



Briton accused of bribery given bail after being held for six years in an Indian jail



Christian Michel was the alleged middleman in a helicopter scam involving Indian politicians (Anushree Fadnavis/Reuters)

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A British citizen accused of bribery in India has been given bail, six years after he was first detained.

Arms consultant Christian James Michel was extradited from Dubai in 2018 and has since applied for bail more than a dozen times. The Supreme Court finally granted it on Tuesday, after he challenged a Delhi High Court order last September that refused it.

The Supreme Court cited delays in the trial as a key reason for granting 64-year-old Mr Michel's latest request, with Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta expressing concern over its slow progress. Justice Mehta questioned the delay in the trial and said on Tuesday: "[The way you are going on right now], you will not be able to conclude [this] trial in 25 years."

The court said: "Considering facts and circumstances and that [the] petitioner was extradited in 2018 and has been in custody for more than six years now, and Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) filing two chargesheets and supplementary chargesheet, we are inclined to grant bail on condition as set by trial court."

The CBI alleges that Mr Michel paid bribes to senior Indian government officials to secure the chopper deal for Agusta in 2010. He has denied the accusations. Signed in 2010 under the Congress-led UPA government, the deal, valued at Rs 3,600 crore (approximately £360m), was for helicopters meant to transport high-profile individuals, including military commanders and heads of state.

The Independent contacted the lawyer representing Mr Michel for comment.

The CBI alleges that India suffered a loss of €398.21m (about £338.48m) due to the illegal transactions. The Enforcement Directorate also filed a chargesheet in 2016, alleging that Mr Michel received €30m in kickbacks from AgustaWestland.

Previously, Mr Michel has claimed his detention was politically motivated and alleged that he was pressured to testify against Indian opposition leaders. He has also previously alleged that senior CBI officials met him in Dubai before his extradition, offering a deal to spare him prison if he confessed and turned witness against Congress leaders, including "the Gandhi family"

and the late MP Ahmed Patel, over the 2010 AgustaWestland deal.

The CBI charged Mr Michel as one of three middlemen in the AgustaWestland deal. The other two accused are Italian business partners Guido Haschke and Carlo Gerosa.

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BACK TO TOP 