

HON'BLE SMT. JUSTICE LALITHA KANNEGANTI

CRIMINAL PETITION No. 10245 of 2021

ORDER:

This Criminal Petition under Sections 437 and 439 Cr.P.C. is filed by petitioner – Accused No. 3 in Crime No. 153 of 2021 on the file of P.S. WCO, Team-XII, CCS, Hyderabad registered for the offences punishable under Sections 419, 409, 420, 465, 467 and 468 read with Sections 34, 120(B), 201 IPC. and Sections 7(A) and 13 of Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988, seeking bail.

2. Case of the prosecution is that on 27.09.2021, a compliant was received from Sri Girish Kumar Jha, Branch Manager, Union Bank of India, Karwan Branch stating that Telugu Akademi, a department of State of Telangana, has been regularly opening Term Deposit Accounts with Union Bank since December 2020. In the process, about 47 deposit accounts were opened during the period 29-12-2020 - 05.07.2021 for an amount of Rs.43,04,34,096/- and all of them were closed and the amount was transferred / credited to the account on various dates opened in the name of Andhra Pradesh MCS Telugu Akademi maintained with Agrasen Urban Cooperative Bank Limited. Similarly, out of 17 deposit accounts opened in Santosh Nagar Branch for Rs.17,05,00,000/-, an amount of Rs.5,70,00,000/- was transferred to Akademi's State Bank of India Account. While so, on 24.09.2021, the personnel of Akedemi brought to the notice of the bank that there were some serious discrepancies in their deposit accounts held in Karwan Branch and except the amount

of Rs.5,70,00,000/-, they have not received any other amount. Immediately, UBI requested Agrasen Urban Cooperative Bank Limited to freeze the account. It came to light that one person by name Dr. Venkat introduced himself as the representative of the said Akademi and produced the letters of mandate at the time of opening the accounts and later, the deposits were withdrawn on maturity by tendering original deposit receipts along with authorization letters, which are now being disputed by the Akademi. It was found that totally an amount of Rs.54,41,62,933.00 was embezzled.

3. Learned counsel for petitioner Sri Challa Gunaranjan submits that petitioner was arrayed as Accused No.3 in the above crime. He submits that originally, petitioner was arrested in Crime No.154 of 2021 on 01.10.2021 and was produced on P.T. Warrant in this crime on 19.10.2021 and from the last 97 days, he has been languishing in jail. He further submits that so far, police failed to file the charge-sheet, as such, petitioner is entitled for grant of default bail.

4. Learned Assistant Public Prosecutor also does not dispute the fact that petitioner has been languishing in jail from the last 97 days.

5. Section 167 (2) 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 sub- section 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."

6. Further, it is apt to note that the Hon'ble Apex Court in **Uday Mohanlal Acharya v. State of Maharashtra**¹ observed that personal liberty is one of the 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 detention of 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 in conformity with the provisions of the Criminal Procedure Code, and as such, it could be violative of Article 21 of

¹ (2001)5 SCC 453

the Constitution of India. The Hon'ble Apex Court in its recent judgment in **S.Kasi v. State**² observed that the indefeasible 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 pandemic as is prevailing now. 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 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 statutes but also in the case of procedure providing for the curtailment of the liberty of the accused.

7. In view of the foregoing reasons, without going into the merits of the matter, as prosecution failed to file charge sheet within the statutory period of 90 days, as contemplated under Section 167 (2) Cr.P.C., and petitioner is languishing in jail from the last 97 days, this Court is of the opinion that he is entitled to statutory bail, on certain conditions.

8. The Criminal Petition is therefore, allowed. Petitioner – Accused No.3 shall be enlarged on bail in connection with Crime No. 153 of 2021 on the file of P.S. WCO, Team-XII, C.C.S., Hyderabad on his executing a personal bond for a sum of

² 2020 SCC OnLine SC 529

Rs.20,000/- (Rupees twenty thousand only) with two sureties for a like sum each to the satisfaction of XII Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate, Hyderabad. Petitioner shall cooperate with the investigation and he shall appear before the police once in fifteen days till charge-sheet is filed.

06th January 2022

LALITHA KANNEGANTI, J

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