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# LLOYD'S LAW REPORTS

Editors: Michael Daiches, Barrister, and Professor Robert Merkin

PART 1

Albon v Naza Motor Trading Sdn Bhd

[2008] Vol 1

### COURT OF APPEAL

24 October: 6 November 2007

 $\begin{array}{c} \text{ALBON} \\ \text{v} \\ \text{NAZA MOTOR TRADING SDN BHD} \end{array}$ 

[2007] EWCA Civ 1124

Before Lord Justice Waller, Lord Justice Longmore and Sir Peter Gibson

Arbitration — Anti-arbitration injunction — Dispute under contract governed by English law — Defendant seeking stay in favour of arbitration in Malaysia — Claimant disputing validity of arbitration clause — English court ordering trial on validity of arbitration clause — Whether defendant to be restrained from proceeding with arbitration.

The parties entered into a motor vehicle distribution agreement governed by English law. Mr Albon commenced proceedings in England for sums overpaid by him under the agreement. Naza Motors applied for a stay of the proceedings on the ground that the parties had entered into a Joint Venture Agreement (JVA) governed by Malaysian law and providing for arbitration in Malaysia. Mr Albon asserted that his signature on the arbitration clause was a forgery.

On 26 June 2005 Mr Albon obtained permission under CPR Part 11 to serve proceedings on the defendant in Malaysia, pursuing (together with other claims against Naza Motors and its principal shareholder Mr Nasim) claims against Naza Motors in respect of overpayments allegedly made by Mr Albon to Naza Motors in the course of performance or intended performance of the UK Agreement. Naza Motors filed an acknowledgement of service and applied to the court for an order declaring that it had no jurisdiction or should not exercise any jurisdiction that it might have and that by reason of the arbitration clause in the JVA the present proceedings should be stayed. Lightman J upheld the grant of permission to pursue the claim in respect of overpayments but set aside permission in respect of the other claims (Albon v Naza Motor Trading Sdn Bhd [2007] | Lloyd's Rep 297). By a second judgment Lightman J dismissed an application by Naza Motors to set aside an alternative service order which Mr Albon obtained under CPR Part 6.8 (Albon v Naza Motor Trading Sdn Bhd (No 2) [2007] 1 All ER (Comm) 813. By a third judgment Lightman J ordered that the question of the validity of the JVA and of the arbitration clause should be tried in England (Albon v Naza Motor Trading Sdn Bhd (No 3) [2007] 2 Lloyd's Rep 1).

On 24 April 2007 Naza Motors made "the Barrell application" seeking to recall and reopen the previous three judgments. That application was due to be tried in October 2007. On 23 May 2006 on an application without notice Mr Albon obtained an order from Warren J against Naza Motors restraining it from commencing or taking any steps in arbitration proceedings in Malaysia, which had purportedly been commenced in November 2005, on the ground that the JVA was a forgery. Mr Albon gave a cross-undertaking in damages. On 4 July 2007 the injunction was discharged as the sanction for failure by Mr Albon to comply with a court order requiring him to provide security for his cross-undertaking. In the present proceedings Mr Albon applied for the grant of a fresh injunction in the same terms as the previous injunction.

The application before Lightman J raised two issues: (1) whether the court had jurisdiction to grant an injunction; and (2) if so, whether the court should in its discretion bar Naza Motors from taking any further steps in the arbitration pending the judgment on the Barrell application, or whether the relief should be limited to barring Naza Motors from inviting the arbitrators to rule on the authenticity of the JVA while leaving them free to proceed with the arbitration in the interim.

Lightman J granted the injunction. The learned judge held that he had jurisdiction to give permission for service abroad either under CPR 6.20(5) or by reason of Naza Motors willingly submitting to the jurisdiction of the English court by making a counterclaim. As far as discretion was concerned, the judge held that: although Mr Albon's lawyers were guilty of a serious failure to bring to the attention of Warren J the need for permission to serve the proceedings on Naza Motors, there was no sufficient reason why permission should not be granted; an undertaking by Naza Motors not to invite the arbitrators to determine the issue conditional on Mr Albon agreeing to participate in the arbitration proceeding was not sufficient for Mr Albon's protection; and an

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Albon v Naza Motor Trading Sdn Bhd

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injunction was necessary because it could not be said that the arbitration could proceed without prejudice to the determination of the authenticity of the arbitration clause, the authenticity issue would soon be determined by the English court, there was limited scope for the arbitrators to proceed with the arbitration until the authenticity of the JVA had been decided, and it would be oppressive to Mr Albon to defend the arbitration while still exposed to the enormous costs of the English action.

