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\* **IN THE HIGH COURT OF DELHI AT NEW DELHI**

+ CS(OS) 335/2026 and I.A. 10423/2026 and I.A. 10424/2026

**SATISH SANPAL**

.....Plaintiff

Through: Mr. Sanjay Jain, Sr. Advocate, Mr. Amit Sibal, Sr. Advocate with Mr. Ankur Mahindro, Mr. Sarfharaj Ahmad, Mr. Nishant Tripathi, Ms. Harshita Sukhija, Ms. Rishika Agarwal, Ms. Priya Tyagi and Creesha Shastri, Advocates.

versus

**JAGRAN PRAKASHAN LIMITED & ORS.** .....Defendants

Through: Mr. Birendra Kumar Mishra and Ms. Alankrita Shukla, Ms. Poonam Atey, Advocates for D1 and D2.

Mr. Akshay Goel, Advocate for D16.

Mr. Aditya Gupta and Mr. Rihith Venkatesan, Advocates for D22.

Mr. Varun Pathak, Ms. Radhika Roy and Mr. Bhavnish Kaur, Advocates for D23.

Mr. Abhishek Kumar Singh, Mr. Saurabh Kumar and Mr. Saksham Chaturvedi, Advocates for D24.

Ms. Gauri Doburdhun, Sr. Panel Counsel with Mr. Amit Kumar Rana, Govt. Pleader for D25 and D26.

**CORAM:**

**HON'BLE MR. JUSTICE VIKAS MAHAJAN**

**ORDER**

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**06.05.2026**

**I.A. 12613/2026 ( under Section 151 CPC on behalf of Defendant no. 23, seeking exemption from filing duly apostilled versions of its written statements with affidavit of admission and denial, and reply to plaintiffs' interim application)**

1. Allowed, subject to all just exceptions.
2. The application stands disposed of.



**I.A. 12612/2026 ( under Order XI rules 1(10) and 1(12) r/w Section 151 CPC on behalf of plaintiff, for filing additional documents)**

3. Allowed, subject to all just exceptions.
4. The application stands disposed of.

**I.A. 10424/2026 ( under Section 151 CPC on behalf of plaintiff, seeking exemption from serving notice u/s 80 CPC, to defendant nos. 25 & 26)**

5. This is an application filed by the plaintiff under section 80 CPC, seeking exemption from serving notice to defendant nos. 25 and 26 on the ground that urgent interim relief is sought in the instant suit.

6. Notably, no urgent relief has been sought or being granted against defendant nos. 25 and 26. However, this Court is inclined to grant urgent interim relief to the plaintiff *qua* other defendants, therefore, this application is allowed.

7. The application stands disposed of.

**CS (OS) 335/2026**

8. The plaint be registered as suit.
9. Issue summons to the defendants. Mr. Birendra Kumar Mishra, learned counsel appearing on behalf of defendant nos. 1 and 2; Mr. Akshay Goel, learned counsel appearing on behalf of defendant no. 16; Mr. Aditya Gupta, learned counsel appearing on behalf of defendant no. 22; Mr. Varun Pathak, learned counsel appearing on behalf of defendant no. 23; Mr. Abhishek Kumar Singh, learned counsel appearing on behalf of defendant no. 24 and Ms. Gauri Doburdhun, learned counsel appearing on behalf of defendant nos. 25 and 26, accept summons and waive formal service of summons.
10. They submit that copy of the plaint, I.A.s and documents have been



received by them.

11. On plaintiff taking steps, summons be issued to defendant nos. 3 to 15 and 17 to 21 by all permissible modes.

12. The summons shall indicate that written statement must be filed within thirty days from the date of receipt of summons.

13. The defendants shall also file an affidavit of admission/denial of the documents filed by the plaintiff, failing which the written statement shall not be taken on record.

14. The plaintiff is at liberty to file replication thereto within thirty days after filing of the written statement. The replication shall be accompanied by affidavit of admission/denial in respect of the documents filed by the defendants, failing which the replication shall not be taken on record.

