



123

**IN THE HIGH COURT OF PUNJAB AND HARYANA
AT CHANDIGARH**

**CWP-13221-2026 (O&M)
Date of Decision: 11.05.2026**

Zee Entertainment Enterprises Limited

...Petitioner

Versus

Union of India and Others

...Respondents

CORAM:- HON'BLE MR. JUSTICE JAGMOHAN BANSAL

Present:- Mr. Amit Jhanji, Senior Advocate with
Mr. Samir Rathour, Advocate,
Mr. Sanjeev Majra, Advocate,
Mr. Angad Makkar, Advocate and
Ms. Eliza Gupta, Advocate
for the petitioner.

Mr. Satya Pal Jain, Addl. Solicitor General (through V.C.),
Mr. Dheeraj Jain, Senior Advocate/Sr. Panel Counsel with
Mr. Sahil Garg, Advocate
for respondent No.1.

Mr. Maninderjit Singh Bedi, Advocate General Punjab with
Mr. P.I.P. Singh, Addl. A.G., Punjab,
Mr. Ferry Sofat, Addl. A.G., Punjab and
Ms. Anisha Advocate for respondent No.2.

Ms. Ateevraj Sandhu, Advocate,
Mrs. Rajani, Advocate,
Ms. Manveen Dhanjal, Advocate,
Ms. Rajwant Kaur, Advocate
Mr. Jalaj Gulyani, Advocate
for respondent No.3.

JAGMOHAN BANSAL, J. (ORAL)

1. The petitioner through instant petition under Articles
226/227 of the Constitution of India is seeking setting aside of
communication dated 24.04.2026 whereby it has been advised not to

release documentary titled 'Lawrence of Punjab'.

2. Short reply on behalf of respondent No.1 and short affidavit of Mr. Manoj Gors, PPS, Superintendent of Police, State Cyber Crime Wing, Punjab on behalf of respondent No.2 filed in the Court are taken on record. The Registry is directed to tag the same at an appropriate place.

3. Teaser poster for the documentary titled 'Lawrence of Punjab' was released on 11.04.2026 which was followed by trailer on 19.04.2026. The respondent issued communication dated 23.04.2026 advising petitioner to take appropriate action in the light of petition filed before this Court impugning aforesaid documentary. The respondent issued communication dated 24.04.2026 advising petitioner not to release aforesaid documentary. The writ petition filed before this Court was dismissed as withdrawn. Lawrence Bishnoi filed WP (C) 5613 of 2026 before Delhi High Court for restraining release of documentary. The petition was disposed of in view of advisory issued by Central Government. Relevant extracts of the impugned communication read as: -

"6. In view of the above judicial directions, Punjab Police has informed that there exists a reasonable apprehension that the release of the said documentary is prejudicial to public order and has the potential to incite the commission of cognizable offences. Therefore, further to the Advisory issued on 27.10.2025 and this Ministry's letter No. DM/16/2024-DM dated 23.04.2026, ZEE5 is advised not to release the said content.

7. ZEE5 may take note of the above and take appropriate action in the matter."

4. Learned Senior counsel representing the petitioner submits that the documentary does not glorify any gangster. It is not a story of one

particular gangster or gang whereas it is a collection of material available in public domain with respect to different gangsters. The intent of documentary is not to glorify rather to criticize criminal activities. The respondent has passed impugned order on the basis of letters forwarded by Director General of Police (**DGP**), Punjab citing two orders of this Court. This Court has restrained different public platforms not to glorify crime and criminals. The petitioner has collected information/material available in public domain and no attempt has been made to glorify any gangster.