Naza Motors appealed. The finding of jurisdiction in the formal sense of the term was not contested, but Naza Motors argued that unconscionability went to the jurisdiction of the court to restrain the arbitration but that had not been demonstrated, and that any order would interfere with the autonomy of the arbitration process.

——Held by CA (WALLER and LONGMORE LJJ and Sir Peter Gibson), that the appeal would be dismissed.

(1) Given that there was a sufficiently good arguable case for Mr Albon to be justified in issuing and continuing proceedings in England, that there was likewise a good arguable case not only that Mr Albon's signature on the JVA had been forged but that the forgery was brought into existence after Mr Albon issued his proceedings in order to stop the English proceedings in their tracks, and that the English court was to be the final judge on the question of the authenticity of the JVA, the immediate and co-extensive continuance of arbitration proceedings was unconscionable. It was a needless expense; it would be difficult to avoid over-proliferation of pleadings and disclosure if the parties did not know whether it would be ultimately determined that the JVA was genuine or not; it need not take long to determine the forgery issue; and Naza could cooperate in a speedy resolution of that question if it wished to do to (see paras 13 and 14).

Per Longmore LJ: It may be right that the question of oppressiveness or unconscionability was not, strictly speaking, a question of discretion but did constitute a condition of the exercise of the court's jurisdiction. But if a judge had applied the right principle (as here), the Court of Appeal should give considerable weight to the judge's assessment of the facts leading him to his conclusion of unconscionability and should be slow to interfere with that assessment (see para 15).

- (2) While there was in the ordinary case much to be said for the argument that the caution exercised by the court relating to anti-suit injunctions should be increased or even redoubled in the case of an anti-arbitration injunction, this was not an ordinary case. It was properly arguable that the agreement to arbitrate had been forged in order to defeat proceedings properly brought in England and, in addition, it was at present agreed that the English court would determine that question. The autonomy of the arbitrators had thus already been undermined because they were, in any event, precluded for the present from determining that question (see paras 16 and 17).
- (3) Permission to appeal against the judge's decision to award to the claimant the costs of the application for the injunction because he succeeded would be refused.

It was not an inevitable rule that costs were not ordered on applications for interim injunctions and the judge was entitled to conclude that Naza Motors had miscalculated and should suffer the consequences. The judge ordered that the claimant's costs of the application for the injunction should be the claimant's costs in any event because he had succeeded. Although costs were not usually ordered on applications for interim injunctions this was not an invariable rule and the judge had been entitled to conclude that Naza Motors had miscalculated the likelihood of persuading the court that the arbitration should continue (see paras 20 and 21);

——Picnic at Ascot v Kalus Derigs [2001] FSR 2, referred to.

The following cases were referred to in the judgment:

Glencore International AG v Exter Shipping Ltd [2002] 2 All ER Comm 1;

Picnic at Ascot v Kalus Derigs [2001] FSR 2.

This was an appeal from the judgment of Lightman J, [2007] 2 Lloyd's Rep 420, granting the claimant an anti-suit injunction preventing the defendant from pursuing an arbitration in Malaysia.

Robert Anderson QC, instructed by Sheridans, for the claimant; Stephen Nathan QC and Neil Kitchener, instructed by Stephens Innocent LLP, for the defendant.

The further facts are stated in the judgment of Longmore LJ.

Tuesday, 6 November 2007

### JUDGMENT

#### Lord Justice LONGMORE:

- 1. This appeal is an interlude in hard fought litigation being case managed by Lightman J in the Chancery Division. It stems from a car dealing relationship between Mr Albon in England and Naza Motor Trading Sdn Bhd ("Naza") in Malaysia. Practically everything in the relationship is controversial but in broad outline it can be said that Mr Albon provided agency services in England in respect of cars imported by Naza from Malaysia and, at any rate according to Mr Albon, at a later date also in relation to cars exported from England to Malaysia.
- Disputes arose between the parties and on 26 August 2005 Master Bragge granted Mr Albon permission to serve out of the jurisdiction a claim

