

[2023] 1 S.C.R. 395

GOVERNMENT OF NCT OF DELHI & ANR.

A

V.

SHAKEEL AHMED & ORS.

(Civil Appeal No. 739 of 2023)

FEBRUARY 09, 2023

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[M. R. SHAH AND C. T. RAVIKUMAR, JJ.]

Land Acquisition – Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013 – s.24(2) – Land Acquisition Act, 1894 – There was ownership dispute with regard to the land in question – High Court without going into that controversy, and relying upon the Supreme Court decision in the case of Pune Municipal Corporation, allowed writ petition preferred by respondent No.1 and declared that the acquisition proceedings were deemed to have lapsed u/s.24(2) of the Act, 2013 – Held: The High Court ought to have first decided the ownership dispute and thereafter ought to have considered the locus of respondent no.1 – Be that it may, the decision in the case of Pune Municipal Corporation, has been specifically overruled by the Constitution Bench decision of Supreme Court in the case of Indore Development Authority – Applying the law laid down in the case of Indore Development Authority, the twin conditions namely, not taking the possession and not paying the compensation have to be satisfied and if one of the conditions is not satisfied there shall not be any lapse of the acquisition – Once possession of the land in question was taken on 04.03.1983, acquisition proceedings is not deemed to have lapsed – Judgment of High Court unsustainable.

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Indore Development Authority vs Manoharlal & Ors.

(2020) 8 SCC 129 : [2020] 3 SCR 1 – followed.

Pune Municipal Corporation & Anr. v. Harakchand Misrimal Solanki & Ors (2014) 3 SCC 183 – held overruled.

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Case Law Reference

(2014) 3 SCC 183

held overruled

Para 2

[2020] 3 SCR 1

followed

Para 3

- A CIVIL APPELLATE JURISDICTION : Civil Appeal No. 739 of 2023.

From the Judgment and Order dated 01.12.2015 of the High Court of Delhi at New Delhi in Writ Petition (C) No.3539 of 2015mk.

- B Huzefa Ahmadi, Sr. Adv., Ms. Sujeta Srivastava, Shivam Singh, Rohan Sharma, Ms. Shaswati Parhi, Gopal Singh, Ms. Iti Sharma, Rahul Bhatia, Mishra Saurabh, Ms. Manika Tripathy, Ashutosh Kaushik, Manish Vashist, Roshan Kumar, Nitin Mishra, Sahil Tagotra, Abhishek Pandey, Ms. Abhivyakti Banerjee, Ms. Sakshi Garg, Ms. Sunieta Ojha, Advs. for the appearing parties.

- C The Judgment of the Court was delivered by

M. R. SHAH, J.

- D 1. Feeling aggrieved and dissatisfied with the impugned judgment and order passed by the High Court of Delhi at New Delhi in Writ Petition (C) No. 3539 of 2015 by which the High Court has allowed the said writ petition preferred by the respondent No. 1 herein – original writ petitioner and has declared that the land acquisition proceedings initiated under the Land Acquisition Act, 1894 (hereinafter referred to as “Act, 1894”) with regard to the land in question is deemed to have lapsed under Section 24(2) of the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013 (hereinafter referred to as “Act, 2013”), the Government of NCT of Delhi and Anr. have preferred the present appeal.
- F 2. From the impugned judgment and order passed by the High Court and even from the counter affidavit filed before the High Court, it appears that it was the specific case on behalf of the appellant and original respondents that the possession of the land in question was taken on 04.03.1983 and even before the High Court, there was an ownership dispute insofar as the subject land is concerned between the original writ petitioner and the original respondent No. 5. However, despite the above and without going into the controversy of the physical possession, relying upon the decision of this Court in the case of **Pune Municipal Corporation and Anr. Vs. Harakchand Misirimal Solanki and Ors., (2014) 3 SCC 183**, the High Court has allowed the said writ petition
- G and has declared that the land acquisition proceedings initiated under the

Act, 1894 of the subject land is deemed to have lapsed under Section A
24(2) of the Act, 2013.

3. At the outset, it is required to be noted that as such the High Court ought to have first decided the ownership dispute and thereafter ought to have considered the locus of the original writ petitioner. Be that it may, the decision of this Court in the case of **Pune Municipal Corporation and Anr. (supra)**, which has been relied upon by the High Court while passing the impugned judgment and order has been specifically overruled by the Constitution Bench decision of this Court in the case of **Indore Development Authority Vs. Manoharlal and Ors., (2020) 8 SCC 129**. In paragraphs 365 and 366, the Constitution Bench of this Court has observed and held as under:-

“**365.** Resultantly, the decision rendered in Pune Municipal Corp. [Pune Municipal Corp. v. Harakchand Misirimal Solanki, (2014) 3 SCC 183] is hereby overruled and all other decisions in which Pune Municipal Corp. [Pune Municipal Corp. v. Harakchand Misirimal Solanki, (2014) 3 SCC 183] has been followed, are also overruled. The decision in Sree Balaji Nagar Residential Assn. [Sree Balaji Nagar Residential Assn. v. State of T.N., (2015) 3 SCC 353] cannot be said to be laying down good law, is overruled and other decisions following the same are also overruled. In Indore Development Authority v. Shailendra [(2018) 3 SCC 412], the aspect with respect to the proviso to Section 24(2) and whether “or” has to be read as “nor” or as “and” was not placed for consideration. Therefore, that decision too cannot prevail, in the light of the discussion in the present judgment.