15. It is made clear that any unjustified denial of documents may lead to an order of costs against the concerned party.

16. Any party seeking inspection of documents may do so in accordance with the Delhi High Court (Original Side) Rules, 2018.

17. List before the learned Joint Registrar for completion of service, pleadings, admission/denial of documents and marking of exhibits on 21.08.2026.

18. List before Court thereafter on a date to be assigned by the learned Joint Registrar.

**I.A. 10423/2026 ( under Order XXXIX rules 1 and 2 r/w Section 151 CPC on behalf of plaintiff, seeking ad interim ex-parte injunction against the defendants)**

19. This is an application filed by the plaintiff seeking grant of ad interim ex parte injunction.

20. Issue notice. Learned counsels for defendant nos. 1 and 2, 16 and 22 to 26 accept notice.



21. On plaintiff taking steps, notice be issued to defendant nos. 5 to 13 and 17 to 21 by all permissible modes.
22. The plaintiff has filed the present suit inter alia praying for decree of permanent injunction and damages.
23. The case set out in the plaint is that the plaintiff is a Dubai-based entrepreneur and the Chairman of ANAX Holding, a diversified business group operating in real estate, hospitality, and investment management. The plaintiff claims to be a globally renowned professional and philanthropist with an impeccable reputation, having been recognized by international publications such as Forbes Middle East and honoured with the Golden Excellency Award, among other accolades.
24. The defendant nos. 1 to 21 comprise content originators, publishers, digital news portals, and journalists. The other defendants include intermediary digital platforms, namely YouTube/Google LLC (defendant no. 22), Meta Platforms, Inc./Instagram (defendant no. 23), and LinkedIn (defendant no. 24). Defendant nos. 25 and 26 are the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MEITY) and the Department of Telecommunications (DoT), respectively.
25. It is stated that commencing from approximately 2014, and escalating dramatically between 2022 and 2025, a coordinated and malicious campaign of defamation has been initiated against the plaintiff across multiple digital platforms, social media networks, and news portals. It is alleged that the defendants have repeatedly and falsely fabricated a narrative portraying the plaintiff as a 'hawala operator', 'bookie (satoria)', 'mastermind of criminal syndicates', and an 'absconding fugitive'.
26. It is stated that the impugned publications do not merely report allegations or police investigations but prematurely pronounce guilt in a



declaratory and conclusive manner. The plaintiff asserts that he has been granted bail by competent courts in the criminal proceedings referenced in the offending articles, and has never been convicted or declared a proclaimed offender by any court of competent jurisdiction in India.

27. Mr. Amit Sibal, learned Senior Counsel appearing on behalf of the plaintiff vehemently argues that the defamatory posts, videos, and articles published by the defendants have blatantly transgressed the contours of journalistic reportage and amount to a media trial.

28. He submits that the defendants have systematically and repeatedly labelled the plaintiff as a ‘hawala operator’, ‘fraudster’, ‘Satta King’, and an ‘absconding fugitive’ in a declaratory and conclusive manner.

29. He emphasizes the fact that the plaintiff has been granted bail by competent courts in all the three criminal proceedings referenced in the impugned publications. That apart, he has already been granted bail in eight out of the nine criminal cases registered against him. Furthermore, in the remaining criminal case the plaintiff is accused of a bailable offence and is in the process of securing bail in that case as well.

30. He further contends that the plaintiff has not been declared a proclaimed offender by any competent court, therefore, branding the plaintiff as an ‘absconder’ or a convicted criminal is demonstrably false and malicious.

31. He further submits that the publications are the product of a targeted and orchestrated campaign designed to exploit the plaintiff's popularity for commercial gain and click-bait. He points out that the defendants have presented unverified police allegations as absolute facts, without conducting any independent fact-checking or journalistic due diligence.

