



210
IN THE HIGH COURT OF PUNJAB AND HARYANA AT
CHANDIGARH

CRM-M-4441-2024(O&M)
Date of Decision: 14.05.2024

Kulwinder Singh @ Billa

....Petitioner

Versus

State of Punjab

.....Respondent

CORAM: HON'BLE MR. JUSTICE JASGURPREET SINGH PURI

Present: Mr. J.S. Mahal, Advocate, for
Mr. Sukhbir Maandi, Advocate, for the petitioner.

Mr. Adeshwar Singh Pannu, AAG, Punjab.

JASGURPREET SINGH PURI, J. (Oral)

1. The present is a third petition filed under Section 439 of the Code of Criminal Procedure for grant of regular bail to the petitioner in FIR No.155 dated 23.09.2022, under Sections 22,61,85 of NDPS Act, registered at Police Station Jabhal, District Tarn Taran.

2. Learned counsel for the petitioner has submitted that the petitioner is in custody for 1 year and 5 months and earlier he was granted interim bail by this Court vide Annexure P-7 for a period of two months on the ground of health condition of his son and thereafter, he has surrendered well in time and has not violated any condition of the bail. He submitted that it is a case where the trial Court framed charges on 06.06.2023 which is about 10 months ago but till date only one prosecution witness has been examined and that too only formal witness and no material witness has been examined in the present case. He submitted that the allegation against the petitioner was that when the police party saw a motorcycle which the



petitioner was driving and there was some bag on the fuel tank of the motorcycle and on seeing the police party, he slipped from the motorcycle and the motorcycle fell down and some loose tablets had scattered on the ground and a recovery of 905 tablets weighing 292 grams of Tramadol and 11 grams of Alprazolam was planted upon the petitioner. He further submitted that in fact the petitioner is involved in four more cases and that is the reason as to why the petitioner has been falsely implicated in the present case and in one case, he has already undergone the sentence but it was only for 30 days because it was a small quantity. He also while referring to the FIR submitted that a bare reading of the FIR would show that it was a stereotype FIR and such kind of language is used in hundreds of FIRs in the State of Punjab by alleging that accused on seeing the police tried to flee and then fell from the motorcycle and various tablets scattered on the ground and the same story is repeated in the present case qua the petitioner. He also submitted that even otherwise also, there was no recovery from the person of the petitioner and it was allegedly from the ground and therefore, the bar contained under Section 37 of the NDPS Act will not apply to the petitioner. He also submitted that there is no justification as to why after a lapse of about 10 months after the framing of the charges but only one witness who is a formal witness has been examined till date and in this way, the trial has been delayed at the hands of the prosecution and not because of the fault of the petitioner. He also referred to judgments of Hon'ble Supreme Court in *Satender Kumar Antil Versus Central Bureau of Investigation and another* [2022 (10) SCC 51], *Mohd. Muslim @ Hussain Versus State (NCT of Delhi)* [2023 AIR (SC) 1648], *Dheeraj Kumar Shukla v. The State of Uttar Pradesh*, 2023 SCC Online SC 918 and *Rabi Prakash*



this regard.

3. On the other hand, Mr. Adeshwar Singh Pannu, learned AAG, Punjab has submitted that so far as the custody of the petitioner is concerned, the same is correct. He submitted that when the petitioner was on interim bail for two months, he did not violate any of the conditions of the bail and he surrendered well in time. He has however opposed the grant of bail to the petitioner on the ground that since the recovery falls in the category of commercial quantity, the prayer of the petitioner is hit by the bar contained under Section 37 of the NDPS Act. He further submitted that the petitioner is a habitual offender and is involved in four more cases.

4. I have heard the learned counsels for the parties.

5. It is a case where the petitioner has already faced incarceration for 1 year and 5 months and the charges in the present case were framed about 10 months ago and as per learned counsel for the parties, only one witness has been examined till date. No justification has come forth from the learned State counsel as to why the prosecution witnesses are not deposing before the Court even 10 months have elapsed after the framing of the charges. The mere fact that the petitioner is involved in four more cases cannot become a ground for denial of bail to the petitioner.

6. Hon'ble Supreme Court in ***Satender Kumar Antil Versus Central Bureau of Investigation and another (Supra)*** has discussed this serious issue.

