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CrI.R.C.No.546 of 2024

IN THE HIGH COURT OF JUDICATURE AT MADRAS

DATED : 25.03.2024

CORAM

THE HONOURABLE MR.JUSTICE M.NIRMAL KUMAR

CrI.R.C.No.546 of 2024

1.Ranjithraj,
S/o.Gowthaman
2.Rajesh,
S/o.Sathish

... Petitioners

Vs.

STATE OF TAMIL NADU
Represented by
The Inspector of Police,
M-2, M.M.Colony Police Station,
Chennai.
(Crime No.442 of 2023)

... Respondent

PRAYER: Criminal Revision is filed under Section 397 r/w 401 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, to call for the records in CrI.M.P.No.10030 of 2023 and set aside the impugned order dated 06.01.2024 passed by the learned Principal Sessions Judge under EC & NDPS Act, Chennai and further enlarge the petitioners on bail.

For Petitioner : Mr.I.Sidharthan
For Respondent : Mr.S.Raja Kumar,
Additional Public Prosecutor

ORDER

The petitioners/A1 & A2 filed a statutory bail in CrI.M.P.No.10030 of 2023 in Crime No.442 of 2023 before the learned Principal Special Judge, Principal Special Court Under EC & NDPS Act, Chennai. The learned Judge



Crl.R.C.No.546 of 2024

vide order, dated 06.01.2024 dismissed the same, against which, the present Criminal Revision Case.

2.The learned counsel for the petitioners submitted that the respondent Police registered a case against the petitioners/A1 & A2 for offence under Sections 8(c), 20(b)(ii)(C), 25 & 29(1) of The Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985 (hereinafter referred to as 'NDPS Act') and 120B IPC in Crime No.442 of 2023. Since the investigation not completed and charge sheet not filed, the petitioner on 181st day filed statutory bail under Section 167(2) Cr.P.C., through online on 24.12.2023. Earlier to it, the respondent Police filed a petition under Section 36-A(4) of NDPS Act on 178th day i.e., on 21.12.2023 seeking extension of statutory period of investigation for further 180 days. The respondent Police filed a petition seeking extension of time in Crl.M.P.No.10019 of 2023 on 21.12.2023. The Court below by common order, dated 06.01.2024 allowed the petition filed by the prosecution seeking extension of time for investigation and dismissed the petition filed by the petitioners for statutory bail under Section 167(2) Cr.P.C. The learned counsel further submitted that in view of the decision of Hon'ble Apex Court in the case of “*M.Ravindran Versus Intelligence Officer, Directorate of Revenue Intelligence* reported in (2021) 2 Supreme Court Cases 485” and



Crl.R.C.No.546 of 2024

WEB COPY
this Court in “*Ajith Versus State Rep. by The Inspector of Police, E-9, Thazhambur Police Station, Chennai-600130 in Crl.R.C.No.924 of 2023, dated 22.06.2023*” followed the “*Judgebir Singh @ Jasbir Singh Samra @ Jasbir & Ors., Versus National Investigating Agency in Criminal Appeal No.1011 of 2023*” the impugned order passed by the Court below is not legally sustainable.

3.The learned Additional Public Prosecutor appearing for the respondent Police filed counter and submitted that on 26.06.2023 at about 17.40 hours, when the Sub Inspector of Police was in station duty, he received a secret information about illegal transport of narcotic substances. Based on the information, he along with his Police team went to the scene of occurrence viz., Manjampakkam parking yard near service road. At that time, three unknown persons standing near a vehicle viz., Mahindra XUV-500 bearing Reg.No.TN-14-S-2540. The respondent Police caught hold of them and enquired. During enquiry, it came to know that the said three persons are the petitioners/A1 & A2 one Sadiq Basha/A3. On search, they were in possession of 120 kgs of Ganja, immediately, they were arrested, confession statement recorded which reveals that as per the instruction of A4, the petitioners have purchased the contrabands from Hussain at Andhra Pradesh. Then, the



Crl.R.C.No.546 of 2024

respondent Police took 12 samples of Ganja each 50 grams and remaining kept in the same bag and the same was seized under seizure mahazar in presence of witnesses. Based on the above complaint, FIR in Crime No.442 of 2023 for offence under Sections 8(c), 20(b)(ii)(C), 25 & 29(1) of NDPS registered. On the same, the accused were arrested and produced before the Magistrate for remand. On 26.07.2023, the seized contraband sent to the Forensic Science Laboratory, Chennai for chemical analysis and the report received on 22.09.2023. During the course of investigation, the respondent Police arrested A4 and A5 and their confession statements recorded.

