

IN THE HIGH COURT OF JUDICATURE AT BOMBAY
CRIMINAL APPELLATE JURISDICTION

CRIMINAL BAIL APPLICATION NO.3423 OF 2023

Bharat Jayawant Kurane, Age 42 years,
Occ.Business, R/o.Dharmveer Sambhaji Galli,
Mahadwar Road, Belgaum, Karnataka.

Presently lodged in Central Jail, Bangalore.

Applicant

versus

The State of Maharashtra

Respondent

WITH

INTERIM APPLICATION NO.3703 OF 2024

Dr.Megha Pansare

Intervenor

In the matter between :

Bharat Jayawant Kurane

Applicant

versus

The State of Maharashtra

Respondent

Mr.Niteen Pradhan with Mr.Virendra Ichalkaranjekar, Mr.Shahen Pradhan, Mr.Danish Patel, Ms.Shambhavi Desai i/by Ms.S.D.Khot, Advocates for Applicant.

Mr.Tanuj Kushare i/by Abhay Nevagi & Associates for Intervenor.

Ms.Geeta P.Mulekar with Ms.Veera Shinde, APP, for State.

API Somnath Shendge and HC Lokesh Raskar, present ATS officers present.

CORAM : ANIL S.KILOR, J.

Date of Reserving the Order : 12th December 2024

Date of Pronouncing the Order : 29th January 2025

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1. Heard.

2. By this application under Section 439 of the Code of Criminal Procedure the applicant is seeking bail in Crime No.39 of 2015 registered with Rajarampuri Police Station, Kolhapur, for the offences punishable under Sections 120(B), 302, 307 r/w 34 of the Indian Penal Code r/w Sections 3(1) r/w 25(1B)(A) r/w Sec.5 r/w Sec.27 of Indian Arms Act.

3. Having gone through the charge sheet and relevant material collected by the Investigating Officer during investigation it is evident that the Applicant was earlier arrested on 9th August 2018 in C.R No.221 of 2017 i.e. in case of murder of Gauri Lankesh and then he was shown as arrested in the present crime on 1st December 2018.

4. In the present crime the investigation was handed over to Special Investigation Team vide administrative order issued by the Government of Maharashtra. SIT then, filed five charge sheets in the present matter. The investigation in the present crime was monitored by this Court and passed various orders. Thereupon, further investigation was entrusted to ATS, Pune.

5. Applicant is accused no.7 and allegations against him are as regards conspiracy.

6. The prosecution is mainly relying on the statement of one Sagar Lakhe whose statement was recorded after 3½ years of the incident. The said witness speaks about the meetings held in February-2015 wherein conspiracy to eliminate the deceased Shri Pansare allegedly hatched. However, no overt act is attributed to accused no.7 or no motive is attributed to the Applicant. Prima facie nothing is pointed out about any agreement arrived at by the Applicant with the co-accused as regards commission of alleged

offence, which is pre-requisite for conspiracy.

7. Moreover, the Applicant is in jail for more than six years. There is no satisfactory progress in trial. Thus, there is no likelihood that trial will be concluded in near future.

8. The Hon'ble Supreme Court of India in the case of *Sheikh Javed Iqbal @ Ashfaq Ansari @ Javed Ansari vs. 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 framed 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

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wherewithal to provide or 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 the plea for bail on the ground that the crime committed is 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 penal 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.

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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.

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30.1. Thereafter, this Court held as follows:

7.1. We are dealing with a case of the accused whose guilt is yet to be established. So long as he is not held guilty, the presumption of innocence is applicable. He cannot be deprived of all his rights guaranteed under Article 21.....

32. This Court has, time and 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 penal 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 penal 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.”

9. In the circumstances, in view of the above referred authority and observations recorded by this Court as regards merit of present application, I am of the opinion that Applicant is entitled for grant of bail. Hence, I pass following order :

ORDER

- (i) Bail Application is allowed and disposed off;
- (ii) It is directed that the applicant shall be released on bail in Crime No.39 of 2015 registered with Rajarampuri Police Station, Kolhapur, for the offences punishable under Sections 120(B), 302, 307 r/w 34 of the Indian Penal Code r/w Sections 3(1) r/w 25(1B) (A) r/w Sec.5 r/w Sec.27 of Indian Arms Act on furnishing P.R.Bond of Rupees Twenty Five Thousand with one solvent surety in the like amount;
- (iii) If the Applicant is not in jail in any other offence, on release of the Applicant in the present crime, he shall attend Rajarampuri Police Station, Kolhapur on every 1st and 16th of each month between 10.00 a.m and 12.00 noon till conclusion of trial; except on the date of trial of this case or any other case;
- (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 breaches any condition or misuses the liberty or 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) Interim Application No.3703 of 2024 stands disposed off.

(ANIL S.KILOR, J.)

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