

THE HON'BLE SMT. JUSTICE LALITHA KANNEGANTI

CRIMINAL PETITION NO.6819 of 2021

ORDER:-

This petition is filed under Sections 437 and 439 of Code of the Criminal Procedure, 1973 (for short 'Cr.P.C.') seeking regular bail to the petitioners/A.1 and A.3 in connection with Crime No.250 of 2021 of Jangaon Police Station, Warangal District for the offence punishable under Section 8(c) r/w 20(b) of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985 (for brevity "**NDPS Act**").

2. The case of prosecution is that on 02.07.2021, the Sub-Inspector of Police, Jangaon Police Station, on receiving reliable information that some persons have been illegally transporting dry ganja from Suraypet to Hyderabad, he along with his staff and two mediators went to Rains Factory and conducted vehicle checking. At about 0800 hours, they intercept one Hundai Verna car bearing No.AP 11 AN 7384 and apprehended three persons. On interrogation, petitioner No.1/A.1 confessed that he purchased 126 kgs. of dry ganja from unknown persons in the area of Chithapally and Vizag and the same was packed into 63 packets, each one 2 kgs., and he tried to sell the said ganja with the help of the A.2 and petitioner No.2/A.3. Police seized the contraband and arrested the petitioners under the cover of mediators report. Basing on the said report, present crime was registered.

3. Heard Mr.V.Venkatram Narsaiah, learned counsel for the petitioners, and learned Assistant Public Prosecutor for the respondent-State.

4. Learned counsel for the petitioners submits that petitioners were arrested on 02.07.2021 and from the last more than 180 days, they have been languishing in jail. He further submits that when once charge sheet is not filed within 180 days as contemplated under Section 36(A) of the NDPS Act, no application is filed seeking extension of time, the petitioners/accused are entitled for default bail, which is an indefeasible right, as such, the petitioners are entitled for statutory bail.

5. Learned Assistant Public Prosecutor submits that as investigation is in progress, they filed extension petition with a delay of 192 days. He submits that huge contraband is seized in this crime, therefore, the petitioners are not entitled for bail.

6. Section 36A of the NDPS Act reads thus:

“36A. Offences triable by Special Courts: (1) *Notwithstanding anything contained in the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 (2 of 1974),--*

(a) all offences under this Act which are punishable with imprisonment for a term of more than three years shall be triable only by the Special Court constituted for the area in which the offence has been committed or where there are more Special Courts than one for such area, by such one of them as may be specified in this behalf by the Government;

(b) where a person accused of or suspected of the commission of an offence under this Act is forwarded to a Magistrate under subsection (2) or subsection (2A) of section 167 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 (2 of 1974), such Magistrate may authorise the detention of such person in such custody as he thinks fit for a period not exceeding fifteen days in the whole where such Magistrate is a Judicial Magistrate and seven days in the whole where such Magistrate is an Executive Magistrate:

Provided that in cases which are triable by the Special Court where such Magistrate considers

(i) when such person is forwarded to him as aforesaid; or

(ii) upon or at any time before the expiry of the period of detention authorised by him, that the detention of such person is unnecessary, he shall order such person to be forwarded to the Special Court having jurisdiction;

(c) the Special Court may exercise, in relation to the person forwarded to it under clause (b), the same power which a Magistrate having jurisdiction to try a case may exercise under section 167 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 (2 of 1974), in relation to an accused person in such case who has been forwarded to him under that section;

(d) a Special Court may, upon perusal of police report of the facts constituting an offence under this Act or upon complaint made by an officer of the Central Government or a State Government authorised in his behalf, take cognizance of that offence without the accused being committed to it for trial.

(2) When trying an offence under this Act, a Special Court may also try an offence other than an offence under this Act with which the accused may, under the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 (2 of 1974), be charged at the same trial.

(3) Nothing contained in this section shall be deemed to affect the special powers of the High Court regarding bail under section 439 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 (2 of 1974), and the High Court may exercise such powers including the power under clause (b) of sub-section (1) of that section as if the reference to "Magistrate" in that section included also a reference to a "Special Court" constituted under section 36.

(4) In respect of persons accused of an offence punishable under section 19 or section 24 or section 27 A or for offences involving commercial quantity the references in sub-section (2) of section 167 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 (2 of 1974), thereof to "ninety days", where they occur, shall be construed as reference to "one hundred and eighty days":

Provided that, if it is not possible to complete the investigation within the said period of one hundred and eighty days, the Special Court may extend the said period up to one year on the report of the Public Prosecutor indicating the progress of the investigation and the specific reasons for the detention of the accused beyond the said period of one hundred and eighty days.