5. *Per contra*, learned Advocate General, Punjab submits that this Court vide orders dated 21.12.2023 and 28.01.2026 passed in **CWP-PIL-93-2023** has ordered to remove interviews of Lawrence Bishnoi from all social media platforms like YouTube. The Court has further directed DGP, Punjab to identify websites and social media platforms where videos and posts that tend to glorify the crime and criminals are being shared and take immediate steps to remove the same. The DGP, Punjab in compliance of aforesaid orders of this Court and on the basis of obtained inputs requested Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India to block impugned documentary. There is apprehension that impugned documentary may glorify Lawrence Bishnoi and entice youngsters to involve in notorious and nefarious activities. The title itself of the documentary is demeaning reputation of the State of Punjab and glorifying one particular gangster. The respondent has removed more than 2600 contents relating to gangsters from social media platforms.

6. Learned Senior counsel for respondent No.1-Union of India submits that they have acted upon letter received from DGP, Punjab. They have also received information from another Central Security Agency. They have fully complied with procedure prescribed under Section 69A read with 79 of The Information Technology Act, 2000 (for short '2000 Act'). It was within domain of the respondent to block release of the impugned documentary. He categorically pointed out Para Nos. 11 & 28 of the reply which read as: -

“11. Ministry was further informed that a Central Security Agency has also expressed serious concern on the release of the web series on Lawrence Bishnoi which is likely to glorify gun culture, violence, gangsters and their lavish lifestyle. It was opined that this could attract young minds towards gangster culture and impact the law and order situation in states. Central security agency further raised concern that showcasing statements from accused or fugitives will impact ongoing cases and may affect witnesses and trials. Based on these observations, the agency also concurred with the said request of Government of Punjab, and sought issuance of suitable advisory from Ministry of Information and Broadcasting to the OTT platform to not release the web-series.

XXX XXX XXX XXX

28. That it is also pertinent to mention here that the answering respondent's actions are not only based upon the concerns raised by Punjab Authorities but also on the inputs received from Central Security Agency through the concerned Ministry that there are serious concerns that the release of this web series is likely to glorify gun culture, violence, gangsters and their lavish lifestyle, which can further attract young minds towards gangster culture and, thus, impact law and order situation in the states where the individual's gang is active. Further concerns were also raised that showcasing statements from accused or

fugitives will impact ongoing cases (e.g. Sidhu Moosewala murder case, extortion, targeted killings) and may affect witnesses & trials. The concerns related to the anticipated law & order problems as well as the likely impact on ongoing legal processes raised by different quarters are very serious in nature and cannot be ignored. Therefore, the impugned advisories are fully justified and, thus, liable to be upheld.”

7. Learned counsel for the respondent No.3 submits that name of respondent No.3-Lawrence Bishnoi should not be used because it would adversely affect trials pending against him. His photograph should not be shown in the documentary as well as in the trailer/poster.

8. Faced with aforesaid objections, Mr. Amit Jhanji, Senior Advocate assures the Court that in the title of the documentary as well as trailer/poster, neither expression ‘Lawrence’ nor ‘Bishnoi’ nor ‘Punjab’ would be incorporated.

9. Heard the arguments and perused the record.

10. I have watched aforesaid documentary on the petitioner’s laptop. The petitioner released link of the documentary which was watched at the Camp Office.

11. The respondent-State of Punjab has primarily raised objection on the release of documentary on the ground that it is going to glorify gangsters especially Lawrence Bishnoi. They are further relying upon two interim orders passed by this Court whereby Authorities have been directed to remove content relating to two interviews of Lawrence Bishnoi. This Court has further ordered that DGP, Punjab would identify and get removed the content which glorify crime and criminals. Relevant extracts of orders dated 21.12.2023 and 28.01.2026 are reproduced as

below: -

Order dated 21.12.2003

“In view of the above, we deem it appropriate to issue following directions:

