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**IN THE HIGH COURT OF JUDICATURE AT BOMBAY
CRIMINAL APPELLATE JURISDICTION**

BAIL APPLICATION NO. 5239 OF 2024

John Peter Montero

.. Applicant

Versus

Union of India and Anr.

.. Respondents

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- Mr. Shreerat Kamath a/w Ms. Puja Yadav, Advocates for Applicant.
- Mr. Siddharth Chandrashekhar, SPP a/w. Mr. Abhishek Mishra, for Respondent No.1. - UOI.
- Mr. R M. Pethe, APP for Respondent No.2 – State.

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CORAM : MILIND N. JADHAV, J.

DATE : MAY 05, 2025.

P.C.:

1. Heard Mr. Kamath, learned Advocate for Applicant, Mr. Chandrashekhar, SPP for Respondent No.1 – Union of India and Mr. Pethe, learned APP for Respondent No.2 – State.

2. This is an Application under Section 483 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023 seeking regular bail in connection with File No.SG/INV-09/2022-23 SIIB (APSC) for offences punishable under Sections 8(c), 20(b)(ii)(a), 21(c), 23(c), 27A, 28, 29, 30 and 35 of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985 (for short “**NDPS Act**”). There are total 6 Accused persons in the crime and except the Applicant who is arraigned as Accused No.1, all other co-

accused persons have been released on bail. Applicant is in incarceration since 29.04.2022 i.e. 3 years and 7 days pending trial.

3. On 03.04.2025 after hearing Mr. Kamath, learned Advocate for Applicant this Court passed the following order:-

“1. Heard Mr. Kamath, learned Advocate for Applicant and Mr. Pethe, learned APP for Respondent – State.

2. Applicant is indicted and incarcerated in an offence punishable under the provisions of NDPS Act for the past 3 years. A controlled delivery action has been invoked wherein a parcel received in the Customs Office was in the name of Accused No.1 and same was received by him when it was dispatched to him. Said parcel contained commercial quantity of the alleged contraband namely Ganja.

3. Mr. Kamath, learned Advocate for Applicant would persuade the Court to consider long incarceration of the Applicant for more than 3 years pending trial being one of the principal ground for grant of bail. On merits he would persuade the Court to consider the fact that said parcel was in fact booked by Accused No.4 who has been enlarged on bail by Court and it is only at the behest of Accused no.4 that Applicant had provided to him his name and other details and at his behest he received the parcel.

3.1. About his nexus, he would submit that Applicant and Accused No.4 both run a Music Production Studio together and in that view of the matter Applicant lent his name to Accused No.4 for receiving the parcel.

3.2. There are in all 6 accused person involved in the crime out of which 5 have been released on bail. He would submit that chargesheet has been filed and investigation is completed and prosecution would desire to examine 64 witnesses, which would be a distinct improbability for the trial to complete since it has not even commenced. He would submit that since this is a Special Act and uncertainty of trial Applicant be released on bail. He would submit that Applicant has deep roots in the Society and in that view of the matter he deserves to be released on bail on the ground of his long incarceration as also parity.

4. It is seen that Union of India is the principal contesting party in the matter. Hence, issue notice to the Respondent – UOI.

5. Union of India is directed to file their Affidavit-in-Reply to the present Application before the next adjourned date with an advance copy of the same served on the Advocate for Applicant.

6. *When the matter is called out none is present on behalf of UOI. This is repeatedly observed by the Court. UOI is further directed to ensure that a responsible Advocate/Counsel appears in the matter on the next adjourned date positively.*

7. *Copy of this order shall be served on the Respondent – UOI by the learned Advocate for Applicant.*

8. *Stand over to 17th April, 2025. To be listed under the caption 'For Directions'."*

4. In compliance of the above order, Mr. Chandrashekhar, learned SPP appears for Respondent No.1 – Union of India and has tendered Affidavit-in-Reply dated 17.04.2025. He would submit that in the investigation carried out by prosecution, involvement of Applicant in importing the Marijuana (Ganja) of more than commercial quantity being 20.220 kgs is *prima facie* established and hence rigours of Section 37 of the NDPS Act would be applicable to the case of Applicant. He would submit that there is sufficient *prima facie* material on record to prove complicity of Applicant in the crime. He would submit that Applicant received the parcel on 28.04.2022 during controlled delivery operation and has in his statement recorded under Section 67 of the NDPS Act admitting that the parcel in which contraband was found was booked in his name by his friend and partner in business – Accused No.4 and he was aware about the contents of the parcel and he received monetary consideration for the same. He would submit that present Applicant in conspiracy with Accused No.4 facilitated procurement of drugs in the country which

has a serious and deleterious effect on the society. In view of his submissions, he would urge the Court to reject the Bail Application.

