

IN THE INCOME TAX APPELLATE TRIBUNAL “B” BENCH, MUMBAI

BEFORE SHRI RAJESH KUMAR, AM AND SHRI AMARJIT SINGH, JM

आयकर अपील सं/ I.T.A. No.2796/Mum/2017

(निर्धारण वर्ष / Assessment Year: 2012-13)

M/s. Shree Naman Developers Limited (Now Known as M/s. Shree Namn Developers Pvt. Ltd.) 315, Parekh Market, 39, J.S.S, Road, Opera House, Mumbai-400004.	बनाम/ Vs.	ACIT, Central Circle-5(4) Mumbai.
स्थायी लेखा सं./जीआइआर सं./PAN/GIR No. : AAACN2568H		
(अपीलार्थी /Appellant)	..	(प्रत्यर्थी / Respondent)
Assessee by:	Shri Jitendra Jain	
Revenue by:	Shri Rahul Raman (DR)	

सुनवाई की तारीख / Date of Hearing: 16/03/2020

घोषणा की तारीख /Date of Pronouncement: 04 /09/2020

आदेश / O R D E R

PER AMARJIT SINGH, JM:

The assessee has filed the present appeal against the order dated 30.01.2017 passed by the Commissioner of Income Tax (Appeals)-53, Mumbai [hereinafter referred to as the “CIT(A)”] relevant to the A.Y. 2012-13 wherein the penalty levied by the AO has been ordered to be confirmed.

2. The assessee has raised the following grounds: -

“The Commissioner of Income Tax(Appeals) - 53, Mumbai, (hereinafter referred to as CIT(A) erred in confirming the order



passed by the Assessing Officer (AO) U/s 271(1)(c) of the I.T. Act for the A.Y. 2012-13.

The Appellant submits that the penalty order passed by the AO is bad in law, ultravires and contrary to the provision of the Act and shall be quashed.

(a) The CIT(A) erred in confirming the penalty of Rs.3,24,45,000/- levied by the AO u/s 271(1)(c) of the I.T. Act.

The Appellant submits that it has neither concealed any particulars of income nor furnished inaccurate particulars of such income so as to justify levy of penalty and hence the AO shall be directed to delete the penalty levied u/s 271(1)(c) of the I.T. Act.

(b) The CIT(A) failed to appreciate that the penalty order passed u/s 271(1)(c) of the Act is bad in law as the notice issued by the AO did not specify whether the penalty is levied for 'concealment of income' or 'furnishing of inaccurate particulars of income'.

The Appellant submits that on the facts of the case and provisions of the Act the penalty order passed by the AO is bad in law and same shall be vacated.

(c) In the alternative and without prejudice to above, the CIT(A) erred in not appreciating that the AO initiated penalty proceeding for 'furnishing of inaccurate particulars of income' whereas the penalty was levied for concealment of income which renders the levy of penalty as bad in law and invalid.

The appellant craves leave, to add, to alter or to amend the aforesaid grounds of appeal."

3. The brief facts of the case are that the assessee filed its return of income on 28.09.2012 declaring total income to the tune of Rs.2,45,07,690/-. Thereafter the case was selected for scrutiny. Notices u/s 143(2) & 142(1) of the I. T. Act, 1961 were issues and served upon the assessee. It was observed that the assessee has shown an amount of Rs.10,00,00,000/- in its profit and loss account and



other income. While the computing the total income, the same was reduced from business income by treating as capital receipt. The assessee was asked to explain the nature of the said receipt and after the reply of the assessee, the nature of the receipt was not found justifiable as claimed, therefore, the said amount was added to the income of the assessee and the total income of the assessee was assessed to the tune of Rs.12,45,07,690/-. The penalty proceeding was initiated u/s 271(1)(c) for furnishing inaccurate particulars of income. Feeling aggrieved, the assessee filed an appeal before the CIT(A) who confirmed the penalty, therefore, the assessee has filed the present appeal before us.

