



Poonam Melwani KC

Called: 1989

Silk: 2011

Email: poonam.melwani@quadrantchambers.com

Poonam Melwani KC is Head of Quadrant Chambers. She is a commercial silk who practises across the full spectrum of commercial, insurance, energy and shipping law, providing advisory and advocacy services. Praised as "*clever, imaginative and user-friendly ... diligent and fights very hard for her clients*." (Chambers UK) Poonam has been ranked as a 'Leading Silk' over many years by the Legal Directories and is shortlisted for Shipping, Commodities & Aviation Silk of the Year 2023 at the Legal 500 Bar Awards. She was also shortlisted for Shipping Silk of the Year at the Chambers & Partners UK Bar Awards 2020. She represents clients in a wide variety of jurisdictions and arbitral regimes including ICC, LCIA, LMAA and ad hoc, as well as English High Court Litigation, mainly in the Commercial Court and the Appellate Courts.

Poonam's clients want her for their "*difficult cases*" where innovative thinking and oversight of a large team, complex issues and multi-strands are necessary. This year Poonam's work has included ships detained due to sanctions issues, a complex arbitration concerning the fitness of chemical tankers, ship-building arbitrations in relation to 22 new builds and two large drug-smuggling disputes. In *UK P&I Club NV v Venezuela* [2022] EWHC 1655 Poonam successfully over-turned the grant of the first anti-suit injunction against a State with both sides being granted leap-frog certificates to the Supreme Court from the first instance judge. Poonam's long-running leadership in the action of *Zumax v FCMB* has continued. Centring on the imposition of trusts/equitable obligations in the context of international bank transfers involving correspondent banks, Poonam successfully overturned the trust declaration in the Court of Appeal, in a claim pleaded at over US\$210 million [2019] EWCA Civ 294 and then successfully struck the entire action out for failure to comply with peremptory orders [2020] EWHC 1852. Judgment in relation to a second action where Poonam has alleged abuse of process is currently awaited.

What the directories say

- "*A dream to watch in cross-examination and incredibly user-friendly and approachable for clients.*" (Chambers UK 2024)
- "*Sagacious, very easy to work with, discerning and clear sighted.*" (Legal 500, 2024)
- "*Her advice is concise and commercial, and she is extremely responsive.*" (Chambers UK, 2023)
- "*Poonam's humble style, combined with a brilliant brain, determination and hard work, makes her a fantastic advocate and fearsome opponent.*" (Chambers UK, 2023)
- "*Poonam is always an absolute joy to work with.*" (Chambers UK, 2023)
- "*Poonam is clever, imaginative and user-friendly. She is effective and well known in the market.*" (Chambers UK, 2022)
- "*She brings a high level of energy to her work and drives things through. She leaves no stone unturned. She is very good on strategy and coming up with killer points.*" (Legal 500, 2022)
- "*She is diligent and fights very hard for her clients.*" (Chambers UK, 2021)
- "*Her strengths include an intelligent, thorough and detail-driven approach and a capacity to handle complex, high-value matters.*" (Legal 500, 2021)

- "She is a silk who gets heavily into the minute detail of a case and stays on top of all the arguments." (Chambers UK, 2020)
- "She will always find a solution in a difficult case." (Chambers UK, 2020)
- "Poonam is dynamic and likeable." (Chambers UK, 2020)
- "She is robust and rigorous in her preparation and she manages to combine this with a very personable approach." (Legal 500, 2020)
- "Pragmatic, clear-sighted and very user-friendly." "Very much dedicated to the case and a pleasure to work with." (Chambers UK, 2019)

Shipping

Dry Shipping

Dry Shipping forms a large part of Poonam's practice, with instructions covering all types of charterparty, bill of lading, sale of goods and ship-sale disputes. The cases raise legal issues, proper ship-management issues as well as technical expert issues of all types e.g. proper carriage techniques, training of crew, ship stability, fatigue cracking, engine breakdowns, bunker disputes and explosive cargoes are just some of the areas where Poonam has extensive experience. Illustrative cases include:

