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H.C.P.No.2273 of 2023

IN THE HIGH COURT OF JUDICATURE AT MADRAS

DATED : 10.01.2024

CORAM :

THE HONOURABLE MR. JUSTICE M.S. RAMESH

AND

THE HONOURABLE MR. JUSTICE SUNDER MOHAN

H.C.P.No.2273 of 2023

Manimalar

... Petitioner

Vs.

1.The Additional Secretary to Government,
Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public
Distribution, (Department of Consumer Affairs),
Government of India,
Room No.270, 'Krishi Bhavan',
New Delhi – 110 001.

2.The Secretary to Government,
Co-operation, Food & Consumer Protection Department,
Government of Tamil Nadu,
Fort St. George, Chennai – 600 009.

3.The Commissioner of Police/Detaining Authority,
Avadi City, Chennai District.

4.The Superintendent of Police,
Central Prison, Puzhal, Chennai – 66.

5.The Inspector of Police,
Civil Supplies C.I.D.,
Chennai North Unit,
Chennai.

... Respondents



H.C.P.No.2273 of 2023

Prayer: Habeas Corpus Petition filed under Article 226 of the Constitution of India, praying for the issuance of Writ of Habeas Corpus, calling for the records in connection with the detention order passed by the third respondent dated 31.10.2023 in No.02/Black Marketing Act/2023 against the petitioner's husband Balaji, aged 43 years, S/o. Masilamani who is confined at Central Prison, Puzhal, Chennai - 66 and set aside the detention order and direct the respondents to produce the detenu before this Court and set him at liberty.

For Petitioner : Mr.U. Kathiravan
For Respondents : Mr.E. Raj Thilak,
Additional Public Prosecutor
assisted by Mr.C. Aravind

ORDER

(Order of the Court was made by *M.S.RAMESH, J.*)

The petitioner, who is the wife of the detenu Balaji, S/o.Masilamani, aged 43 years, has come forward with this petition challenging the detention order passed by the third respondent dated 31.10.2023 slapped on her husband, branding him as "Black Marketeer" under the Prevention of Black Marketing and Maintenance of Supplies of Essential Commodities Act, 1980 [Central Act No.7 of 1980].



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2. Heard the learned counsel for the petitioner and the learned

Additional Public Prosecutor appearing for the respondents.

3. Though several grounds are raised in the petition, the learned counsel for the petitioner focused mainly on the ground that there is an unexplained delay in considering the representation of the petitioner, dated 09.11.2023. According to the learned counsel for the petitioner, though the representation is dated 09.11.2023, the same has been received by the Government only on 14.11.2023; the file has been dealt with by the Deputy Secretary on 01.12.2023 and the Minister concerned dealt with the file only on 08.12.2023 and the Rejection Letter was prepared on 08.12.2023 and sent to the detenu on 08.12.2023. It is the further submission of the learned counsel that the delay of 6 days in considering the representation remains unexplained and the same vitiates the detention order. In support of his contention, the learned counsel for the petitioner relied on the judgment of the Hon'ble Supreme Court in ***Rajammal Vs. State of Tamil Nadu, reported in (1999) 1 SCC 417.***

4. As per the submission of the learned counsel for the petitioner and on perusal of the records, we find that the representation of the



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petitioner is dated 09.11.2023, which was received by the Government on 14.11.2023 and further, the Minister concerned had dealt with the file of the detenu only on 08.12.2023 and the Rejection Letter was sent to the detenu on 08.12.2023. Thus, we find there is a considerable delay of 6 days in considering the representation of the petitioner. This delay of 6 days in considering the petitioner's representation remains unexplained.

5. It is trite law that the representation should be very expeditiously considered and disposed of with a sense of urgency and without avoidable delay. Any unexplained delay in the disposal of the representation would be a breach of the constitutional imperative and it would render the continued detention impermissible and illegal. From the records produced, we find that no acceptable explanation has been offered for the delay of 6 days. Therefore, we have to hold that the delay has vitiated further detention of the detenu.

6. In the judgment of the Hon'ble Supreme Court in ***Rajammal's case (cited supra)***, it has been held as follows:

"It is a constitutional obligation of the Government to consider the representation forwarded



by the detenu without any delay. Though no period is prescribed by Article 22 of the Constitution for the decision to be taken on the representation, the words "as soon as may be " in clause (5) of Article 22 convey the message that the representation should be considered and disposed of at the earliest."

As per the dictum laid down by the Supreme Court in above cited ***Rajammal's case***, number of days of delay is immaterial and what is to be considered is whether the delay caused has been properly explained by the authorities concerned. But, here the inordinate delay of 6 days has not been properly explained at all.

7. Further, in a recent decision in ***Ummu Sabeena vs. State of Kerala-2011 STPL (Web) 999 SC***, the Hon'ble Supreme Court has held that the history of personal liberty, as is well known, is a history of insistence on procedural safeguards. The expression 'as soon as may be', in Article 22(5) of the Constitution of India clearly shows the concern of the makers of the Constitution that the representation, made on behalf of the detenu, should be considered and disposed of with a sense of urgency and without any avoidable delay.



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8. In the light of the above discussion, we have no hesitation in quashing the order of detention on the ground of delay on the part of the Government in disposing of the representation of the petitioner.

9. Accordingly, the detention order passed by the third respondent, in No.02/Black Marketing Act/2023, dated 31.10.2023, is hereby set aside and the Habeas Corpus Petition is allowed. The detenu viz., Balaji, S/o. Masilamani, aged 43 years, is directed to be set at liberty forthwith unless he is required in connection with any other case.

[M.S.R., J] [S.M., J]

10.01.2024

Index: Yes/No
Speaking/Non-speaking order
Internet: Yes/No
Neutral Citation: Yes/No

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To
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