



W.P.(MD)No.29285 of 2023

BEFORE THE MADURAI BENCH OF MADRAS HIGH COURT

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DATED : 12.12.2023

CORAM:

THE HONOURABLE MR.JUSTICE B.PUGALENDHI

W.P.(MD)No.29285 of 2023 and
WMP(MD) No.25299 & 25300 of 2023

S.Karuppaiah

... Petitioner

Vs

1.The Regional Transport Officer,
The Regional Transport Office, (North),
Madurai.

2.The Inspector of Police,
Appanthirupathy Police Station,
Appanthirupathy,
Madurai District.

... Respondents

Writ Petition filed under Article 226 of the Constitution of India, seeking for the issuance of a Writ of Certiorarified Mandamus, calling for the records from the first respondent relating to his impugned order dated 15.11.23 passed in Proceeding R.No.59958/A4/2023, quash the same and consequently direct the 1st respondent to return the driving license of the petitioner bearing D.L.No.TN 60-19950000916 without any remarks, award cost.



W.P.(MD)No.29285 of 2023

For Petitioner : Ms.R.Praveena
For R1 : Mr.G.Surya Ananth
Additional Government Pleader
For R2 : Mr.B.Thanga Aravindh
Government Advocate (Crl. side)

ORDER

This writ petition is filed as against the impugned order passed by the Regional Transport Officer / Licensing Authority concerned, in and by which, the driving licence of the petitioner was suspended under Section 19(1)(d)&(f) of the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988 with Rule 21 of the Central Motor Vehicle Rules, 1989.

2.The learned Counsel for the petitioner submits that the petitioner is working as Driver in the Tamil Nadu State Transport Corporation. While he was on duty as Driver, a fatal accident had occurred due to which, a case was registered as against the petitioner in Crime No.170 of 2023, under Sections 279 and 304 (A) IPC for causing death by negligence and the respondent Police seized the driving license of the petitioner without giving any show cause to him



W.P.(MD)No.29285 of 2023

and further forwarded the seized licence to the Regional Transport Officer concerned, who in turn, has suspended the driving licence of the petitioner. The case registered as against the petitioner is under investigation and not even charge sheet has been filed so far. While so, before even any decision is taken by the trial Court, the authorities came to the conclusion that the petitioner is guilty for the offences committed. The learned Counsel further submit that the Regional Transport Officer cannot act as a pre-judge to take decision on the guilt even before filing of charge sheet before the Court concerned and without even any materials. Therefore, the impugned order is liable to be set aside.

3.The learned Additional Government Pleader appearing for the Transport Authority submits that the petitioner is an accused of an offence under Sections 279 and 304(A) IPC and it is a cognizable offence. If any cognizable offence is committed, the authority after giving reasonable opportunity to the person concerned is empowered to



W.P.(MD)No.29285 of 2023

suspend the licence as per Section 19 of the Motor Vehicles Act, 1981 read with Rule 21 of the Central Motor Vehicle Rules, 1989. Accordingly the petitioner was issued with show cause notice and being not satisfied with the reply given by the petitioner, the impugned order came to be passed. Therefore, there is no reason to interfere with the impugned order.

4.This Court considered the rival submissions made and perused the materials placed on record.

5.The petitioner is the Driver of the Tamil Nadu State Transport Corporation. While he was on duty in driving the bus, an accident had occurred and a case was registered as against the petitioner under Sections 279 and 304(A) IPC for causing death by negligence and subsequently his driving licence was suspended for a temporary period. The grievance of the petitioner is that before filing of any final report as against the petitioner, the authorities pre-judged that



W.P.(MD)No.29285 of 2023

the petitioner has committed the offence and therefore, he is before this Court.

6.A Division Bench of this Court in ***[P.Sethuraman Vs. The Licensing Authority, The Regional Transport Officer, The Regional Transport Officer, Dindigul]*** in ***2010 Writ Law reporter 100*** has held as under:

“8. A bare reading of Section 19(1) shows that the Licensing Authority has the power to revoke any licence or disqualify a person for a specified period from holding or obtaining a driving licence, if any of the contingencies prescribed in Clauses (a) to (h) of Sub Section (1) of Section 19 arises. Moreover, the power under Section 19(1) can be invoked only after giving an opportunity of being heard to the holder of the licence and for reasons to be recorded in writing.

