

Supreme Court of India

Madhab Roy Alias Madha Roy vs State Of West Bengal on 26 February, 1974

Equivalent citations: AIR 1975 SC 255, 1974 CriLJ 1335, (1974) 4 SCC 548, 1974 (6) UJ 276 SC

Bench: D Palekar, P Bhagwati, V K Iyer

JUDGMENT Bhagwati J.,

1. The petitioner, who has filed this petition for a writ of habeas corpus from jail, was detained pursuant to an order dated 23rd May, 1972 passed by District Magistrate, 24 Parganas under Sub-section (1) read with Sub-section (2) of Section 3 of the Maintenance of Internal Security Act, 1971 on the ground that it was necessary to detain the petitioner with a view to preventing him from acting in any manner prejudicial to the maintenance of supplies and services essential to the community. The communication dated 23rd May, 1972, which was served on the petitioner at the time of his arrest, intimated to him the following ground on which the order of detention was made by the District Magistrate:

That on 18-12-71 at about 20.00 hours you along with your associates with a view to commit theft of Copper return feeder wire of Railway Traction cut the end of the wire of traction at post No. 28/23 in between Shyamnager and Ichhapur. During the operation your associates Shri Lakshman Ch. Das died of of Electrocution at the post. You and other associates then left the place without picking up the wires which rolled up in a running goods train passing on the line and caused serious damages to post No. 28/23 resulting disruption of train services. You have thus acting in a manner prejudicial to the maintenance of supply and services essential to the community.

Though only one single incident was referred to in the communication dated 23rd May, 1972 as forming the basis of the making of the order of detention, the District Magistrate in paragraph 7 of the affidavit filed by him in reply to the petition stated what according to the petitioner was something much more than this single incident:

I further state that the detenu-petitioner is one of the notorious anti-elements of Shyamnagar P.S. He was indulging in committing theft of copper feeder wires from Railway stations, it appears that on 18-12-1971, the petitioner along with his associates cut end of feeder traction wires from the post No. 28/23 between Shyamnagar and Ichhapur railway stations with a view to commit theft of the said copper feeder wire and during the said operation one of the associates Lakshman Chandra Das died as a result of electrocution. It further appears that on 12-2-72 the petitioner and his associates also committed theft of 48.5 meters of overhead copper traction wires between the said railway stations. Due to the aforesaid acts running of trains in the Sealdah Division was dislocated and disrupted for a considerable period causing hardship to travelling public and delay in movement of supply and services. The activities of the petitioner were prejudicial to the maintenance of supply and services essential to the community and so he was detained under the said Act.

The argument of the petitioner was that in arriving at his subjective satisfaction that it was necessary to detain the petitioner with a view to preventing him from carrying on prejudicial activities, the District Magistrate took into account not only the solitary incident intimated to the petitioner in the communication dated 23rd May, 1972, but also the fact that the petitioner was "one

of the notorious anti-social elements of Shyamnagar P.S.", and that "he was indulging in committing theft of copper feeder wires from railway stations". This additional circumstance, which went into the formation of the satisfaction of" the District Magistrate, was not communicated to the petitioner and the petitioner had, therefore, no opportunity of making his representation against it. This, contended the petitioner, constituted violation of the Constitutional safeguard in Article 22, Clause (5) which has been translated into statutory enactment in Section 8 of the Act. Now, there can be no doubt and that has been repeatedly laid down by this Court in a series of recent decisions commencing from Sheik Hanif v. state of West Bengal W.Ps. Nos. 1679 of 1973, etc., dec. on February 1, 1974. and Bhut Nath Made v. state of West Bengal WP No. 20 of 1973, dec. on February 22, 1974 that if any factual components constituting the real grounds for detention have not been fairly and fully put across to the detenu so as to enable him to make an effective answer, the order of detention would be invalid as being in contravention not only of the statutory safeguard under Section 8 of the Act, but also of the Constitutional guarantee under Article 22, Clause (5). It, therefore, becomes necessary to consider whether in the present case any facts or circumstances, in addition to the single solitary incident communicated to the petitioner, were taken into account by the District Magistrate in arriving at the requisite satisfaction for making the order of detention. The District Magistrate admittedly took into account the fact or circumstance that the petitioner was one of the notorious anti-social elements of Shyamnagar police station and was indulging-in committing theft of copper feeder wires from railway stations. The question, is, does this prejudicial activity attributed to the petitioner go beyond the ground based on the single fugitive incident communicated to the petitioner, or is comprised within it.?

2. To answer this question it is necessary to understand the real nature of the activity of the petitioner as disclosed by the incident communicated to him. This incident must be judged in its correct setting, grave proportions and clear implications. It must be noticed that this was not an ordinary incident of theft of wheat, rice or jute bags. It was a daring act of robbery of copper return feeder wire of railway stations which resulted in the death of one of the associates of the petitioner by electrocution and brought serious disruption of the railway services. Now, cutting and removal of copper return feeder wire of railway traction is a sophisticated and complex operation which requires technical skill and expertise and is not the work of a lay man or a novice. It postulates experience acquired as a result of a course of such or similar activities and also suggests that it is a part of an organised activity of "a complex of agencies collaborating to remove, secret and sell" such stolen goods. This activity has very serious and disturbing consequences and it can well be part of a plan of sabotage which brings to a grinding halt the movement of trains. Therefore, it is obvious that though the incident referred to in the communication served on the petitioner is a single solitary incident, it cannot be looked upon as an isolated act. It necessarily connotes a course of previous conduct of such or similar activities where specialised experience has been acquired and specialised kind of mischief has been planned to be perpetrated. The allegation that the petitioner was one of the notorious anti-social elements indulging in committing theft of copper feeder wires from railway stations is, therefore, really nothing but an elaboration of what is already implied in the apparently single solitary incident communicated to the petitioner. To quote the word of one of us in Anil Day v. State of West Bengal WR No. 20 of 1973, dec. on February 22, 1974. "the very proficiency and daring displayed by the petitioner, with his associates, in doing what he did, amounts to the attribution of a series of activities" more fully put down in paragraph 7 of the affidavit of the District Magistrate. It is

therefore, not possible to say that in arriving at the requisite satisfaction the District Magistrate relied on any ground not communicated to the petitioner, or that in making the order of detention he was guilty of any violation of the statutory provision in Section 8 or of the Constitutional safeguard in Article 22, Clause (5).

3. This was the only contention urged on behalf of the petitioner and since there is no substance in it, the petition fails and the rule is discharged.