5. Mr. Pethe, learned APP for Respondent No.2 – State would adopt and support the submissions made by the learned SPP for Respondent No.1 – Union of India and would urge the Court to dismiss the Bail Application considering Applicant's complicity in the crime which is *prima facie* proved from the material placed on record.

6. With the able assistance of the learned Advocates at the bar, I have perused the record of the case.

7. In the present case it is seen that all other 5 co-accused persons except the present Applicant have been released on bail and hence ground of parity needs to be considered by the Court. The role attributed to Applicant is that the parcel was booked by Accused No.4 in his name and he went to receive it and was apprehended during controlled delivery operation. Accused No.4 has been enlarged on bail. The Applicant is behind bars for more than 3 years pending trial which is the reason which impels me to consider the Bail Application of Applicant. The trial is yet to commence and prosecution is desirous of examining 64 probable witnesses which fact is delineated in my previous order and thus would render completion of trial in the near foreseeable future a distinct impossibility.

8. The reliance of prosecution on the confessional statement of Applicant cannot be considered by this Court at the bail stage to indict the Applicant's role in view of the decision of the Supreme Court in the case of *Tofan Singh Vs. State of Tamil Nadu*¹ wherein the Supreme Court held that statements recorded by NDPS officers could be construed as statements to police officers given their duties and responsibilities in preventing and detecting crime under the NDPS Act. It held that right against self-incrimination and right to privacy under Article 20(3) and Article 21 of the Constitution apply to confessions recorded under Section 67 of the NDPS Act. It also held that officers under the NDPS Act should be construed as 'police officers' under Section 25 of the Indian Evidence Act to prevent coercion in recording confessions and that confessions made before such officers are inadmissible as evidence to protect fundamental rights under Articles 20(3) and 21 of the Constitution of India.

9. Though it is argued that commercial quantity of alleged contraband is seized from Applicant and hence rigours of Section 37 of the NDPS Act would apply in the facts of the present case it is seen that the seized contraband Ganja is weighed alongwith the plastic pouch and has weighed 20.220 kgs which is seen to be marginally above the commercial quantity specified for the contraband Ganja i.e. 20 kgs. Hence in this view, I am of the opinion that the said interdict of

¹ (2021) 4 SCC 1

Section 37 of the NDPS Act can be said to be *prima facie* satisfied.

10. That apart it is seen that role of Applicant is at par with Accused No.4, his business partner who according to Applicant had booked the alleged contraband in his name after using his documents. Accused No.4 has been granted bail. Therefore on parity Applicant's case deserves consideration.

11. Apart from merits, long incarceration of Applicant for more than 3 years pending trial, charge-sheet being filed but trial not having commenced, prosecution desiring to examine 64 prosecution witnesses in trial and therefore commencement and completion of trial in the near foreseeable future being a distinct impossibility, the Applicant deserves to be released on bail.

12. It is settled law that a Court while deciding a Bail Application has to keep in mind the principal rule of bail which is to ascertain whether the Accused is likely to appear before the Court for trial. There are other broad parameters also like gravity of offence, likelihood of Accused repeating the offence while on bail, whether he would influence the witnesses and tamper with the evidence, his antecedents which are required to be considered in such cases. However the metrics of judicial decision making gets amplified or rather shuttled to another facet when dealing with offences where Section 37 of NDPS Act is attracted. In such cases one has to satisfy

itself with the rigors of the twin conditions as prescribed under Section 37 of the NDPS Act. Section 37 reads thus:-

“37. Offences to be cognizable and non-bailable.:- (1) Notwithstanding anything contained in the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 (2 of 1974),--

(a) every offence punishable under this Act shall be cognizable;

(b) no person accused of an offence punishable for offences under section 19 or section 24 or section 27-A and also for offences involving commercial quantity shall be released on bail or on his own bond unless:-

(i) the Public Prosecutor has been given an opportunity to oppose the application for such release, and

(ii) where the Public Prosecutor opposes the application, the court is satisfied that there are reasonable grounds for believing that he is not guilty of such offence and that he is not likely to commit any offence while on bail.