32. To substantiate his contention, he draws the attention of the Court to



three bail orders which are annexed as document nos. 24 to 26 with the plaintiff. He submits that the aforementioned three bail orders are in reference to the FIRs which have been primarily mentioned by the defendants in the impugned defamatory articles.

33. He contends that certain defendants are relying on older articles from 2022, 2023, and 2025 that contain false allegations against the plaintiff. This has created a ripple effect, where past publications are continuously recycled to unfairly tarnish the plaintiff's image while the formal investigations are still pending. Further, he also submits that the plaintiff has been suffering damages owing to the continuous publications and hence, has approached the Hon'ble Court praying for injunction.

34. Mr. Sibal expounds on the immediate, tangible, and irreparable harm suffered by the plaintiff due to this concerted campaign. He draws the Court's attention to specific instances demonstrating this harm:

- a. The Government of St. Lucia explicitly cited the adverse 'research' and media reports concerning the plaintiff's alleged involvement in money laundering and gambling to deny citizenship to the plaintiff's brother, thereby causing harm to the plaintiff's family as well.
- b. Financial institutions have severely restricted the plaintiff's banking operations. Notably, ENBD Bank directed the transfer/withdrawal of funds and closure of accounts citing non-compliance with their current criteria, seemingly on account of defamatory campaign against the plaintiff.
- c. Third-party financial service providers, such as PEMO.IO, suspended the plaintiff's accounts following inquiries into the adverse media reports, forcing the plaintiff to disrupt automated workflows and incur additional operational costs.



35. Lastly, he submits that the plaintiff issued comprehensive Cease and Desist notices to the defendants on various dates in February, March, and April 2026, explicitly informing them of the plaintiff's bail status and the falsity of the 'absconder' tag. Despite receiving actual notice of the falsity of their claims, the defendants have not taken down the defamatory content or published a retraction. Mr. Sibal argues that this deliberate silence and continued publication constitutes actual malice, entirely disentitling the defendants to any defence of good faith, and making out a strong *prima facie* case for the grant of an *ex-parte* ad-interim injunction.

36. *Per contra*, Mr. Varun Pathak, learned counsel appearing for defendant no. 23 contends that the plaintiff's request for global blocking of contested content should be denied as the issue concerning validity of global injunctions is *sub judice* before a Division Bench of this Hon'ble Court.

37. Mr. Sibal, on instructions, submits that at this stage he does not wish to press the takedown of the content on the platform of defendant nos. 22 and 23.

38. I have heard the counsels for the parties and also perused the material on record.

39. In the context of the present case, when the FIRs already stand registered against the plaintiff and bail has been granted to him in the said FIRs, but the investigation is still underway, the defendants may be within their right to share or disseminate the contents of FIR or material which is informative but in public interest. However, at the same time the defendants have to exercise restraint and refrain from publishing and circulating any material referring to the character of the plaintiff which creates an atmosphere of prejudice for him or mar his reputation and thereby causes prejudice to an ongoing investigation.



40. This approach is warranted to finely balance the competing constitutional rights i.e. the defendants' right of freedom to speech and expression under Article 19(1)(a) and the plaintiff's right to reputation and a fair trial guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution of India. The guiding principles in this regard have been articulated by the Division Bench of Bombay High Court in *Nilesh Navalakha and Ors. v. Union of India and Ors.* 2021 SCC OnLine Bom 56, while examining the impact of trial by media on pending investigation. The relevant excerpts from the said decision reads thus:

*“353. While not proposing to issue directions for postponement of news reporting for the reasons noted above, yet, bearing in mind the adverse impact that a trial by media could have on pending investigations (which was not the subject matter of consideration before the Supreme Court in the aforesaid decisions), that an accused is entitled to Constitutional protections and invasion of his rights is to be zealously guarded, that there is an emerging need to foster a degree of responsibility as well as promote accountability and the reason in the paragraph that follows, we do not consider it to be either impermissible or imprudent in the present context to maintain a fine balance between competing rights as well as having regard to the ever-changing societal needs to suggest measures for exercise of restraint by the media in respect of certain specified matters, with a view to secure proper administration of justice, while it proceeds to exercise its right to report.*