4. All the issues are in connection with challenging the penalty confirmed by the CIT(A) on the grounds mentioned above. The Ld. Representative of the assessee has argued that the assessee nowhere concealed the particulars of income and furnished the inaccurate particulars of income being the necessary particulars have been mentioned in the return of income lies at page no. 1 to 3 of the paper book, therefore, in the said circumstances, no penalty is leviable. It is also specifically argued that at the time of the process of the assessment, the AO raised the query which was replied vide letter dated 12.02.2015 and 10.03.2015 lies at page no. 55 to 58 of the paper book, therefore, in the said circumstances, there should be no initiation of the penalty u/s 271(1)(c) of the Act. It is argued that the claim of the assessee was denied and the amount was treated as



revenue which nowhere attract the penalty in view of the provisions u/s 271(1)(c) of the Act and in this regard, the Ld. Representative of the assessee has placed reliance upon the decision of the Hon'ble Supreme Court in the case of **Reliance Petroproduct Vs. CIT (P) Ltd. 322 ITR 158 SC**. However, on the other hand, the Ld. Representative of the Department has refuted the said contention and strongly placed reliance upon the decision of the CIT(A) under challenged. Taking into consideration the arguments advanced by the Ld. Representative of the parties and perusing the record, we noticed that the assessee has disclosed the amount in sum of Rs.10 crores as settlement capital receipt in its return of income which lies at page no. 1 to 3 of the paper book. The AO raised the query in this regard and in this regard, the assessee has filed the reply by virtue of letter dated 12.02.2015 lies at page no. 55 to 58 of the paper book and by virtue of letter dated 10.03.2015 lies at page no. 59 to 61 of the paper book. Needless to say that the AO after considering the reply of the assessee declined the claim of settlement capital receipt and treated the same as revenue in nature. All the facts nowhere attract the penalty in view of the provisions u/s 271(1)(c) of the Act because nothing was concealed nor inaccurate particulars were furnished. The Hon'ble Supreme Court in the case of **Reliance Petroproduct Vs. CIT (P) Ltd. 322 ITR 158 SC** has held that the "*A glance at the provision of section 271(1)(C) of the Income Tax Act, 1961, suggest that in order to be covered by it, there has to be concealment of the particulars of the*



income of the assessee. Secondly, the assessee must have furnished inaccurate particulars of his income. The meaning of the word "particulars" used in section 271 (1)'c,) would embrace the details of the claim made. Where no information given in the return is found to be incorrect or inaccurate, the assessee cannot be held guilty of furnishing inaccurate particulars. in order to expose the assessee to penalty, unless the case is strictly covered by the provision, the penalty provision cannot be invoked. liv no stretch of imagination can making an incorrect c/anti tantamount to furnish ink' inaccurate particulars. There can be no dispute that everything would depend upon the return filed by the assessee, because that is the only document where the assessee can furnish the particulars of his income. When such particulars are found to be inaccurate, the liability would arise. To attract penalty, the details supplied in the return must not be accurate, not exact or correct. not according to the truth or erroneous. Where there is no finding that any details supplied by the assessee in its return are found to be incorrect or erroneous or false there is no question of inviting the penalty under section 271(1)(c). A mere making of a claim, which is not sustainable in law, by itself, will not amount to furnish inaccurate particulars regarding the income of the assessee. Such a claim made in the return cannot amount to furnishing of inaccurate particulars."



In view of the said circumstances, we are of the view that the no penalty is leviable in accordance with law. Now coming to the other point which has been raised by the Ld. Representative of the assessee that the notice was not in accordance with law and no penalty can be levied on account of defective notice. On appraisal of the assessment order, we find that the penalty was initiated on account of furnishing the inaccurate particulars of income. Subsequently while initiating the penalty proceeding, the notice dated 24.03.2015 was issued wherein both the limbs have been tick off. Subsequently, while passing the order penalty order dated 29.09.2015. the penalty was levied on both the limbs which is not justifiable. In the case of **Meherjee Cassinath Holdings P. Ltd. Vs. ACIT, Circle-4(2)**. It has been held that

“8. We have carefully considered the rival submissions. Sec. 271(1)(c) of the Act empowers the Assessing Officer to impose penalty to the extent specified if, in the course of any proceedings under the Act, he is satisfied that any person has concealed the particulars of his income or furnished inaccurate particulars of such income. In other words, what Sec. 271(1)(c) of the Act postulates is that the penalty can be levied on the existence of any of the two situations, namely, for concealing the particulars of income or for furnishing inaccurate particulars of income. Therefore, it is obvious from the phraseology of Sec. 271(1)(c) of the Act that the imposition of penalty is invited only when the conditions prescribed u/s 271(1)(c) of the Act exist. It is also a well accepted proposition that ‘concealment of the particulars of income’ and ‘furnishing of inaccurate particulars of income’ referred to in Sec. 271(1)(c) of the Act denote different connotations. In fact, this distinction has been appreciated even at the level of Hon'ble Supreme Court not only in the case of Dilip N. Shroff (supra) but also in the case of T. Ashok Pai, 292 ITR 11 (SC). Therefore, if the two expressions, namely ‘concealment of the particulars of income’ and ‘furnishing of inaccurate