- i) The DGP, Punjab, is directed to immediately register two FIRs with regard to the conduct of two interviews as recommended by the Special Investigation Team in the police station having State-wide jurisdiction.*
- ii) The investigation of the FIRs shall be carried out by the Special Investigation Team headed by Mr. Prabodh Kumar, IPS, DG, Human Rights Commission. The other members of the SIT would include Dr. S.Rahul, IPS and Ms.Nilambari Vijay Jagadale, DIG, Cyber Crime.*
- iii) The Head of the SIT would be at liberty to seek assistance of any other officer or of any other kind, on his making a request, the DGP, Punjab shall provide all necessary help and assistance to him. A copy of the report dated 11.12.2023 and the relevant record shall be handed over to the Head of the SIT. The SIT shall conclude the investigation expeditiously and file a status report before this Court within a period of two months.*
- iv) The DGP, Punjab is further directed:*
 - (a) to get the URLs/weblinks/videos pertaining to both the said interviews removed/blocked/disable/restrict from all social media platforms like Youtube etc. forthwith;*
 - (b) To ensure that the Press channel, where the said interview is hosted, removes the URLs/weblinks/videos from all its news /social media platforms with immediate effect;*
 - (c) In case the said interviews are discovered by police authorities to be existing on any social media platform in future, the same be get removed with immediate effect;*
 - (d) to direct the intermediary to preserve all the*

information associated relating to the offending content for use in investigation, in line with Rule 3(1) (g) of the 2021 Rules;

(e) To direct the search engines Google Search, Yahoo Search, Microsoft Bing to globally de-index and dereference from their search results the afore-said interviews and their related contents as identified by its web URL and image URL.

(f) All the concerned intermediaries be informed that noncompliance with the foregoing directions would make the non-complaint party liable to forfeit the exemption, if any, available to it generally under Section 79 (1) of the I.T.Act and as specified by Rule 7 of 2021 Rules: and shall make such entity and its officers liable for action as mandated by section 85 of the I.T.Act.

(g) The ADGP, Prisons, Punjab shall file a status report with regard to the timelines for installation of jammers, CCTV cameras, nylon mesh, X-ray body scanners etc. for augmentation of jail security.”

Order dated 28.01.2026

“After hearing learned counsel for the parties, we are of the considered view that it is necessary to direct the following :

- i) The Director General of Police, Punjab, shall file a specific affidavit setting out the details of the shooting incidents in the State of Punjab, from 2023 till date, with a focus on the incidents which have been captured on CCTV cameras/mobile phones;*
- ii) The affidavit shall also set out whether the shooters who are involved in these incidents have been arrested and the steps that have been taken to arrest those who are at large.*
- iii) There have been several instances where extortion calls have been made and it is likely that ‘protection’/ransom money has been paid. Therefore,*

the said affidavit shall also set out the details of the extortion money recovered including the money trail and related investments.

- iv) The Director General of Police, Punjab, shall also take immediate steps to install CCTV cameras in sensitive places in urban areas in the State of Punjab. Learned Advocate General, Punjab, assures us that there would be no dearth of finances in that regard and whenever the budget is submitted, the same would be sanctioned at the earliest.*
- v) The Director General of Police, Punjab, shall also identify the websites and social media platforms, where videos and posts that tend to glorify crime and criminals are being shared and take immediate steps to remove the same forthwith.*
- vi) He shall also ensure that an adequate number of policemen are deployed for patrolling in urban areas. The affidavit and status report shall be filed before the next date of hearing and the Director General of Police, Punjab, shall appear before the Court through Video Conferencing.”*

12. Having watched impugned documentary, I have come to the conclusion that it is not with respect to one particular person whereas it is with respect to multiple gangs and their members. It is not prepared in the form of film whereas it is a mere documentary where material available in public domain has been compiled and few persons such as two retired Policemen, 2-3 Reporters and one Advocate are expressing their opinion. None of them is glorifying crime or criminals. More or less message of the documentary is that life of gangsters is very short and it spoils life of many persons.

