

**IN THE HIGH COURT OF JUDICATURE AT BOMBAY
CRIMINAL APPELLATE JURISDICTION**

CRIMINAL BAIL APPLICATION NO. 2276 OF 2024

Suman Ijajul Haq Shaikh @ Laden ...Applicant

Versus

The State Of Maharashtra ...Respondent

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Mr. Pradeep Kumar Pardeshi a/w Mr. Nitin Bhoskar, Mr. Sagar Kasavkar,
Ms. Anushka Martis Advocate for the Applicant.

Mrs. Geeta Mulekar, APP for the Respondent – State.

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CORAM : ANIL S. KILOR, J.

DATE : 22nd JULY, 2024.

P.C.:

1. Heard.

2. By this application under Section 439 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, the applicant is seeking bail in Crime No.21 of 2016, registered with Mhasala Police Station, District: Raigad for the offences punishable under Sections 307, 393, 397, 398, 457, 452, 120-B , 325 of the Indian Penal Code (for short 'IPC'), Sections 4, 25, 27 of Arms Act, 1959 and Sections 3(1)(ii), 3(2), 3(4) of Maharashtra Control of Organized Crime Act, 1999 (for short 'MCOC Act').

3. The Applicant is in jail from last about eight years and as far as trial is concerned. It is informed that only nine witnesses

have been examined so far and there are total about 74 witnesses. Thus, there is no end to the sight of the trial to be concluded in near future. The Hon'ble Supreme Court of Indian in the case of '*Sheikh Javed Iqbal @ Ashfaq Ansari @ Javed Ansari V/s. State of Uttar Pradesh*'¹ has observed thus :

23. This Bench in a recent decision dated 03.07.2024 in Javed Gulam Nabi Shaikh Vs. State of Maharashtra, Criminal Appeal No. 2787 of 2024, has held that howsoever serious a crime may be, an accused has the right to speedy trial under the Constitution of India. That was also a case where fake counterfeit Indian currency notes were seized from the accused-appellant. He was investigated by the National Investigating Agency (NIA) under the National Investigating Agency Act, 2008 and was charged under the UAP Act alongwith Sections 489B and 489C IPC. He was in custody as an undertrial prisoner for more than four years. The trial court had not even frame the charges. It was in that context, this Court observed as under :

9.Over a period of time, the trial Courts and the High Courts have forgotten a very well settled principle of law that bail is not to be withheld as a punishment.

23.1. After referring to various other decisions, this Court further observed as follows:

19. If the State or any prosecuting agency including the court concerned has no wherewithal to provide r protect the fundamental right of an accused to have a speedy trial as enshrined under Article 21 of the Constitution then the State or any other prosecuting agency should not oppose

¹ (2024) SCC Online SC 1755

the plea for bail on the ground that the crime committed in serious. Article 21 of the Constitution applies irrespective of the nature of the crime.

20. We may hasten to add that the petitioner is still an accused; not a convict. The overarching postulate of criminal jurisprudence that an accused is presumed to be innocent until proven guilty cannot be brushed aside lightly, howsoever stringent the panal law may be.

21. We are convinced that the manner in which the prosecuting agency as well as the Court have proceeded, the right of the accused to have a speedy trial could be said to have been infringed thereby violating Article 21 of the Constitution.

26. Angela Harish Sontakke Vs. State of Maharashtra is a case where the accused-appellant was charged under various provisions of the UAP Act as well as under the IPC. He sought for bail. This Court observed that, undoubtedly, the charges are serious but the seriousness of the charges will have to be balanced with certain other facts like the period of custody suffered and the likely period within which the trial can be expected to be completed. In that case, it was found that the Appellant-accused was in custody since April,2011 i.e. for over five years. The trial was yet to commence. A large number of witnesses were proposed to be examined. It was in that context that the appellant-accused was directed to be released on bail.

32. This Court has, time to again, emphasized that right to life and personal liberty enshrined under Article 21 of the Constitution of India is overarching and sacrosanct. A constitutional court cannot be restrained from granting bail to an accused on account of restrictive statutory provisions in a panel

statute if it finds that the right of the accused-undertrial under Article 21 of the Constitution of India has been infringed. In that event, such statutory restrictions would not come in the way. Even in the case of interpretation of a panel statute, howsoever stringent it may be, a constitutional court has to lean in favour of constitutionalism and the rule of law of which liberty is an intrinsic part. In the given facts of a particular case, a constitutional court may decline to grant bail. But it would be very wrong to say that under a particular statute, bail cannot be granted. It would run counter to the very grain of our constitutional jurisprudence. In any view of the matter, K.A. Najeeb (supra) being rendered by a three Judge Bench is binding on a Bench of two Judges like us.

4. Considering the above referred observations and the fact that there is unlikelihood that in near future the trial would be concluded, coupled with the fact that the Applicant is in jail from last eight years, I am of the opinion that the Applicant is entitled for grant of bail. Accordingly, the application is allowed;

ORDER

- i. Criminal Bail Application No.2276 of 2024 is allowed;
- ii. It is directed that the Applicant shall be released on bail in Crime No.21 of 2016, registered with Mhasala Police Station, District: Raigad for the offences punishable under Sections 307, 393, 397, 398, 457, 452, 120-B , 325 of IPC, Sections 4, 25, 27 of Arms Act, 1959 and Sections 3(1)(ii),

3(2), 3(4) of MCOC Act, on furnishing PR. Bond of Rupees Twenty Five Thousand with one solvent surety in the like amount;

iii. The Applicant shall attend the Police Station on 1st and 16th day of each month between 11:00 am to 12:00 noon till conclusion of trial;

iv. The Applicant shall not directly or indirectly make any inducement, threat or promise to any person acquainted with the facts of the case, as also not tamper with the evidence;

v. Liberty is granted to the State for cancellation of bail if the Applicant commits similar offence;

vi. The Applicant shall attend the trial before the Trial Court regularly on every date unless exempted by the Trial Court for any reason.

vii. Application stands disposed off, accordingly.

viii. The High Court Legal Services Committee is directed to pay appropriate fees to Advocate appearing for the Applicant for espousing the cause of Applicant.

(ANIL S. KILOR, J.)