particulars of income' have different connotations, it is imperative for the assessee to be made aware as to which of the two is being put against him for the purpose of levy of penalty u/s 271(1)(c) of the Act, so that the assessee can defend accordingly. It is in this background that one has to appreciate the preliminary plea of assessee, which is based on the manner in which the notice u/s 274 r.w.s. 271(1)(c) of the Act dated 10.12.2010 has been issued to the assessee-company. A copy of the said notice has been placed on record and the learned representative canvassed that the same has been issued by the Assessing Officer in a standard proforma, without striking out the irrelevant clause. In other words, the notice refers to both the limbs of Sec. 271(1)(c) of the Act, namely concealment of the particulars of income as well as furnishing of inaccurate particulars of income. Quite clearly, non-striking-off of the irrelevant limb in the said notice does not convey to the assessee as to which of the two charges it has to respond. The aforesaid infirmity in the notice has been sought to be demonstrated as a reflection of non-application of mind by the Assessing Officer, and in support, reference has been made to the following specific discussion in the order of Hon'ble Supreme Court in the case of Dilip N. Shroff (supra):-

“83. It is of some significance that in the standard proforma used by the Assessing Officer in issuing a notice despite the fact that the same postulates that inappropriate words and paragraphs were to be deleted, but the same had not been done. Thus, the Assessing Officer himself was not sure as to whether he had proceeded on the basis that the assessee had concealed his income or he had furnished inaccurate particulars. Even before us, the learned Additional Solicitor General while placing the order of assessment laid emphasis that he had dealt with both the situations.

84. The impugned order, therefore, suffers from non-application of mind. It was also bound to comply with the principles of natural justice. (See Malabar Industrial Co. Ltd. v. CIT [2000] 2 SCC 718)”

9. Factually speaking, the aforesaid plea of assessee is borne out of record and having regard to the parity of reasoning laid down by the Hon'ble Supreme Court in the case of Dilip N. Shroff (supra), the notice in the instant case does suffer from the vice of



non-application of mind by the Assessing Officer. In fact, a similar proposition was also enunciated by the Hon'ble Karnataka High Court in the case of M/s. SSA's Emerald Meadows (supra) and against such a judgment, the Special Leave Petition filed by the Revenue has since been dismissed by the Hon'ble Supreme Court vide order dated 5.8.2016, a copy of which is also placed on record.

10. *In fact, at the time of hearing, the Id. CIT-DR has not disputed the factual matrix, but sought to point out that there is due application of mind by the Assessing Officer which can be demonstrated from the discussion in the assessment order, wherein after discussing the reasons for the disallowance, he has recorded a satisfaction that penalty proceedings are initiated u/s 271(1)(c) of the Act for furnishing of inaccurate particulars of income. In our considered opinion, the attempt of the Id. CIT-DR to demonstrate application of mind by the Assessing Officer is no defence inasmuch as the Hon'ble Supreme Court has approved the factum of non-striking off of the irrelevant clause in the notice as reflective of non-application of mind by the Assessing Officer. Since the factual matrix in the present case conforms to the proposition laid down by the Hon'ble Supreme Court, we proceed to reject the arguments advanced by the Id. CIT-DR based on the observations of the Assessing Officer in the assessment order. Further, it is also noticeable that such proposition has been considered by the Hon'ble Bombay High Court also in the case of Shri Samson Perinchery, ITA Nos. 1154, 953, 1097 & 1126 of 2014 dated 5.1.2017 (supra) and the decision of the Tribunal holding levy of penalty in such circumstances being bad, has been approved.*

11. *Apart from the aforesaid, the Id. CIT-DR made an argument based on the decision of the Hon'ble Bombay High Court in the case of Smt. Kaushalya & Others, 216 ITR 660 (Bom.) to canvass support for his plea that non-striking off of the irrelevant portion of notice would not invalidate the imposition of penalty u/s 271(1)(c) of the Act. We have carefully considered the said argument set-up by the Id. CIT-DR and find that a similar issue had come up before our coordinate Bench in the case of Dr. Sarita Milind Davare (supra). Our coordinate Bench, after considering the judgment of the Hon'ble Bombay High Court in the case of Smt. Kaushalya & Ors., (supra) as also the judgments of the*