Para 49 of the aforesaid judgment is reproduced as under:-

“49. Sub-section (1) mandates courts to continue the proceedings on a day-to-day basis till the completion of the evidence. Therefore, once a trial starts, it should reach the logical end. Various directions have been issued by this Court not to give unnecessary adjournments resulting in the witnesses being won over. However,



the non-compliance of Section 309 continues with gay abandon. Perhaps courts alone cannot be faulted as there are multiple reasons that lead to such adjournments. Though the section makes adjournments and that too not for a longer time period as an exception, they become the norm. We are touching upon this provision only to show that any delay on the part of the court or the prosecution would certainly violate Article 21. This is more so when the accused person is under incarceration. This provision must be applied inuring to the benefit of the accused while considering the application for bail. Whatever may be the nature of the offence, a prolonged trial, appeal or a revision against an accused or a convict under custody or incarceration, would be violative of Article 21. While the courts will have to endeavour to complete at least the recording of the evidence of the private witnesses, as indicated by this Court on quite a few occasions, they shall make sure that the accused does not suffer for the delay occasioned due to no fault of his own”.

7. Hon'ble Supreme Court in ***Mohd. Muslim @ Hussain (Supra)*** has dealt with this issue. The relevant portion of the aforesaid judgment contained in para No.19 and 20 are reproduced as under:-

19. A plain and literal interpretation of the conditions under Section 37 (i.e., that Court should be satisfied that the accused is not guilty and would not commit any offence) would effectively exclude grant of bail altogether, resulting in punitive detention and unsanctioned preventive detention as well. Therefore, the only manner in which such special conditions as enacted under Section 37 can be considered within constitutional parameters is where the court is reasonably satisfied on a prima facie look at the material on record (whenever the bail application is made) that the accused is not guilty. Any other interpretation, would result in complete denial of the bail to a person accused of offences such as those enacted under Section 37 of the NDPS Act.

20. The standard to be considered therefore, is one, where the court would look at the material in a broad manner, and reasonably see whether the accused's guilt may be proved. The judgments of this



court have, therefore, emphasized that the satisfaction which courts are expected to record, i.e., that the accused may not be guilty, is only prima facie, based on a reasonable reading, which does not call for meticulous examination of the materials collected during investigation (as held in Union of India v. Rattan Malik). Grant of bail on ground of undue delay in trial, cannot be said to be fettered by Section 37 of the Act, given the imperative of Section 436A which is applicable to offences under the NDPS Act too (ref. Satender Kumar Antil supra). Having regard to these factors the court is of the opinion that in the facts of this case, the appellant deserves to be enlarged on bail.

8. Hon'ble Supreme Court in ***Dheeraj Kumar Shukla's*** case (supra) has observed as under:-

“3. It appears that some of the occupants of the 'Honda City' Car including Praveen Maurya @ Puneet Maurya have since been released on regular bail. It is true that the quantity recovered from the petitioner is commercial in nature and the provisions of Section 37 of the Act may ordinarily be attracted. However, in the absence of criminal antecedents and the fact that the petitioner is in custody for the last two and a half years, we are satisfied that the conditions of Section 37 of the Act can be dispensed with at this stage, more so when the trial is yet to commence though the charges have been framed.”

9. Hon'ble Supreme Court in ***Rabi Prakash Versus State of Odisha (Supra)*** has also discussed the effect of Section 37 of the NDPS Act in such like cases of long custody. The relevant portion of the aforesaid judgment contained in para No.4 is reproduced as under:-

4. As regard to the twin conditions contained in [Section 37](#) of the NDPS Act, learned counsel for the respondent – State has been duly heard. Thus, the 1st condition stands complied with. So far as the 2nd condition re: formation of opinion as to whether there are reasonable grounds to believe that the petitioner is not



guilty, the same may not be formed at this stage when he has already spent more than three and a half years in custody. The prolonged incarceration, generally militates against the most precious fundamental right guaranteed under [Article 21](#) of the Constitution and in such a situation, the conditional liberty must override the statutory embargo created under [Section 37\(1\)\(b\)\(ii\)](#) of the NDPS Act.

10. After hearing the learned counsels for the parties, this Court is of the view that considering the judgments of Hon'ble Supreme Court as aforesaid and considering the custody of the petitioner and the stage of the trial, the bar contained under Section 37 of the NDPS Act will not apply to the petitioner in the light of Article 21 of the Constitution of India.
11. Therefore, considering the totality of facts and circumstances of the present case, this Court deems it fit and proper to grant regular bail to the petitioner.
12. Consequently, the present petition is allowed. The petitioner shall be released on regular bail subject to furnishing bail bonds/surety to the satisfaction of the learned trial Court/Duty Magistrate concerned, if not required in any other case.
13. However, anything observed hereinabove shall not be treated as an expression of opinion on merits of the case and is meant for the purpose of deciding the present petition only.

14.05.2024

rakesh

(JASGURPREET SINGH PURI)
JUDGE

Whether speaking	:	Yes/No
Whether reportable	:	Yes/No