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*355. Having given our anxious consideration to all aspects of the matter, we are inclined to the opinion that the press/media ought to avoid/regulate certain reports/discussions/debates/interviews in respect of and/or touching upon any on-going inquiry/investigation into a criminal offence and that only those items are presented for reading/viewing and otherwise perceiving through the senses which are merely informative but in public interest instead of what, according to the media, the public is interested in. No report/discussion/debate/interview should be presented by the press/media which could harm the interests of the accused being*



*investigated or a witness in the case or any such person who may be relevant for any investigation, with a view to satiate the thirst of stealing a march over competitors in the field of reporting. Accordingly, we direct the press/media to exercise restraint and refrain from printing/displaying any news item and/or initiating any discussion/debate/interview of the nature, as indicated hereunder:*

*a. In relation to death by suicide, depicting the deceased as one having a weak character or intruding in any manner on the privacy of the deceased;*

*b. That causes prejudice to an ongoing inquiry/investigation by:*

*(i) Referring to the character of the accused/victim and creating an atmosphere of prejudice for both;*

*(ii) Holding interviews with the victim, the witnesses and/or any of their family members and displaying it on screen;*

*(iii) Analyzing versions of witnesses, whose evidence could be vital at the stage of trial;*

*(iv) Publishing a confession allegedly made to a police officer by an accused and trying to make the public believe that the same is a piece of evidence which is admissible before a Court and there is no reason for the Court not to act upon it, without letting the public know the nitty-gritty of the Evidence Act, 1872;*

*(v) Printing photographs of an accused and thereby facilitating his identification;*

*(vi) Criticizing the investigative agency based on half-baked information without proper research;*

*(vii) Pronouncing on the merits of the case, including pre-judging the guilt or innocence qua an accused or an individual not yet wanted in a case, as the case may be;*

*(viii) Recreating/reconstructing a crime scene and depicting how the accused committed the crime;*

*(ix) Predicting the proposed/future course of action including steps that ought to be taken in a particular direction to complete the investigation; and*

*(x) Leaking sensitive and confidential information from materials collected by the investigating agency;*

*c. Acting in any manner so as to violate the provisions of the Programme Code as prescribed under section 5 of the CTVN Act read with rule 6 of the CTVN Rules and thereby inviting contempt of court; and*



*d. Indulging in character assassination of any individual and thereby mar his reputation.*

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*358. At the same time, while emphasizing on the need for a free, fair, effective and meaningful investigation of an FIR disclosing commission of cognizable offence by an accused be it a celebrity or an ordinary person to be conducted by the investigative agency, we also consider it appropriate to remind the investigative agencies that they are entitled to maintain secrecy in course of investigation and are under no obligation to divulge materials thus collected. If indeed there is leakage or disclosure of materials, which has the potential of stifling a proper investigation, it could pave the way for such information being laid before the competent court having powers to punish for criminal contempt under section 2(c) of the CoC Act and in an appropriate case, for being dealt with in accordance with law.”*

(emphasis supplied)

41. A comparative analysis of the First Information Reports (FIRs) and the impugned publications reveals a clear dichotomy. A bare perusal of the FIRs placed on record, specifically FIR No. 271/2022 (Omti Police Station), FIR No. 170/2022 (Madan Mahal Police Station), and FIR No. 356/2022 (Lardganj Police Station) indicates that the police are investigating allegations pertaining to the operation of betting (*satta*) networks, the recovery of cash, and the alleged unauthorized use of identity documents (Aadhaar/PAN) to open bank accounts for transactions. The said allegations are, however, subject to investigation and eventual judicial scrutiny.