13. The matter further needs to be examined in the light of statutory provisions and power of Authorities. The impugned order has been passed without invoking any particular provision of 2000 Act or any

other enactment. During the course of hearing as well as in the reply, the Union of India has pleaded that action has been initiated under Sections 69A and 79 of 2000 Act. Sections 69A and 79 are reproduced as below:

“69A. Power to issue directions for blocking for public access of any information through any computer resource.- (1) *Where the Central Government or any of its officer specially authorised by it in this behalf is satisfied that it is necessary or expedient so to do, in the interest of sovereignty and integrity of India, defence of India, security of the State, friendly relations with foreign States or public order or for preventing incitement to the commission of any cognizable offence relating to above, it may subject to the provisions of sub-section (2) for reasons to be recorded in writing, by order, direct any agency of the Government or intermediary to block for access by the public or cause to be blocked for access by the public any information generated, transmitted, received, stored or hosted in any computer resource.*

(2) *The procedure and safeguards subject to which such blocking for access by the public may be carried out, shall be such as may be prescribed.*

(3) *The intermediary who fails to comply with the direction issued under sub-section (1) shall be punished with an imprisonment for a term which may extend to seven years and shall also be liable to fine.*

XXX XXX XXX XXX

79. Exemption from liability of intermediary in certain cases.- (1) *Notwithstanding anything contained in any law for the time being in force but subject to the provisions of sub-sections (2) and (3), an intermediary shall not be liable for any third party information, data, or communication link made available or hosted by him.*

2) *The provisions of sub-section (1) shall apply if-*

(a) *the function of the intermediary is limited to providing access to a communication system over which information*

made available by third parties is transmitted or temporarily stored or hosted; or

(b) the intermediary does not-

(i) initiate the transmission,

(ii) select the receiver of the transmission, and

(iii) select or modify the information contained in the transmission;

(c) the intermediary observes due diligence while discharging his duties under this Act and also observes such other guidelines as the Central Government may prescribe in this behalf.

(3) The provisions of sub-section (1) shall not apply if-

(a) the intermediary has conspired or abetted or aided or induced, whether by threats or promise or otherwise in the commission of the unlawful act;

(b) upon receiving actual knowledge, or on being notified by the appropriate Government or its agency that any information, data or communication link residing in or connected to a computer resource, controlled by the intermediary is being used to commit the unlawful act, the intermediary fails to expeditiously remove or disable access to that material on that resource without vitiating the evidence in any manner.

Explanation. For the purpose of this section, the expression "third party information" means any information dealt with by an intermediary in his capacity as an intermediary."

14. From the perusal of afore-quoted Sections, it is evident that content/information may be blocked if the Central Government is satisfied that it is necessary or expedient in the interest of sovereignty and integrity of India, defence of India, security of the State, friendly relations with foreign state or public order or for preventing incitement to the commission of cognizable offences relating to above. In the impugned

order, it has been mentioned that impugned documentary is prejudicial to public order and has the potential to incite the commission of cognizable offences. The respondent has borrowed words and expressions used in Section 69A of 2000 Act, however, the Competent Authority has not recorded its satisfaction to the effect that it is expedient and necessary to block impugned documentary. The impugned order is further based upon letter of DGP, Punjab which in turn is based upon two interim orders passed by Division Bench of this Court. Orders passed by this Court are to the effect that interviews of Lawrence Bishnoi shall not be available in the public domain and crime as well as criminals shall not be glorified. In the documentary, there is not even a whisper about aforesaid interviews and there is nothing which can be treated as glorifying crime or criminals, thus, there is no violation of orders of this Court.

15. The respondent has further relied upon Section 79(3)(b) of 2000 Act which provides that intermediary shall block content/information on the direction of Government or its Agencies. The said provision enjoins intermediary to block content/information if there is direction by appropriate Government or any Agency. The petitioner is bound to comply with instructions of the respondent. Question involved herein is not of compliance of instructions whereas is whether order blocking content is justified or not. The respondent-Union of India is further pleading that Code of Ethics has been issued. The petitioner is bound to comply with Code of Ethics. The respondent has not pointed out any particular clause of the Code of Ethics or Rules which has been violated by petitioner. Sole grievance of the respondents is that impugned documentary is going to glorify one particular gang/gangster

and would disturb public order. As observed hereinabove, neither any gangster has been glorified nor there is exclusive discussion about a particular gang in the documentary.