Hon'ble Supreme Court in the case of Dilip N. Shroff (supra) and Dharmendra Textile Processors, 306 ITR 277 (SC) deduced as under :-

"12. A combined reading of the decision rendered by Hon'ble Bombay High Court in the case of Smt. B Kaushalya and Others (supra) and the decision rendered by Hon'ble Supreme Court in the case of Dilip N Shroff (supra) would make it clear that there should be application of mind on the part of the AO at the time of issuing notice. In the case of Lakhtdir Lalji (supra), the AO issued notice u/s 274 for concealment of particulars of income but levied penalty for furnishing inaccurate particulars of income. The Hon'ble Gujarat High Court quashed the penalty since the basis for the penalty proceedings disappeared when it was held that there was no suppression of income. The Hon'ble Kerala High Court has struck down the penalty imposed in the case of N.N.Subramania Iyer Vs. Union of India (supra), when there is no indication in the notice for what contravention the petitioner was called upon to show cause why a penalty should not be imposed. In the instant case, the AO did not specify the charge for which penalty proceedings were initiated and further he has issued a notice meant for calling the assessee to furnish the return of income. Hence, in the instant case, the assessing officer did not specify the charge for which the penalty proceedings were initiated and also issued an incorrect notice. Both the acts of the AO, in our view, clearly show that the AO did not apply his mind when he issued notice to the assessee and he was not sure as to what purpose the notice was issued. The Hon'ble Bombay High Court has discussed about non-application of mind in the case of Kaushalya (supra) and observed as under:-

"...The notice clearly demonstrated non-application of mind on the part of the Inspecting Assistant Commissioner. The vagueness and ambiguity in the notice had also prejudiced the right of reasonable opportunity of the assessee since he did not know what exact charge he had to face. In this back ground, quashing of the penalty proceedings for the assessment year 1967-68 seems to be fully justified."

In the instant case also, we are of the view that the AO has issued a notice, that too incorrect one, in a routine manner. Further the notice did not specify the charge for which the penalty notice was



issued. Hence, in our view, the AO has failed to apply his mind at the time of issuing penalty notice to the assessee.”

12. *The aforesaid discussion clearly brings out as to the reasons why the parity of reasoning laid down by the Hon'ble Supreme Court in the case of Dilip N. Shroff (supra) is to prevail. Following the decision of our coordinate Bench in the case of Dr. Sarita Milind Davare (supra), we hereby reject the aforesaid argument of the ld. CIT-DR.*

13. *Apart from the aforesaid discussion, we may also refer to the one more seminal feature of this case which would demonstrate the importance of non-striking off of irrelevant clause in the notice by the Assessing Officer. As noted earlier, in the assessment order dated 10.12.2010 the Assessing Officer records that the penalty proceedings u/s 271(1)(c) of the Act are to be initiated for furnishing of inaccurate particulars of income. However, in the notice issued u/s 274 r.w.s. 271(1)(c) of the Act of even date, both the limbs of Sec. 271(1)(c) of the Act are reproduced in the proforma notice and the irrelevant clause has not been struck-off. Quite clearly, the observation of the Assessing Officer in the assessment order and non-striking off of the irrelevant clause in the notice clearly brings out the diffidence on the part of Assessing Officer and there is no clear and crystallised charge being conveyed to the assessee u/s 271(1)(c), which has to be met by him. As noted by the Hon'ble Supreme Court in the case of Dilip N. Shroff (supra), the quasi-criminal proceedings u/s 271(1)(c) of the Act ought to comply with the principles of natural justice, and in the present case, considering the observations of the Assessing Officer in the assessment order alongside his action of non-striking off of the irrelevant clause in the notice shows that the charge being made against the assessee qua Sec. 271(1)(c) of the Act is not firm and, therefore, the proceedings suffer from non-compliance with principles of natural justice inasmuch as the Assessing Officer is himself unsure and assessee is not made aware as to which of the two limbs of Sec. 271(1)(c) of the Act he has to respond.*

14. *Therefore, in view of the aforesaid discussion, in our view, the notice issued by the Assessing Officer u/s 274 r.w.s. 271(1)(c) of the Act dated 10.12.2010 is untenable as it suffers from the vice of non-application of mind having regard to the ratio of the*



judgment of the Hon'ble Supreme Court in the case of Dilip N. Shroff (supra) as well as the judgment of the Hon'ble Bombay High Court in the case of Shri Samson Perinchery (supra). Thus, on this count itself the penalty imposed u/s 271(1)(c) of the Act is liable to be deleted. We hold so. Since the penalty has been deleted on the preliminary point, the other arguments raised by the appellant are not being dealt with."