4.He further submitted that the charge sheet ought to be filed before the concerned court within 180 days. On 21.12.2023 i.e., 178th day, the learned Special Public Prosecutor filed extension application of statutory period of investigation under Section 36-4(A) of NDPS Act before the learned Principal Special Judge, Special Court under EC & NDPS Act, Chennai in Crl.M.P.No.10019 of 2023. The petitioner on 24.12.2023 i.e., 181st day filed statutory bail in Crl.M.P.No.10030 of 2023. The learned Principal Special Judge, Principal Special Court Under EC & NDPS Act, Chennai by order, dated 06.01.2024 dismissed the statutory bail and allowed the extension petition filed by the respondent Police. Hence, prays for dismissal of the



Criminal Revision Case.

WEB COPY

5.This Court considered the rival submissions and perused the materials available on record.

6.The Hon'ble Apex Court in the case of “***M.Ravindran Versus Intelligence Officer, Directorate of Revenue Intelligence*** reported in (2021) 2 ***Supreme Court Cases 485***” had held in detail about the Fundamental Right to Life and Personal Liberty under Section 167(2) Cr.P.C., commonly referred as default bail and rights of the Prosecutor under Section 167(2) Cr.P.C., r/w Section 36-A(4) of NDPS Act referring to various judgments of the Apex Court considering *pari materia* Section 20(4)(bb) of The Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act, 1987, Section 43D (2)(b) of The Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 and 49(2)(b) of The Prevention of Terrorism Act, 2002.

(i)The Hon'ble Apex Court further held that unless the Court grants extension in time based on the report of the Public Prosecutor, there is no reason by the Special Court to deny to the accused his indefeasible right to default bail if the accused seeks and is prepared to furnish the bail bonds as directed by the Court.



(ii) It had also held that the default bail cannot be denied on account of delay in deciding his application or erroneous rejection of the same.

(iii) Further held that irrespective of the reasons for delay in deciding the bail application, the accused is deemed to have exercised his indefeasible right upon filing of the bail application, though his actual release from custody is inevitably subject to compliance with the order granting bail.

(iv) Further held that no extension shall be granted by the court without notice to an accused to have his say regarding the prayer for grant of extension.

(v) The application for default bail by the accused and any application for extension of time made by the Public Prosecutor must be considered together are, in our opinion, only applicable in situations where the Public Prosecutor files a report seeking extension of time prior to the filing of the application for default bail by the accused. However, where the accused has already applied for default bail, the Prosecutor cannot defeat the enforcement of his indefeasible right by subsequently filing a final report, additional complaint or report seeking extension of time.

(vi) It had referred to the settled principles that issuance of notice to the State on the application for default bail filed under the Proviso to Section 167(2) Cr.P.C., is to the limited extent that the Public Prosecutor can satisfy



the Court that the prosecution has already obtained an order of extension of time from the Court; or that the challan has been filed in the designated Court before the expiry of the prescribed period; or that the prescribed period has actually not expired. Such issuance of notice would avoid the possibility of the accused obtaining default bail by deliberate or inadvertent suppression of certain facts and also guard against multiplicity of proceedings.

(vii)It is clearly held that Public Prosecutors cannot be permitted to misuse the limited notice issued to them by the Court on bail applications filed under Section 167(2) Cr.P.C., by dragging on proceedings and filing subsequent applications/reports for the purpose of 'buying extra time' and facilitating filling up of lacunae in the investigation by the investigating agency. The Apex Court cautioned the lower Court that if the Court deliberately does not decide the bail application but adjourns the case by granting time to the prosecution, it would be in violation of the legislative mandate.

(viii)Further deprecated the practice of the concerned Magistrate to take up the applications for extension of time with retrospective effect and considering the default bail under Section 167(2) Cr.P.C., is not proper. Further, it had reiterated the principle that the right of the accused to statutory bail, which was exercised at the time his bail application was filed, remained



unaffected by the subsequent application for extension of time to complete investigation.

(ix) Further held that the concerned Magistrate was obligated to deal with the application for default bail on the day it was filed. Default bail, being an indefeasible right of the accused under the first proviso to Section 167(2), kicks in and must be granted. Thus, *“If the accused applies for bail under Section 167(2), Cr.P.C read with Section 36-A (4), NDPS Act upon expiry of 180 days or the extended period, as the case may be, the Court must release him on bail forthwith without any unnecessary delay after getting necessary information from the public prosecutor for the limited purpose as stated above. Thus, such prompt action will restrict the prosecution from frustrating the legislative mandate to release the accused on bail in case of default by the investigative agency.”*

(x) Further, it had held that the right to be released on default bail continues to remain enforceable if the accused has applied for such bail, notwithstanding pendency of the bail application; or subsequent filing of the charge sheet or a report seeking extension of time by the prosecution before the Court; or filing of the charge sheet during the interregnum when challenge to the rejection of the bail application is pending before a higher Court.