42. In stark contrast, the narrative propagated by the media houses and digital platforms, comprising Defendant Nos. 1 to 21 and disseminated across various platforms as detailed in paragraph 63 of the plaint, has gone beyond the realm of the FIRs. The publications do not merely report the allegations contained in the police complaints; rather, they prematurely adjudicate the matter. For instance:

a. **Pre-judging Guilt:** Defendants such as Jai Lok/defendant no. 6;



Naidunia/defendant no. 2; Umesh Gujarathi/defendant no. 5; and D.D. Corp/defendant no. 9 have repeatedly used declaratory language, labeling the plaintiff as a, ‘Satoriya’, ‘fraudster’, ‘faraar’ and ‘India's wanted criminal’.

- b. **Financial Exaggerations:** The articles make definitive claims that the plaintiff has laundered Rs. 1,000 crores through 13 bogus/shell companies using *hawala* channels, and connect him to the Mahadev online betting app scandal, allegations that find no mention in the referenced FIRs or any judicial determination.
- c. **Targeting Plaintiff's Enterprise:** The publications actively target the plaintiff's Dubai-based business conglomerate, ANAX Holding, falsely projecting to the global community that his entire \$3 billion business valuation may stem from criminal sources. Platforms like [Pattyfriedmann.com/defendant no. 15](https://pattyfriedmann.com/defendant-no-15) and [Cybercriminal.com/defendant no. 12](https://cybercriminal.com/defendant-no-12) explicitly warn prospective investors and partners to avoid engaging with ANAX entities, thereby causing direct commercial disparagement.

43. Furthermore, the labelling of the plaintiff as an ‘absconder’, ‘fugitive’, and ‘farar’ is premature. The material on record indicates that the plaintiff has already been granted bail by competent courts *vide* bail orders dated 10.12.2025, 13.01.2026 and 21.01.2026 (annexed as Document nos. 24, 25 and 26 respectively, with the plaint) in the criminal proceedings referenced in the impugned publications. Incidentally, none of the impugned articles refer to any judicial order whereby the plaintiff has been declared a Proclaimed Offender by any court. The continued tagging of the plaintiff as an ‘absconder’, especially after the receipt of various Cease and Desist notices dated 19.02.2026, 24.02.2026, 06.03.2026, 25.03.2026, 01.04.2026,



03.04.2026 etc., informing the defendants of the bail orders, *prima facie* points towards malice.

44. By labelling and implying the plaintiff to be a culprit, the defendants have arrogated to themselves the adjudicatory function of the competent courts. Such pronouncements grossly violate the foundational principle of criminal jurisprudence, namely, the presumption of innocence until proven guilty.

45. *Prima facie*, what is particularly unsettling for the plaintiff is the cascading effect resulting from the impugned articles. A perusal of the documents placed on record reveals that the majority of the foundational defamatory articles date back to the years 2022, 2023, and 2025. Recent articles are actively recycling and hyper-linking these unverified older publications to create a facade of investigative credibility to the fresh defamatory publications. For instance, Defendant No. 8/Legal Observer, Defendant No. 14/Hannahowell, Defendant No. 12/CyberCriminal, , and Defendant No. 15/Pattyfriedmann, in their recent articles published on 15.12.2025, 31.10.2025, 15.12.2025 and 15.02.2026, respectively, prominently rely upon hyper-links of older articles whereby outdated and unverified accusations have been brought to fore, which *prima facie* has the potential of tarnishing the plaintiff's image while formal investigations are still ongoing.

46. In this day and age of digital/social media, digital defamation carries real, tangible, and instant legal and commercial consequences. The plaintiff has placed on record material illustrating this immediate and irreparable injury, *viz*:

- (i) the Government of St. Lucia explicitly cited these adverse media reports regarding money laundering to deny citizenship to the



plaintiff's brother, causing profound familial prejudice.

- (ii) the global financial institution and service provider, such as PEMO.IO, has imposed severe restrictions, suspending the plaintiff's accounts, and severed business ties with the plaintiff's entities.