5. The Hon'ble Bombay High Court in the case of CIT-11 Vs. Samson Perinchery has given the following finding:-

"5. We have carefully examined the record as well as duly considered the rival contentions. Both the Commissioner (Appeals) as well as the ITAT have categorically held that in the present case, there is no record of satisfaction by the Assessing Officer that there was any concealment of income or that any inaccurate particulars were furnished by the assessee. This being a sine qua non for initiation of penalty proceedings, in the absence of such petition, the two authorities have quite correctly ordered the dropping of penalty proceedings against the petitioner.

6. Besides, we note that the Division Bench of this Court in Samson(supra) as well as in New Era Sova Mine(supra) has held that the notice which is issued to the assessee must indicate whether the Assessing Officer is satisfied that the case of the assessee involves concealment of particulars of income or furnishing of inaccurate particulars of income or both, with clarity. If the notice is issued in the printed form, then, the necessary portions which are not applicable are required to be struck off, so as to indicate with clarity the nature of the satisfaction recorded. In both Samson Perinchery and New Era Sova Mine(supra), the notices issued had not struck off the portion which were inapplicable. From this, the Division Bench concluded that there was no proper record of satisfaction or proper application of mind in matter of initiation of penalty proceedings.

7. In the present case, as well if the notice dated 30/09/16 (at page 33) is perused, it is apparent that the relevant portions have not been struck off. This coupled with the fact adverted to in paragraph (5) of this order, leaves no ground for interference with the impugned order. The impugned order are quite consistent by the law laid down in the case of Samson Perinchery and New Era Sova Mine(supra) and therefore, warrant no interference.



8. The contention based upon MAK Data (P.) Ltd.(supra) also does not appeal to us in the peculiar facts of the present case. The notice in the present case is itself is defective and further, there is no finding or satisfaction recorded in relation to concealment or furnishing of inaccurate particulars.

9. For the aforesaid reasons, we hold that no substantial questions of law arise in this appeal. Consequently, this appeal is dismissed."

6. In view of the above said discussion and by relying upon the above mentioned decisions, we nowhere found any justifiable ground to uphold the order passed by the CIT(A) in question, therefore, we set aside the finding of the CIT(A) and delete the penalty.

Reasons for delay in pronouncement of order

6.1 Before parting, we would like to enumerate the circumstances which have led to delay in pronouncement of this order. The hearing of the matter was concluded on 07/02/2020 and in terms of Rule 34(5) of Income Tax (Appellate Tribunal) Rules, 1963, the matter was required to be pronounced within a total period of 90 days. As per sub-clause (c) of Rule 34(5), every endeavor was to be made to pronounce the order within 60 days after conclusion of hearing. However, where it is not practicable to do so on the ground of exceptional and extraordinary circumstances, the bench could fix a future date of pronouncement of the order which shall not ordinarily be a day beyond a further period of 30 days. Thus, a period of 60 days has been provided under the extant rule for pronouncement of the order. This period could be extended by the bench on the ground of exceptional and extraordinary circumstances. However, the extended period shall not **ordinarily** exceed a period of 30 days.



6.2 Although the order was well drafted as well as approved before the expiry of 90 days, however, unfortunately, on 24/03/2020, a nationwide lockdown was imposed by the Government of India in view of adverse circumstances created by pandemic covid-19 in the country. The lockdown was extended from time to time which crippled the functioning of most of the government departments including Income Tax Appellate Tribunal (ITAT). The situation led to unprecedented disruption of judicial work all over the country and the order could not be pronounced despite lapse of considerable period of time. The situation created by pandemic covid-19 could be termed as unprecedented and beyond the control of any human being. The situation, thus created by this pandemic, could never be termed as ordinary circumstances and would warrant exclusion of lockdown period for the purpose of aforesaid rule governing the pronouncement of the order. Accordingly, the order is being pronounced now after the re-opening of the offices.