7. In the case of “**Judgebir Singh @ Jasbir Singh Samra @ Jasbir & Ors., Versus National Investigating Agency in Criminal Appeal No.1011 of 2023**” the Hon'ble Apex Court in paragraph Nos.76 to 78 had held as follows:

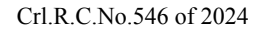
“AN EYE-OPENER LITIGATION FOR THE NIA/STATE POLICE

76. As is evident from the chronology of dates and events referred to in the earlier part of our judgment, the final report under Section 173(2) of the CrPC was filed in the Court of SDJM, Ajnala on 15.11.2019. 15.11.2019 was the 161st day from the date of arrest of two of the appellants before us, namely, Jasbir Singh and Varinder Singh. They were the first to be arrested on 08.06.2019. The Punjab Police applied to the Court of the Additional Sessions Judge, Amritsar, for extension of time to complete the investigation invoking the proviso to Section 43D(2)(b) of the UAPA on 04.09.2019. When this application for extension of time was filed only two days were left for 90 days to expire. This is suggestive of the fact that the 91st day would have fallen on 07.09.2019. What is important to highlight is that the Additional Sessions Judge, Amritsar, looked into the extension application dated 04.09.2019 filed by the Punjab Police and ultimately, extended the time limit vide its order dated 17.09.2019 i.e., on the 101st day. By the time, the Additional Sessions Judge, Amritsar, passed an order extending the time, the period of 90 days had already expired. Indisputably, there was no chargesheet.



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before the Court on the 91st day i.e., on 07.09.2019. The reason why we say that this is a grey area is because what would have happened if the appellants Jasbir Singh and Varinder Singh had preferred an application seeking statutory/default bail under Section 167(2) of the CrPC on the 91st day i.e., on 07.09.2019. The application seeking extension of time was very much pending. The Additional Sessions Judge could not have even allowed such application promptly i.e., on or before the 90th day without giving notice to the accused persons. The law is now well settled in view of the decision of this Court in the case of Jigar alias Jimmy Pravinchandra Aditya v. State of Gujarat reported in 2022 SCC OnLine SC 1290 that an opportunity of hearing has to be given to the accused persons before the time is extended up to 180 days to complete the investigation. The only error or lapse on the part of the appellants Jasbir and Varinder Singh was that they failed to prefer an appropriate application seeking statutory/default bail on the 91st day. If such application would have been filed, the court would have had no option but to release them on statutory/default bail. The Court could not have said that since the extension application was pending, it shall pass an appropriate order only after the extension application was decided. That again would have been something contrary to the well settled position of law. This litigation is an eye opener for the NIA as well as the State investigating agency that if they want to seek extension, they must be careful that such extension is not prayed for at the last moment.



“25. Having carefully considered the submissions made on behalf of the respective parties, the relevant provisions of law and the decision cited, we are unable to accept the submissions advanced on behalf of the State by the learned Additional Solicitor General Mr Raval. There is no denying the fact that on 17-7-2012, when CR No. 86 of 2012 was allowed by the Additional Sessions Judge and the custody of the appellant was held to be illegal and an application under [Section 167\(2\)](#) CrPC was made on behalf of the appellant for grant of statutory bail which was listed



for hearing. Instead of hearing the application, the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate adjourned the same till the next day when the Public Prosecutor filed an application for extension of the period of custody and investigation and on 20-7- 2012 extended the time of investigation and the custody of the appellant for a further period of 90 days with retrospective effect from 2-6-2012. Not only is the retrospectivity of the order of the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate untenable, it could not also defeat the statutory right which had accrued to the appellant on the expiry of 90 days from the date when the appellant was taken into custody. Such right, as has been commented upon by this Court in Sanjay Dutt [(1994) 5 SCC 410 : 1994 SCC (Cri) 1433] and the other cases cited by the learned Additional Solicitor General, could only be distinguished (sic extinguished) once the charge-sheet had been filed in the case and no application has been made prior thereto for grant of statutory bail. It is well-established that if an accused does not exercise his right to grant of statutory bail before the charge-sheet is filed, he loses his right to such benefit once such charge-sheet is filed and can, thereafter, only apply for regular bail.

26. The circumstances in this case, however, are different in that the appellant had exercised his right to statutory bail on the very same day on which his custody was held to be illegal and such an application was left undecided by the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate till after the application filed by the prosecution for extension of time to complete investigation was taken up and orders were passed thereupon.