(2) The limitations on granting of bail specified in clause (b) of sub-section (1) are in addition to the limitations under the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 (2 of 1974) or any other law for the time being in force on granting of bail.”

13. From the reading of Section 37 of the NDPS Act, it becomes clear that the legislature intends to deny bail to accused alleged to be in possession of commercial quantity of contraband in absence of court subscribing to a contrary view, however therefore if seen it does not rule out the facet of discretion of Court to grant bail. Furthermore the Court must be satisfied that the accused is unlikely to re-offend. It is seen that while dealing with Bail Applications the material available for consideration and adjudication is limited. In such cases, if we look realistically the provisions of Section 37 leave limited room for a possibility of granting bail to the accused. However employing such

limitation would create a dichotomy in the current scenario where one common grievance is made before this Court repeatedly in matter after matter. It is brought to the notice of the Court that trials are taking perpetuity to be concluded and prisons are also simultaneously overcrowded in some segments. This Court regularly deals with Bail Applications of under-trials who have been in custody for long incarceration, and is also equally aware of the conditions of our prisons. To give an example in the city of Mumbai, recently in one of the cases before me, a Report dated 12.12.2024 made by the Superintendent of Mumbai Central Prison addressed to the Chief Government Pleader was placed before me by the Public Prosecutor which stated that the Mumbai Central Prison (Arthur Road Jail) is overcrowded beyond its sanctioned capacity by more than 5 – 6 times and every barrack sanctioned to house 50 inmates, as on date houses anywhere between 220 – 250 inmates. This situation is inhumane, but it also cannot be forgotten that addiction of drugs is also a serious issue qua the society at large, and therefore provisions such as Section 37 act as a deterrent to prospective wrongdoers. Such an incongruity leads us to answer the proposition: ***“How can Courts find a balance between the two polarities?”***

14. Argued before me is a case concerning liberty of an under-trial who has been incarcerated for more than 3 years, a situation

impacting the rights of undertrial conferred by Article 21 of Constitution to speedy justice as also personal liberty. In so far as the power of high courts to grant bail is concerned, when the case is such that involves a question of personal liberty of an undertrial who is incarcerated for a very long period, the powers are wide and unfettered by conditions, the principle rule being that bail is the rule and refusal is the exception, allowing accused persons to better prepare their defense.

15. In the case of *Emperor Vs. H.L. Hutchinson*², the Allahabad High Court, as far back as in the year 1931 held that power of granting bail conferred on High Court is entirely unfettered by any conditions. It held that legislature has given the High Court and the Court of Session discretion unfettered by any limitation other than that which controls all discretionary powers vested in a Judge, viz. that the discretion must be exercised judiciously. The Court has given primacy to the fact that accused person if granted bail will be in a much better position to defend himself. In this very case, it was delineated that grant of Bail is the Rule and refusal is an exception. This was in the famous Meerut Conspiracy case. Justice Mukherji writing for the Bench in paragraph No.9 held as under:-

“9. Speaking for myself, I think it very unwise to make an attempt to lay down any particular rules for the guidance of the High Court, having regard to the fact that the legislature itself

2 AIR 1931 ALL 356

left the discretion of the Court entirely unfettered. The reason for this action on the part of the legislature is not far to seek. The High Court might be safely trusted in this matter and it goes without saying that it would act in the best interests of justice whether it decides in favour of the prosecution or the defence. The variety of cases that may arise from time to time cannot be safely classified and it will be dangerous to make an attempt to classify the cases and to say that in particular classes a bail may be granted but not in other classes.”

16. In the case of *Satender Kumar Antil Vs. Central Bureau of Investigation*³, in paragraph Nos.6 to 15 the Supreme Court considered the prevailing situation of prisons in India, definition of trial and bail, principle of presumption of innocence and reiterated the well recognised principle that bail is the rule and jail is the exception in bail jurisprudence on the touchstone of Article 21 of the Constitution of India. Paragraph Nos.6 to 15 of the judgment reads as under:-

“Prevailing situation

6. Jails in India are flooded with undertrial prisoners. The statistics placed before us would indicate that more than 2/3rd of the inmates of the prisons constitute undertrial prisoners. Of this category of prisoners, majority may not even be required to be arrested despite registration of a cognizable offence, being charged with offences punishable for seven years or less. They are not only poor and illiterate but also would include women. Thus, there is a culture of offence being inherited by many of them. As observed by this Court, it certainly exhibits the mindset, a vestige of colonial India, on the part of the investigating agency, notwithstanding the fact arrest is a draconian measure resulting in curtailment of liberty, and thus to be used sparingly. In a democracy, there can never be an impression that it is a police State as both are conceptually opposite to each other.