6.3 Faced with similar facts and circumstances, the co-ordinate bench of this Tribunal comprising-off of Hon'ble President and Hon'ble Vice President, in its recent decision titled as **DCIT V/s JSW Limited (ITA Nos. 6264 & 6103/Mum/2018)** order dated 14/05/2020 held as under: -

7. However, before we part with the matter, we must deal with one procedural issue as well. While hearing of these appeals was concluded on 7th January 2020, this order thereon is being pronounced today on 14th day of May, 2020, much after the expiry of 90 days from the date of conclusion of hearing. We are also alive to the fact that rule 34(5) of the Income Tax Appellate Tribunal Rules 1963, which deals with pronouncement of orders, provides as follows:

(5)The pronouncement may be in any of the following manners: —



(a) *The Bench may pronounce the order immediately upon the conclusion of the hearing.*

(b) *In case where the order is not pronounced immediately on the conclusion of the hearing, the Bench shall give a date for pronouncement.*

(c) *In a case where no date of pronouncement is given by the Bench, every endeavour shall be made by the Bench to pronounce the order within 60 days from the date on which the hearing of the case was concluded but, where it is not practicable so to do on the ground of exceptional and extraordinary circumstances of the case, the Bench shall fix a future day for pronouncement of the order, and such date shall not ordinarily (emphasis supplied by us now) be a day beyond a further period of 30 days and due notice of the day so fixed shall be given on the notice board.*

8. Quite clearly, “ordinarily” the order on an appeal should be pronounced by the bench within no more than 90 days from the date of concluding the hearing. It is, however, important to note that the expression “ordinarily” has been used in the said rule itself. This rule was inserted as a result of directions of Hon’ble jurisdictional High Court in the case of **Shivsagar Veg Restaurant Vs ACIT [(2009) 317 ITR 433 (Bom)]** wherein Their Lordships had, inter alia, directed that **“We, therefore, direct the President of the Appellate Tribunal to frame and lay down the guidelines in the similar lines as are laid down by the Apex Court in the case of Anil Rai (supra) and to issue appropriate administrative directions to all the benches of the Tribunal in that behalf. We hope and trust that suitable guidelines shall be framed and issued by the President of the Appellate Tribunal within shortest reasonable time and followed strictly by all the Benches of the Tribunal. In the meanwhile(emphasis, by underlining, supplied by us now), all the revisional and appellate authorities under the Income-tax Act are directed to decide matters heard by them within a period of three months from the date case is closed for judgment”.** In the ruled so framed, as a result of these directions, the expression “ordinarily” has been inserted in the requirement to pronounce the order within a period of 90 days. The question then arises whether the passing of this order, beyond ninety days, was necessitated by any “extraordinary” circumstances.



9. Let us in this light revert to the prevailing situation in the country. On 24th March, 2020, Hon'ble Prime Minister of India took the bold step of imposing a nationwide lockdown, for 21 days, to prevent the spread of Covid 19 epidemic, and this lockdown was extended from time to time. As a matter of fact, even before this formal nationwide lockdown, the functioning of the Income Tax Appellate Tribunal at Mumbai was severely restricted on account of lockdown by the Maharashtra Government, and on account of strict enforcement of health advisories with a view of checking spread of Covid 19. The epidemic situation in Mumbai being grave, there was not much of a relaxation in subsequent lockdowns also. In any case, there was unprecedented disruption of judicial work all over the country. As a matter of fact, it has been such an unprecedented situation, causing disruption in the functioning of judicial machinery, that Hon'ble Supreme Court of India, in an unprecedented order in the history of India and vide order dated 6.5.2020 read with order dated 23.3.2020, extended the limitation to exclude not only this lockdown period but also a few more days prior to, and after, the lockdown by observing that ***"In case the limitation has expired after 15.03.2020 then the period from 15.03.2020 till the date on which the lockdown is lifted in the jurisdictional area where the dispute lies or where the cause of action arises shall be extended for a period of 15 days after the lifting of lockdown"***. Hon'ble Bombay High Court, in an order dated 15th April 2020, has, besides extending the validity of all interim orders, has also observed that, ***"It is also clarified that while calculating time for disposal of matters made time-bound by this Court, the period for which the order dated 26th March 2020 continues to operate shall be added and time shall stand extended accordingly"***, and also observed that ***"arrangement continued by an order dated 26th March 2020 till 30th April 2020 shall continue further till 15th June 2020"***. It has been an unprecedented situation not only in India but all over the world. Government of India has, vide notification dated 19th February 2020, taken the stand that, the coronavirus "should be considered a case of natural calamity and FMC (i.e. ***force majeure*** clause) maybe invoked, wherever considered appropriate, following the due procedure...". The term '***force majeure***' has been defined in Black's Law Dictionary, as '***an event or effect that can be neither anticipated nor controlled***' When such