47. At this juncture, reference may also be had to the decision of the coordinate bench of this Court in ***Vinai Kumar Saxena v. Aam Aadmi Party (2022) 5 HCC (Del) 662***, wherein it was observed as under:

*“25. On behalf of the defendants, it has also been vehemently contended that in cases of defamation, so long as some material has been placed on record, the veracity of the allegations can only be tested in trial and the adequate remedy would be damages, not interim injunction. I do not agree with the said submission. In appropriate cases where the court is of the view that statements are unsubstantiated and have been made in a reckless manner without regard to the truth, in order to cause injury to the reputation of the plaintiff, the court would be justified in granting an interim injunction. If the aforesaid submission of the defendants is accepted, it would give the defendant a free reign to continue making defamatory statements against the plaintiff and continue to tarnish his reputation. Therefore, the court cannot be powerless in such a situation. After suffering the brunt of such defamatory content, it is difficult to contemplate a complete restitution through damages. Such cases demand immediate injunctive relief and the court cannot wait for the defendants to place their response on record.”*

(emphasis supplied)

48. Likewise, apt would be to refer to a decision of Hon'ble Supreme Court in ***Subramanian Swamy v. Union of India (2016) 7 SCC 221***, wherein it was held as under:

*“144.....We are in respectful agreement with the aforesaid enunciation of law. Reputation being an inherent component of Article 21, we do not think it should be allowed to be sullied solely because another individual can have its freedom. It is not a restriction that has an inevitable consequence which impairs circulation of thought and ideas. In fact, it is control*



*regard being had to another person's right to go to Court and state that he has been wronged and abused. He can take recourse to a procedure recognized and accepted in law to retrieve and redeem his reputation. Therefore, the balance between the two rights needs to be struck. "Reputation" of one cannot be allowed to be crucified at the altar of the other's right of free speech .....*

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*195. One cannot be unmindful that right to freedom of speech and expression is a highly valued and cherished right but the Constitution conceives of reasonable restriction.....Right to free speech cannot mean that a citizen can defame the other. Protection of reputation is a fundamental right. It is also a human right. Cumulatively it serves the social interest....."*

(emphasis supplied)

49. Having noticed the aforesaid dicta as well as the material on record, this Court is of the *prima facie* view that the allegations in the articles published by the defendants have prematurely labelled the plaintiff as the culprit, branding him a 'fraudster', 'Satta King', and an 'absconder', even when the criminal investigations are underway and the plaintiff has already been granted bail by competent courts. Further, it also *prima facie* appears that some of the impugned articles go beyond the realm of the contents of the FIRs, thereby potentially harming the reputation of the plaintiff, who is now facing severe tangible consequences, including the denial of citizenship to his brother by the Government of St. Lucia and the abrupt suspension of his corporate account by financial institution PEMO.IO, despite his established commercial standing of several years, as claimed.

50. This Court is satisfied that the plaintiff will suffer an irreparable loss and injury in case an *ad interim* order of injunction in favour of the plaintiff is not granted. The balance of convenience is also in favour of an interim order of *status quo* being passed.

51. Under the circumstances, it is deemed appropriate to direct defendant



nos. 1 to 21 not to publish any post making identical or similar defamatory allegations against the plaintiff, till the next date of hearing. Ordered accordingly. Further, the plaintiff has produced a tabulated chart of the links and the defendants who have uploaded them in para 63 of the plaint. Accordingly, the aforesaid defendants, as featured in the tabulated chart in para 63 of the plaint, are directed to forthwith take down/remove the defamatory posts published by them or on their platforms, and maintain that position, till the next date of hearing.

52. Provisions of Order XXXIX Rule 3 CPC be complied with by the plaintiff *qua* defendant nos. 3 to 15 and 17 to 21, within a period of three weeks from today and affidavit of compliance be filed within a period of one week thereafter.

53. Let reply to the application be filed within a period of 04 weeks.

54. Rejoinder thereto, if any, be filed within a period of two weeks thereafter.

55. List before the learned Joint Registrar for completion of service and pleadings on 21.08.2026.

**VIKAS MAHAJAN, J**

**MAY 6, 2026/jg**