Definition of trial

7. The word “trial” is not explained and defined under the Code. An extended meaning has to be given to this word for the purpose of enlargement on bail to include, the stage of investigation and thereafter. Primary considerations would

3 (2022) 10 SCC 51

obviously be different between these two stages. In the former stage, an arrest followed by a police custody may be warranted for a thorough investigation, while in the latter what matters substantially is the proceedings before the court in the form of a trial. If we keep the above distinction in mind, the consequence to be drawn is for a more favourable consideration towards enlargement when investigation is completed, of course, among other factors.

8. Similarly, an appeal or revision shall also be construed as a facet of trial when it comes to the consideration of bail on suspension of sentence.

Definition of bail

9. The term “bail” has not been defined in the Code, though is used very often. A bail is nothing but a surety inclusive of a personal bond from the accused. It means the release of an accused person either by the orders of the court or by the police or by the investigating agency.

10. It is a set of pre-trial restrictions imposed on a suspect while enabling any interference in the judicial process. Thus, it is a conditional release on the solemn undertaking by the suspect that he would cooperate both with the investigation and the trial. The word “bail” has been defined in Black's Law Dictionary, 9th Edn., p. 160 as:

“A security such as cash or a bond; esp., security required by a court for the release of a prisoner who must appear in court at a future time.”

11. Wharton's Law Lexicon, 14th Edn., p. 105 defines “bail” as:

“to set at liberty a person arrested or imprisoned, on security being taken for his appearance on a day and at a place certain, which security is called bail, because the party arrested or imprisoned is delivered into the hands of those who bind themselves or become bail for his due appearance when required, in order that he may be safely protected from prison, to which they have, if they fear his escape, etc. the legal power to deliver him.”

Bail is the rule

12. The principle that bail is the rule and jail is the exception has been well recognised through the repetitive pronouncements of this Court. This again is on the touchstone of Article 21 of the Constitution of India. This Court in *Nikesh Tarachand Shah v. Union of India* [*Nikesh Tarachand Shah v. Union of India*, (2018) 11 SCC 1 : (2018) 2 SCC (Cri) 302] , held that : (SCC pp. 22-23 & 27, paras 19 & 24)

“19. In *Gurbaksh Singh Sibbia v. State of Punjab* [*Gurbaksh Singh Sibbia v. State of Punjab*, (1980) 2 SCC 565 : 1980 SCC (Cri) 465] , the purpose of granting bail is

set out with great felicity as follows : (SCC pp. 586-88, paras 27-30)

‘27. It is not necessary to refer to decisions which deal with the right to ordinary bail because that right does not furnish an exact parallel to the right to anticipatory bail. It is, however, interesting that as long back as in 1924 it was held by the High Court of Calcutta in Nagendra Nath Chakravarti, In re [Nagendra Nath Chakravarti, In re, 1923 SCC OnLine Cal 318 : AIR 1924 Cal 476] , AIR pp. 479-80 that the object of bail is to secure the attendance of the accused at the trial, that the proper test to be applied in the solution of the question whether bail should be granted or refused is whether it is probable that the party will appear to take his trial and that it is indisputable that bail is not to be withheld as a punishment. In two other cases which, significantly, are the “Meerut Conspiracy cases” observations are to be found regarding the right to bail which deserve a special mention. In K.N. Joglekar v. Emperor [K.N. Joglekar v. Emperor, 1931 SCC OnLine All 60 : AIR 1931 All 504] it was observed, while dealing with Section 498 which corresponds to the present Section 439 of the Code, that it conferred upon the Sessions Judge or the High Court wide powers to grant bail which were not handicapped by the restrictions in the preceding Section 497 which corresponds to the present Section 437. It was observed by the court that there was no hard-and-fast rule and no inflexible principle governing the exercise of the discretion conferred by Section 498 and that the only principle which was established was that the discretion should be exercised judiciously. In Emperor v. H.L. Hutchinson [Emperor v. H.L. Hutchinson, 1931 SCC OnLine All 14 : AIR 1931 All 356] , AIR p. 358 it was said that it was very unwise to make an attempt to lay down any particular rules which will bind the High Court, having regard to the fact that the legislature itself left the discretion of the court unfettered. According to the High Court, the variety of cases that may arise from time to time cannot be safely classified and it is dangerous to make an attempt to classify the cases and to say that in particular classes a bail may be granted but not in other classes. It was observed that the principle to be deduced from the various sections in the Criminal Procedure Code was that grant of bail is the rule and refusal is the exception. An accused person who enjoys freedom is in a much better position to look after his case and to properly defend himself than if he were in custody. As a presumably innocent person he is therefore entitled

to freedom and every opportunity to look after his own case. A presumably innocent person must have his freedom to enable him to establish his innocence.