366. In view of the aforesaid discussion, we answer the questions as under:

366.1. Under the provisions of Section 24(1)(a) in case the award is not made as on 1-1-2014, the date of commencement of the 2013 Act, there is no lapse of+ proceedings. Compensation has to be determined under the provisions of the 2013 Act.

366.2. In case the award has been passed within the window period of five years excluding the period covered by an

- A interim order of the court, then proceedings shall continue as provided under Section 24(1)(b) of the 2013 Act under the 1894 Act as if it has not been repealed.

366.3. The word “or” used in Section 24(2) between possession and compensation has to be read as “nor” or as “and”. The deemed lapse of land acquisition proceedings under Section 24(2) of the 2013 Act takes place where due to inaction of authorities for five years or more prior to commencement of the said Act, the possession of land has not been taken nor compensation has been paid. In other words, in case possession has been taken, compensation has not been paid then there is no lapse. Similarly, if compensation has been paid, possession has not been taken then there is no lapse.

366.4. The expression “paid” in the main part of Section 24(2) of the 2013 Act does not include a deposit of compensation in court. The consequence of non-deposit is provided in the proviso to Section 24(2) in case it has not been deposited with respect to majority of landholdings then all beneficiaries (landowners) as on the date of notification for land acquisition under Section 4 of the 1894 Act shall be entitled to compensation in accordance with the provisions of the 2013 Act. In case the obligation under Section 31 of the Land Acquisition Act, 1894 has not been fulfilled, interest under Section 34 of the said Act can be granted. Non-deposit of compensation (in court) does not result in the lapse of land acquisition proceedings. In case of non-deposit with respect to the majority of holdings for five years or more, compensation under the 2013 Act has to be paid to the “landowners” as on the date of notification for land acquisition under Section 4 of the 1894 Act.

366.5. In case a person has been tendered the compensation as provided under Section 31(1) of the 1894 Act, it is not open to him to claim that acquisition has lapsed under Section 24(2) due to non-payment or non- deposit of compensation in court. The obligation to pay is complete by tendering the amount under Section 31(1). The landowners who had refused to accept compensation or who sought reference for higher compensation, cannot claim that the acquisition proceedings had lapsed under Section 24(2) of the 2013 Act.

366.6. The proviso to Section 24(2) of the 2013 Act is to A
be treated as part of Section 24(2), not part of Section 24(1)(b).

366.7. The mode of taking possession under the 1894 Act B
and as contemplated under Section 24(2) is by drawing of inquest
report/memorandum. Once award has been passed on taking
possession under Section 16 of the 1894 Act, the land vests in
State there is no divesting provided under Section 24(2) of the
2013 Act, as once possession has been taken there is no lapse
under Section 24(2).

366.8. The provisions of Section 24(2) providing for a C
deemed lapse of proceedings are applicable in case authorities
have failed due to their inaction to take possession and pay
compensation for five years or more before the 2013 Act came
into force, in a proceeding for land acquisition pending with the
authority concerned as on 1-1-2014. The period of subsistence of
interim orders passed by court has to be excluded in the D
computation of five years.

366.9. Section 24(2) of the 2013 Act does not give rise to E
new cause of action to question the legality of concluded
proceedings of land acquisition. Section 24 applies to a proceeding
pending on the date of enforcement of the 2013 Act i.e. 1-1-2014.
It does not revive stale and time-barred claims and does not reopen F
concluded proceedings nor allow landowners to question the
legality of mode of taking possession to reopen proceedings or
mode of deposit of compensation in the treasury instead of court
to invalidate acquisition.”

4. In view of the above and applying the law laid down by this G
Court in the case of **Indore Development Authority (supra)** and
when it was the specific case on behalf of the appellant and original
respondents that the possession of the land in question was taken on
04.03.1983, the impugned judgment and order passed by the High Court
declaring that the land acquisition proceedings initiated under the Act,
1894 with respect to land in question is deemed to have lapsed under
Section 24(2) of the Act, 2013 is unsustainable and deserves to be quashed
and set aside and is accordingly quashed and set aside.

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A Present appeal is accordingly allowed. No costs.

Pending applications, if any, also stand disposed of.

Bibhuti Bhushan Bose
(Assisted by : Abhishek Pratap Singh, LCRA)

Appeal allowed.