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form in which Mr Albon claimed against both Naza and Mr Nasim, its controlling director and shareholder, that he had made overpayments to Naza in the course of performing the importation agreement. The grounds, on which that permission was granted, were that the claim was made in respect of a contract which was made in England and/or was governed by English law. On 28 October there was an attempt to serve the claim form on Naza at their office in Malaysia but that purported service was ineffective because the document which was served was marked "Not for service out of the Jurisdiction" and was untranslated. Naza's solicitors (Finers) on 21 November pointed out that service was defective and on 14 December 2005 they withdrew acknowledgements of service which they had needlessly served. Two days later Naza served on Mr Albon a notice of dispute and conciliation prior to arbitration pursuant to an arbitration clause in a written document called a Joint Venture Agreement ("the JVA") dated 29 July 2003. On 11 January 2006 Mr Albon's solicitors said that Mr Albon had not signed that agreement; Mr Albon has ever since said that his purported signature on the document was a forgery. On 29 March 2007 (in his third judgment in this matter, [2007] 2 Lloyd's Rep 1) Lightman J held that, since Naza has applied for a stay of the English proceedings, it is for the English court to decide whether the JVA is a genuine document and whether accordingly there is a genuine agreement to arbitrate between the parties. Naza has not yet decided whether to seek permission to appeal this judgment but has agreed (subject to any possible appeal) that it will not invite the arbitration tribunal which has now been appointed to determine that question. It has thus been agreed for present purposes that the question of authenticity will be determined finally by the English courts.

- 3. In the fourth judgment of 31 July 2007 ([2007] 2 Lloyd's Rep 420) Lightman J decided that, pending the decision as to the genuineness of the JVA, the arbitration should not proceed and he has granted an injunction restraining Naza from pursuing the arbitration pending resolution of that question. It is this fourth judgment that is now under appeal, permission having been granted by Rix LJ limited to the question whether the court had jurisdiction to grant the injunction. He refused permission to appeal the discretionary aspects of the judge's decision and there is now a renewed application to this court on the discretionary issues. He also adjourned to this court an application for permission to appeal the order for costs made in favour of the claimant.
- 4. In his third judgment, Lightman J described the issue as to the genuineness of the JVA in the following way (at para 8):

Mr Nasim and a Mr Naidu (an employee of Naza Motors) have made witness statements to the effect that Mr Albon signed the JVA or acknowledged his signature on the JVA in their presence at the offices of Naza Motors in Kuala Lumpur on the 29 July 2003. Mr Albon has made a witness statement to the effect that he never agreed to or signed the JVA and he suggests that his signature was "lifted" from a document which he signed at about that time at the request of Mr Nasim to be provided to the Malaysian tax authorities. Mr Albon points out a number of features of Naza Motors' case which (he argues) call into question the evidence of Mr Nasim and Mr Naidu. These include that: (1) the JVA was allegedly made on the 29 July 2003 but according to its terms was deemed to have commenced six years earlier in March 1997. One of Naza Motors' witnesses, Ms Amin, in part of her evidence states that the explanation for this given to her by Mr Nasim is that this earlier date was the date when the importation of cars into the UK commenced. Mr Nasim in his later evidence and Mr Albon however agree that trading only started in November 1997; (2) Naza Motors have produced no other document referring to the JVA; (3) Naza Motors first asserted the existence of the JVA in a letter from their solicitors FSI dated the 22 December 2005; (4) though (according to Naza Motors) the JVA was drafted by Mr Naidu who (according to Mr Nasim) "had many years experience in drafting legal documents on behalf of the Naza group of companies" and though Mr Albon, Naza Motors, Mr Nasim and NA Carriage are named as parties, the document is signed only by Mr Albon and Mr Nasim personally, and there is no reference to Naza Motors at all on the signature page; (5) the layout and print of the last (signature) page is not the same as for the previous pages and the last (signature) page is paginated differently; (6) the "draft" which Naza Motors says was produced for discussion prior to finalising the JVA has never been produced; and (7) Naza Motors have refused to permit Mr Albon's expert Mr Brown to take the original JVA away for (non-destructive) testing and to carry out an ESDA test. I cannot resolve the issue of the genuineness of the JVA on the material before me. There must be cross-examination of Mr Albon, Mr Nasim and Mr Naidu and (in all probability) expert evidence. All I can say on the material before me is that the outcome of the trial of the issue is wide open.

5. In these circumstances Mr Robert Anderson QC for Mr Albon submits not only that it is a fair inference that the JVA (together with its arbitration clause) is not genuine but a forgery but also that it is a forgery which has been brought into existence