- **Confidential on-going disputes following the discovery of large amounts of drugs on board vessels in South America with consequential long term detention of the vessels and deterioration of cargo.** Legal issues arise under several charters and bills of lading including as to unseaworthiness, responsibility for crew/stevedores and anti-drug abuse practices Issues include
- **Confidential on-going disputes following loss of a rudder at sea and abandonment**
- **Latin American Investments v Maroil Trading** involving joint venture shareholders of a fleet of vessels and complex allegations of breach of fiduciary duty, secret profits and fraud.
- **Compania Sud Americana de Vapores SA v Hin-Pro International Logistics Limited** [2015] 2 Lloyds Rep 1, a US\$25 million dispute involving alleged mis-deliveries of cargo and the commencement of 23 sets of proceedings by Chinese freight forwarders in China in breach of an exclusive jurisdiction clause. Poonam obtained orders and judgments which have made new law and which are of importance not just in shipping but in any area of commercial litigation.
- **Xiamen C&D Minerals v SCIT Trading** A consolidated action involving 5 parties concerning delivery of cargo said to be worth over US\$10 million without production of original bills of lading and said to have jeopardised a Bank's security interest. The case concerns the proper construction of Letters of Indemnity when arising in the varying contexts of a time charter, COAs and sale contracts and is proceeding to trial here whilst parallel proceedings are ongoing both in China and Hong Kong.
- **DS Rendite Fonds NR 106 VLCC Titan Glory GmbH & GmbH and 7 others v Titan Maritime & 8 others.** 2014 Commercial Court. Poonam acted for 8 shipowners claiming over US\$250 million. Disputes arose as regards these CRAs and then, even whilst litigation was on-going, further disputes arose as regards the parties' obligations of good faith to each other. Poonam obtained judgment for over US\$250 million [2015] EWHC 248 with the Court indicating disagreement with earlier first instance authority.
- **Magellan Spirit ApS v Mansel Oil Ltd** A commercial court action concerning an LNG carrier with issues arising in relation to, inter alia, as yet untested clauses in the SHELL LNG form.
- **Enviroco Ltd v Farstad Supply A/S** [2011] UKSC 16 in the Supreme Court concerning the proper construction of exemption and indemnity clauses in a charterparty providing for risk allocation between groups of companies and their affiliates.
- Charter party and ship-building disputes, such as **The Ailsa Craig** [2009] 2 Lloyds Rep 371 (CA) where previous Court of Appeal decisions were reconciled and guidance was given as to the inter-relationship between nomination obligations and cancellation rights and **The Socol 3** [2010] 2 Lloyds Rep 221 examining risk allocation and the NYPE deck cargo provisions.

Wet Shipping

Poonam has experience of collision cases and the important procedural and jurisdictional issues that arise in the Admiralty Court concerning arrests, forced sales and sister ship arrests. She has also acted on cases as to arrest powers and collision cases.

Poonam acted on behalf of the Milford Haven Port Authority following the Sea Empress grounding, raising issues of pilot training, oil pollution and as to the liability of the port for the economic and physical consequences of the oil

spill.

Commercial Dispute Resolution

Poonam is often instructed in substantial commercial disputes requiring a mastery of voluminous documentation, an understanding of wider commercial relationships and needs and innovative analyses.

She is also regularly involved in a large number of cases requiring pre-emptive and other-procedural remedies such as freezing and anti-suit injunctions. Poonam has obtained several injunctions against substantive proceedings, security and arrest measures and obtained orders for imprisonment for contempt when injunctions are not obeyed – see e.g. *CSAV v Hin-Pro Intl Logistics Ltd* [2013] EWHC 987. She has also acted on behalf of a number of high profile international companies resisting wide ranging asset disclosure and freezing injunctions.

Other illustrative cases include:

- ***Zumax v FCMB*** Poonam led an entirely new team in the action of ***Zumax v FCMB***, a claim for over US\$210 million and concerning the imposition of trusts/equitable obligations in the context of international bank transfers involving correspondent banks. Poonam successfully overturned the summary judgment entered against the bank, [2019] EWCA Civ 294 and then successfully struck out the entire action out for failure to comply with peremptory orders [2020] EWHC 1852.
- ***Commerzbank v Pauline Shipping*** [2017] 1 WLR 3497 Poonam successfully argued that asymmetrical jurisdiction clauses, prevalent in banking agreements, are exclusive jurisdiction clauses for the purposes of Brussels 1 Recast, an issue and judgment which has attracted widespread attention.
- ***CSAV v Hin Pro Litigation*** [2015] 2 Lloyds Rep 1 (Court of Appeal) and [2015] 1 Lloyds Rep 301 where a new approach to damages for breach of exclusive jurisdiction clause was adopted.
- Poonam also acted in ***Vitol SA v Capri Marine Ltd*** [2011] 1 All ER 366 and ***Vitol SA v Capri Marine Ltd*** [2009] Bus L.R. 271, important cases concerning post-judgment enforcement abroad, US alter-ego issues and cross-examination of foreign judgment debtors.
- The US\$20 million reinsurance dispute of ***Beazley Underwriting Ltd v Al Ahleia Insurance Co*** [2013] Lloyds Rep I.R. 561 where reinsurers alleged breaches of a claims control clause against insurers and thereby sought to avoid liability for a collapsed crude oil storage tank. In this unusual case, which involved a split amongst lead reinsurers, Poonam successfully represented insurers and made new law with her argument that the CCC entitled insurers to follow different reinsurers separately in respect of their different “slices” of the risk.
- A high value commercial dispute between joint venture parties with one party claiming to be entitled both to the full shareholding and to payment of substantial sums. Issues include “alter-ego” allegations with Poonam successfully obtaining an injunction restraining alter-ego security measures.
- ***Lail v Maroil***, a US\$50 million pound dispute in the commercial court concerning the collapse of a 15 year joint venture relationship in respect of several vessels including the two (then) largest VLCCs in the world. Issues included the financing of the joint venture, alleged economic duress, conspiracy and fraudulent misrepresentations.
- A multi million investment treaty dispute concerning alleged unlawful expropriation of factories in Venezuela
- ***Enviroco Ltd v Farstad Supply A/S*** [2011] UKSC 16 a complex case reaching the Supreme Court concerning the subsidiary/holding company definitions in the Companies Act legislation and affecting diverse commercial and employment contracts, and risk allocation clauses, utilising those definitions. The anomalies exposed by the case have caused practitioners to amend their boilerplate definitions and may lead to Parliamentary amendments of the Companies Act.