is the position, and it is officially so notified by the Government of India and the Covid-19 epidemic has been notified as a disaster under the National Disaster Management Act, 2005, and also in the light of the discussions above, the period during which lockdown was in force can be anything but an “ordinary” period.

10. In the light of the above discussions, we are of the considered view that rather than taking a pedantic view of the rule requiring pronouncement of orders within 90 days, disregarding the important fact that the entire country was in lockdown, we should compute the period of 90 days by excluding at least the period during which the lockdown was in force. We must factor ground realities in mind while interpreting the time limit for the pronouncement of the order. Law is not brooding omnipotence in the sky. It is a pragmatic tool of the social order. The tenets of law being enacted on the basis of pragmatism, and that is how the law is required to be interpreted. The interpretation so assigned by us is not only in consonance with the letter and spirit of rule 34(5) but is also a pragmatic approach at a time when a disaster, notified under the Disaster Management Act 2005, is causing unprecedented disruption in the functioning of our justice delivery system. Undoubtedly, in the case of **Otters Club Vs DIT [(2017) 392 ITR 244 (Bom)]**, Hon'ble Bombay High Court did not approve an order being passed by the Tribunal beyond a period of 90 days, but then in the present situation Hon'ble Bombay High Court itself has, vide judgment dated 15th April 2020, held that **“while calculating the time for disposal of matters made timebound by this Court, the period for which the order dated 26th March 2020 continues to operate shall be added and time shall stand extended accordingly”**. The extraordinary steps taken suo motu by Hon'ble jurisdictional High Court and Hon'ble Supreme Court also indicate that this period of lockdown cannot be treated as an ordinary period during which the normal time limits are to remain in force. In our considered view, even without the words “ordinarily”, in the light of the above analysis of the legal position, the period during which lockdown was in force is to be excluded for the purpose of time limits set out in rule 34(5) of the Appellate Tribunal Rules, 1963. Viewed thus, the exception, to 90-day time-limit for pronouncement of orders, inherent in rule 34(5)(c), with respect to the pronouncement of orders within ninety days, clearly comes



into play in the present case. Of course, there is no, and there cannot be any, bar on the discretion of the benches to refix the matters for clarifications because of considerable time lag between the point of time when the hearing is concluded and the point of time when the order thereon is being finalized, but then, in our considered view, no such exercise was required to be carried out on the facts of this case.

Driving strength from the ratio of aforesaid decision, we exclude the period of lockdown while computing the limitation provided under Rule 34(5) and proceed with pronouncement of the order.

7. In the result, the appeal filed by the **assessee is hereby ordered to be allowed.**

Order pronounced in the open court on 04/09/2020

Sd/-

Sd/-

(RAJESH KUMAR)

लेखा सदस्य / ACCOUNTANT MEMBER

मुंबई Mumbai; दिनांक Dated : 04/09/2020

Vijay Pal Sing/Sr. PS

(AMARJIT SINGH)

न्यायिक सदस्य/JUDICIAL MEMBER

आदेश की प्रतिलिपि अग्रेषित/Copy of the Order forwarded to :

1. अपीलार्थी / The Appellant
2. प्रत्यर्थी / The Respondent.
3. आयकर आयुक्त(अपील) / The CIT(A)-
4. आयकर आयुक्त / CIT
5. विभागीय प्रतिनिधि, आयकर अपीलीय अधिकरण, मुंबई / DR, ITAT, Mumbai
6. गार्ड फाईल / Guard file.

आदेशानुसार/ BY ORDER,

सत्यापित प्रति //True Copy//

उप/सहायक पंजीकार / (Dy./Asstt. Registrar)
आयकर अपीलीय अधिकरण, मुंबई / ITAT, Mumbai