(5) Notwithstanding anything contained in the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 (2 of 1974), the offences punishable under this Act with imprisonment for a term of not more than three years may be tried summarily."

Section 167 (2) of Cr.P.C reads thus:

“(2) The Magistrate to whom an accused person is forwarded under this section may, whether he has or has not jurisdiction to try the case, from time to time, authorize the detention of the accused in such custody as such Magistrate thinks fit, for a term not exceeding fifteen days in the whole; and if he has no jurisdiction to try the case or commit it for trial, and considers further detention unnecessary, he may order the accused to be forwarded to a Magistrate having such jurisdiction:

Provided that-

(a) ¹ the Magistrate may authorize the detention of the accused person, otherwise than in the custody of the police, beyond the period of fifteen days; if he is satisfied that adequate grounds exist for doing so, but no Magistrate shall authorize the detention of the accused person in custody under this paragraph for a total period exceeding,-

(i) ninety days, where the investigation relates to an offence punishable with death, imprisonment for life or imprisonment for a term of not less than ten years;

(ii) sixty days, where the investigation relates to any other offence, and, on the expiry of the said period of ninety days, or sixty days, as the case may be, the accused person shall be released on bail if he is prepared to and does furnish bail, and every person released on bail under this subsection shall be deemed to be so released under the provisions of Chapter XXXIII for the purposes of that Chapter;]

(b) no Magistrate shall authorize detention in any custody under this section unless the accused is produced before him;

(c) no Magistrate of the second class, not specially empowered in this behalf by the High Court, shall authorize detention in the custody of the police. ¹ Explanation I.- For the avoidance of doubts, it is hereby declared that, notwithstanding the expiry of the period specified in paragraph (a), the accused shall be detained in custody so long as he does not furnish bail;]. ²

Explanation II.- If any question arises whether an accused person was produced before the Magistrate as required under paragraph (b), the production of the accused person may be proved by his signature on the order authorizing detention.”

7. The Hon'ble Apex Court in the case of *Uday Mohanlal Acharya v. State of Maharashtra*¹ has observed that personal liberty is one of cherished objects of the Indian Constitution and deprivation of the same can only be in accordance with law and in conformity with the provisions thereof, as stipulated under Article 21 of the Constitution. When the law provides that the Magistrate could authorize the detention of the accused in custody up to a maximum period as indicated in the proviso to sub Section (2) of Section 167 of Cr.P.C, any further detention beyond the period without filing of a challan by the investigating agency would be a subterfuge and would not be in accordance with law and inconformity with the provisions of the Criminal Procedure Code, and as such, it could be violative of Article 21 of the Constitution of India and the Hon'ble Apex Court in recent judgment in *S.Kasi v. State*² wherein it was observed that the infeasible right to default bail under Section 167 (2) Cr.P.C. is an integral part of the right to personal liberty under Article 21 of the Constitution, and the said right to bail cannot be suspended even during a pandemic situation as is prevailing currently. It was emphasized that the right of the accused to be set at liberty takes precedence over the right of the State to carry on the investigation and submit a charge sheet. Additionally, it is well settled that in case of any ambiguity in the construction of a penal statute, the Courts must favour the interpretation which leans towards protecting the rights of the accused, given the ubiquitous power disparity between the individual accused and the State machinery. This is applicable not only in the case of substantive penal

¹ (2001)5 SCC 453

² 2020 SCC OnLine SC 529

statutes but also in the case of procedure providing for the curtailment of the liberty of the accused.

8. In view of the foregoing reasons as the charge sheet is not filed within the statutory period of 180 days, the petitioners are entitled for statutory bail, which is an indefeasible right of the accused as laid down by the Hon'ble Apex Court in catena of cases.

9. Accordingly, this criminal petition is allowed and petitioners/A.1 and A.3 shall be enlarged on bail on their execution of self bonds for Rs.2,00,000/- (Rupees two lakhs only) each with two sureties for a like sum each to the satisfaction of the Court of the I Additional Sessions Judge for NDPS Cases at Warangal. On such release, the petitioners shall not leave the State and shall appear before the Station House Officer, Jangaon Police Station, Warangal District, once in a week i.e. on every Saturday between 10.00 AM and 1.00 PM till completion of trial.

LALITHA KANNEGANTI, J

Date: 19.01.2022

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