewu

11. In view of the provisions contained in Section 2(1)(g) read with Section 9(1)(a) of the Admiralty (Jurisdiction and Settlement of Maritime Claims) Act, 2017,

the claim of the crew for wages constitutes a maritime lien. It also ranks first in the order of in inter se priority of claimants having maritime lien. It is trite law that crew can proceed in rem against the Vessel and/or sale proceeds of the Vessel, where it is sold consequent to arrest, to enforce their maritime claims for wages.

12. In the light of the aforesaid position in law and overwhelming material to substantiate the claim of the Plaintiffs that they did render the services as crew members, on different positions, on board the Defendant No.1 Vessel, which is encapsulated in the Master's Certificate (Exhibit G) extracted above, there is no realistic prospect of the Defendant Nos.1 and 2 successfully defending the claim of the Plaintiffs. Since the Defendant No.2 chose not to contest the claim of the crew members, there does not seem to be any compelling reason not to dispose of the Suit before recording oral evidence.

13. In any event the maritime lien of the crew members commands highest priority, as noted above. Hence, I do not find any impediment in passing a summary judgment in favour of the Plaintiffs and against the sale proceeds of Defendant No.1 Vessel.

14. Hence, the following order :

ORDER

- (i) The Interim Application stands allowed.
- (ii) There shall be a summary judgment in favour of each of the

Plaintiffs for the sum indicated against the name of the respective Plaintiffs in the second last column of Exhibit G, under the caption “Balance of Wages” extracted above, aggregating to the sum of Rs.38,88,962/- and against the sale proceeds of the Defendant No.1 Vessel, along with further interest @ 12% p.a. from the date of “sign off” till payment and/or realization.

(iii) Each of the Plaintiffs is entitled to costs quantified at Rs.25,000/-.

(iv) Subject to and upon determination of priorities, the decreetal amounts be disbursed to the respective Plaintiffs through their Advocates for onwards remittance to the respective Plaintiffs, who are Sea-farers.

(v) It is, however, made clear that the Plaintiffs will pay the income tax and other statutory dues directly and that the Advocates for the Plaintiffs shall, in no manner, be liable / responsible for deducting the income tax at source or the service tax etc.

(vi) By an order dated 15th October, 2018 the Plaintiffs were allowed to pay the court fees as and when decreetal amount was received. The Prothonotary and Senior Master should ensure that the court fee amount is deducted from the amount payable to the Plaintiffs before paying any money to the Plaintiffs.

(vii) The Suit also stands disposed.

(viii) Decree be drawn in the aforesaid terms.

(N.J.JAMADAR, J.)