16. It is difficult to conclude that there would be a problem of public order. It is apt to mention here that difference between ‘public order’, ‘law and order’ and ‘security of the State’ has been discussed and elaborated by Hon’ble Supreme Court in ‘**Ram Manohar Lohia v. State of Bihar**’, 1965 SCC OnLine SC 9. Relevant extract of **Ram Manohar Lohia (supra)** reads as: -

“54. We have here a case of detention under Rule 30 of the Defence of India Rules which permits apprehension and detention of a person likely to act in a manner prejudicial to the maintenance of public order. It follows that if such a person is not detained public disorder is the apprehended result. Disorder is no doubt prevented by the maintenance of law and order also but disorder is a broad spectrum which includes at one end small disturbances and at the other the most serious and cataclysmic happenings. Does the expression “public order” take in every kind of disorders or only some of them? The answer to this serves to distinguish “public order” from “law and order” because the latter undoubtedly takes in all of them. Public order if disturbed, must lead to public disorder. Every breach of the peace does not lead to public disorder. When two drunkards quarrel and fight there is disorder but not public disorder. They can be dealt with under the powers to maintain law and order but cannot be detained on the ground that they were disturbing public order. Suppose that the two fighters were of rival communities and one of them tried to raise communal passions. The problem is still one of law and order but it raises the apprehension of public disorder. Other examples can be imagined. The contravention of law always affects order but before it can

be said to affect public order, it must affect the community or the public at large. A mere disturbance of law and order leading to disorder is thus not necessarily sufficient for action under the Defence of India Act but disturbances which subvert the public order are. A District Magistrate is entitled to take action under Rule 30(1)(b) to prevent subversion of public order but not in aid of maintenance of law and order under ordinary circumstances.

55. It will thus appear that just as “public order” in the rulings of this Court (earlier cited) was said to comprehend disorders of less gravity than those affecting “security of State”, “law and order” also comprehends disorders of less gravity than those affecting “public order”. One has to imagine three concentric circles. Law and order represents the largest circle within which is the next circle representing public order and the smallest circle represents security of State. It is then easy to see that an act may affect law and order but not public order just as an act may affect public order but not security of the State. By using the expression “maintenance of law and order” the District Magistrate was widening his own field of action and was adding a clause to the Defence of India Rules.”

In view of the fact that content/information discussed in the impugned documentary is easily available in public domain, it cannot be concluded that release of impugned documentary is going to create problem of public order or public safety. The fact that it is documentary and not a movie where artists are playing role cannot be ignored. A number of web series displaying violence/crime are available in public domain. More than a dozen Hindi movies which are purely based upon lifestyle of gangsters are available in the market. Thus, by no stretch of imagination, it can be concluded that impugned documentary would

incite youngsters to involve in criminal activities.

17. Hon’ble Supreme Court in ‘*Director General, Directorate General of Doordarshan and Others Versus Anand Patwardhan and Another*’, (2006) 8 SCC 433 has considered scope of fundamental right of freedom of speech and expression *vis-a-vis* restrictions which may be imposed under Article 19(2) of Constitution of India. The Court has held that message of the filmmaker cannot be gathered by viewing only certain portions of the film in isolation but has to be viewed as a whole. A film must be viewed from an average, healthy and common-sense point of view.

18. Keeping in mind aforecited judgments and information contained in the impugned documentary, this Court does not find that release of documentary would create problem of public order. It is not going to instigate, inspire, promote or entice anyone.

19. In the wake of above discussion and findings, this Court is of the considered opinion that impugned order deserves to be set aside and accordingly set aside. It is made clear that as conceded by petitioner, the title of the impugned documentary as well as the trailer/poster would be changed before its release. It shall not carry expression ‘Lawrence’ or ‘Bishnoi’ or ‘Punjab’.

20. **Allowed** in above terms.

21. Pending application(s), if any, shall also stand disposed of.

(JAGMOHAN BANSAL)
JUDGE

11.05.2026
Prince Chawla

Whether Speaking/reasoned	Yes/No
Whether Reportable	Yes/No