9. But in the case on hand, the licence of the appellant was impounded or retained by the police immediately after the accident. Thereafter, the



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W.P.(MD)No.29285 of 2023

respondent issued the show cause notice under Section 19(1) of the Act, after getting a report from the police. Therefore the impounding of the licence has actually preceded the issue of show cause notice.”

7.A similar view has been taken by another Division Bench in ***S.Murugan Vs Licensing Authority [WA(MD)No.176 of 2009 dated 22.06.2009 Madurai Bench of Madras High Court]***. However a Division Bench of this Court in ***S.Krishnan Vs The Licensing Authority [in WA(MD)No.783 of 2008]*** has held as follows:

“Section 19 itself gives the power to the authority to disqualify a person from holding a driving licence when the licensing authority is satisfied after giving notice to the licensee and enumerated 10 disqualification clauses. One among them was Section 19(1)(C) which clearly states that when the vehicle is used and a cognizable offence is made out all that is required is the authority should satisfy itself whether the petitioner has utilized the vehicle which resulted in a cognizable offence. Admittedly, this appellant used the vehicle and



W.P.(MD)No.29285 of 2023

caused the death of a person.”

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8.Following the above cited judgments, a single judge of this Court in WP No.11 of 2023 has discussed the issue elaborately. The seizure power of the police under Section 206 of the Act is limited only in circumstances that if the offence has been committed any of the Sections under Sections 183, 184, 185, 189, 190, 194 (c) 194(d) and 194(e) under Sub Section 4 of Section 206 of the Motor Vehicle Act and therefore, held that the power of seizure vested with the police under Section 206 is not automatic. The officer has to record the reasons to believe any of the circumstances narrated under Section 206 as directed he can exercise such power. Recording so this Court has held as under :

“19. In such a view of the matter, this court is of the view that seizure of the licence to take action under section 19 is not a mandatory. Irrespective of licence being surrendered or produced before the authorities, the action can be initiated by the authorities under



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W.P.(MD)No.29285 of 2023

Section 19 on the report submitted by the police.

Therefore, this Court is of the view that merely on the basis of the FIR is registered particularly in the other IPC offences, the police officer cannot have power to seize the licence. If at all any action is contemplated under Section 19, they may forward a report to the concerned RTA to take action under Section 19 of the Act. On such report the licensing authority is satisfied any of the contingencies in clauses 1(a) to (h) of Section 19 and sub~clause 1A of the Act and after giving an opportunity to the holder of the licence may pass an order as contemplated in Section 19 of the Act.

20. Accordingly this Court hold that the seizure of the licence in the given case is not valid in the eye of law and the 2nd Respondent is directed to return the licence within one week from the date of receipt of copy of this order. It is well open to the 1st Respondent to send a report to the RTA for taking appropriate action. The RTA may after providing opportunity to the petitioner may proceed under Section 19 of the M.V. Act and to pass an order on merits.”



W.P.(MD)No.29285 of 2023

9. In view of the above discussion, this Court is of the view that the respondent police cannot seize the driving licence. Further it is not for the Regional Transport Authority to pre-judge the guilt of the petitioner, even before filing of the final report by the respondent Police in the criminal case registered against this petitioner. Therefore, this writ petition is disposed of in the following terms:

- i. The impugned order is set aside.
- ii. The respondent RTO is directed to return the driving licence of these petitioners within a period of one week from the date of receipt of a copy of this order.
- iii. It is open to the respondent Police to forward the relevant materials to the RTO after filing of the final report in the criminal case registered against this petitioner.
- iv. On receipt of any such materials from the respondent Police, the respondent RTO shall take appropriate action as stipulated under Section 19 of the Motor Vehicles Act.



W.P.(MD)No.29285 of 2023

WEB COPY

10.This writ petition is disposed of in the above terms. No costs. Consequently connected miscellaneous petitions are closed.

12.12.2023

NCC : Yes / No.

Index : Yes / No.

Internet: Yes / No.

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To

1.The Regional Transport Officer,
The Regional Transport Office, (North),
Madurai.

2.The Inspector of Police,
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B.PUGALENDHI, J.

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