27. We are unable to appreciate the procedure adopted by the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate, which has been endorsed by the High Court and we are of the view that the appellant acquired the right for grant of statutory bail on 17-7-2012, when his custody was held to be illegal by the Additional Sessions Judge since his



WEB COPY



Crl.R.C.No.546 of 2024

application for statutory bail was pending at the time when the application for extension of time for continuing the investigation was filed by the prosecution. In our view, the right of the appellant to grant of statutory bail remained unaffected by the subsequent application and both the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate and the High Court erred in holding otherwise.”
(Emphasis supplied)

8.This Court in the case of “***Ajith Versus State Rep. by The Inspector of Police, E-9, Thazhambur Police Station, Chennai-600130 in Crl.R.C.No.924 of 2023, dated 22.06.2023***” following the Hon'ble Apex Court decisions had granted statutory bail finding that the Court below considered the bail application as well as extension petition belatedly but simultaneously. This order (***Ajith case***) came to be passed on 22.06.2023, the Court below failed to make correction course, continuous to belatedly take into consideration in passing order in extension petition and statutory bail application. Despite extension petition filed by the investigating agency before expiry of the statutory period, no order passed, kept pending for quite some time. In the meanwhile, indefeasible right for statutory bail accrues to the accused. The Court below dismissing the statutory bail on the ground that extension petition has been filed and both orders passed on the same day is not proper. Filing of charge sheet before the statutory period is sufficient and any claim for default bail as statutory right is not permissible. On the other hand, the dictum of the



Hon'ble Apex Court is clear that once extension petition filed, notice to be given to the accused and thereafter, considering Section 36-A(4) of NDPS Act and the twin conditions that (i) indicating the progress of the investigation (ii) specific reason for the detention of the accused beyond the said period of one hundred and eighty days, orders to be passed. Then, only it can be construed that the extension period for filing charge sheet has been granted, otherwise filing of extension petition alone by the prosecution would not amount to compliance of the condition in the absence of the order by the Magistrate/Special Judge stipulated under Section 36-A(4) of NDPS Act. For better appreciation, Section 36-A(4) of NDPS Act is extracted below:

“(4) In respect of persons accused of an offence punishable under section 19 or section 24 or section 27A 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.”



Crl.R.C.No.546 of 2024

WEB COPY

9.It is clear that on date of petition for default bail by the petitioner, neither charge sheet filed nor order for extension of time to complete the investigation granted/ordered. In the meanwhile, the indefeasible right to default bail under Section 167(2) Cr.P.C., an integral part of right to personal liberty under Article 21 of Constitution of India accrued to the accused, cannot be denied.

10.In view of the callous manner of the Court below in belatedly considering and passing orders in the extension petition filed by the Public Prosecutor under Section 36-A(4) of NDPS Act, the accused cannot be denied his accrued right of default bail.

11.In view of the foregoing discussions, the impugned order dated 06.01.2024 passed in Crl.M.P.No.10030 of 2023 in Crime No.442 of 2023 by the learned Principal Special Judge, Principal Special Court under EC & NDPS Act, Chennai, is set aside and Statutory Bail is granted to the petitioners and the petitioners are ordered to be released on bail on executing a bond for a sum of Rs.10,000/- (Rupees Ten Thousand only) along with two sureties each for a like sum, before the Principal Special Judge, Principal Special Court



CrI.R.C.No.546 of 2024

under EC & NDPS Act, Chennai on the following conditions:

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(a) the sureties shall affix their photographs and left thumb impression in the surety bond and the Court concerned may obtain a copy of their Aadhar card or Bank pass Book to ensure their identity;

(b) the petitioners shall not tamper with evidence or witness either during investigation or trial;

(c) the petitioners to appear before the respondent Police on the first working day of every English calendar month at 10.30 a.m., until further orders;

(d) the petitioners shall not abscond either during investigation or trial;

(e) on breach of any of the aforesaid conditions, the learned Magistrate/Trial Court is entitled to take appropriate action against the petitioners in accordance with law as if the conditions have been imposed and the petitioners released on bail by the learned Magistrate/Trial Court himself as laid down by the Hon-ble Supreme Court in P.K.Shaji Vs. State of Kerala [(2005) AIR SCW 5560]; and;

(f) if the accused thereafter absconds, a fresh FIR can be registered under Section 229-A IPC.



Crl.R.C.No.546 of 2024

12. With the above directions, this Criminal Revision Case is allowed.

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25.03.2024

Speaking order/Non-speaking order

Index: Yes/No

Internet: Yes/No

Neutral Citation: Yes/No

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Note: Issue Order Copy on 25.03.2024.

M.NIRMAL KUMAR, J.

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To

1. The Principal Special Judge,
Principal Special Court Under EC & NDPS Act,
Chennai.
2. The Superintendent of Police,
Central Prison, Puzhal.
3. The Inspector of Police,
M-2, M.M.Colony Police Station,
Chennai.
4. The Public Prosecutor,
High Court, Madras.

Crl.R.C.No.546 of 2024



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Crl.R.C.No.546 of 2024

25.03.2024