Insurance

Poonam has done an enormous amount of marine insurance work and significant re-insurance work where successful advice and litigation in this area require an appreciation of the unique policy and commercial considerations applicable to the insurance field. Illustrative cases include:

- The US\$20 million reinsurance dispute of ***Beazley Underwriting Ltd v Al Ahleia Insurance Co*** [2013] Lloyds Rep I.R. 561 where reinsurers alleged breaches of a claims control clause against insurers and thereby sought to avoid liability for a collapsed crude oil storage tank. In this unusual case, which involved a split amongst lead reinsurers, Poonam successfully represented insurers and made new law with her argument that the CCC entitled insurers to follow different reinsurers separately in respect of their different “slices” of the risk. On-going

issues now centre on alleged design defects and the application of the London Engineering Group 2 exclusion clause.

- *Ma'Aden Aluminium Company v Tawuniya Insurance Corp* – 2014 Comm Court acting for the Saudi Reassured/Insurers in a business interruption claim worth S\$70 million. The case involves factual and expert issues and issues as to whether the insurance contract was ever entered. The complex placing arrangement for this project (worth billions of dollars) with entities in several different jurisdictions and some 15 + potential reinsurers are all in issue
- A dispute between London reinsurers and reinsured regarding the scope and effect of a claims co-operation clause and remedies arising for a breach.
- A substantial dispute between reinsurers and the reinsured arising in relation to a gas processing plant in Kurdistan regarding coverage for legal and public authority requirements.
- *Swiss Re-Insurance v United India Insurance* [2005] Lloyd's Rep IR 341 a re-insurance dispute arising out of the mothballing of the construction of power plants in India and raising issues as to the nature of premium payments and material alteration of risk.

Jurisdictional Disputes and Conflicts of Laws

Jurisdictional and conflict of law issues frequently arise in general commercial litigation and Poonam has extensive experience of conflicts issues, including the very important House of Lords decision in *Airbus Industrie v Patel* [1998] 1 Lloyd's Rep 631 and [1997] 2 Lloyd's Rep 8.

Poonam is regularly involved in a large number of cases requiring pre-emptive and other-procedural remedies such as freezing and anti-suit injunctions. In 2013 and 2014 Poonam has obtained several injunctions against substantive proceedings, security and arrest measures and obtained orders for imprisonment for contempt when injunctions are not obeyed – see e.g. *CSAV v Hin-Pro Intl Logistics Ltd* [2013] EWHC 987. She has also acted on behalf of a number of high profile international companies resisting wide ranging asset disclosure and freezing injunctions.

See also *Vitol SA v Capri Marine Ltd* [2011] 1 All ER 366 and *Vitol SA v Capri Marine Ltd* [2009] Bus L.R. 271, important cases concerning post-judgment enforcement abroad, US alter-ego issues and cross-examination of foreign judgment debtors.

Shipbuilding

Poonam has extensive experience of ship sale and shipbuilding disputes and spent much of 2019 and 2020 working on two extremely complex ship-building arbitrations, leading a large team of counsel, solicitors and experts. Both have now been concluded on terms extremely favourable to Poonam's clients.

Academic

MA Cantab (Law)

Ranking



Memberships

COMBAR, Supporting Member LMAA

Personal

Married, 4 Children.