28. Coming nearer home, it was observed by Krishna Iyer, J., in *Gudikanti Narasimhulu v. Public Prosecutor* [*Gudikanti Narasimhulu v. Public Prosecutor*, (1978) 1 SCC 240 : 1978 SCC (Cri) 115] that : (SCC p. 242, para 1)

“1. ... the issue [of bail] is one of liberty, justice, public safety and burden of the public treasury, all of which insist that a developed jurisprudence of bail is integral to a socially sensitised judicial process. ... After all, personal liberty of an accused or convict is fundamental, suffering lawful eclipse only in terms of “procedure established by law”. The last four words of Article 21 are the life of that human right.”

29. In *Gurcharan Singh v. State (Delhi Admn.)* [*Gurcharan Singh v. State (Delhi Admn.)*, (1978) 1 SCC 118 : 1978 SCC (Cri) 41] it was observed by Goswami, J., who spoke for the Court, that : (SCC p. 129, para 29)

“29. ... There cannot be an inexorable formula in the matter of granting bail. The facts and circumstances of each case will govern the exercise of judicial discretion in granting or cancelling bail.”

30. In *American Jurisprudence* (2nd Edn., Vol. 8, p. 806, para 39), it is stated:

“Where the granting of bail lies within the discretion of the court, the granting or denial is regulated, to a large extent, by the facts and circumstances of each particular case. Since the object of the detention or imprisonment of the accused is to secure his appearance and submission to the jurisdiction and the judgment of the court, the primary inquiry is whether a recognizance or bond would effect that end.”

It is thus clear that the question whether to grant bail or not depends for its answer upon a variety of circumstances, the cumulative effect of which must enter into the judicial verdict. Any one single circumstance cannot be treated as of universal validity or as necessarily justifying the grant or refusal of bail.’

* * *

24. *Article 21 is the Ark of the Covenant so far as the Fundamental Rights Chapter of the Constitution is concerned. It deals with nothing less sacrosanct than the rights of life and personal liberty of the citizens of India and other persons. It is the only article in the Fundamental Rights Chapter (along with Article 20) that cannot be suspended even in an emergency [see Article 359(1) of the Constitution]. At present, Article 21 is the repository of a vast number of substantive and procedural rights post Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India [Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India, (1978) 1 SCC 248] .”*

13. *Further this Court in Sanjay Chandra v. CBI [Sanjay Chandra v. CBI, (2012) 1 SCC 40 : (2012) 1 SCC (Cri) 26 : (2012) 2 SCC (L&S) 397] , has observed that : (SCC p. 52, paras 21-23)*

“21. In bail applications, generally, it has been laid down from the earliest times that the object of bail is to secure the appearance of the accused person at his trial by reasonable amount of bail. The object of bail is neither punitive nor preventative. Deprivation of liberty must be considered a punishment, unless it is required to ensure that an accused person will stand his trial when called upon. The courts owe more than verbal respect to the principle that punishment begins after conviction, and that every man is deemed to be innocent until duly tried and duly found guilty.

22. From the earliest times, it was appreciated that detention in custody pending completion of trial could be a cause of great hardship. From time to time, necessity demands that some unconvicted persons should be held in custody pending trial to secure their attendance at the trial but in such cases, “necessity” is the operative test. In this country, it would be quite contrary to the concept of personal liberty enshrined in the Constitution that any person should be punished in respect of any matter, upon which, he has not been convicted or that in any circumstances, he should be deprived of his liberty upon only the belief that he will tamper with the witnesses if left at liberty, save in the most extraordinary circumstances.

23. Apart from the question of prevention being the object of refusal of bail, one must not lose sight of the fact that any imprisonment before conviction has a substantial punitive content and it would be improper for any court to refuse bail as a mark of disapproval of former conduct whether the accused has been convicted for it or not or to refuse bail to an unconvicted person for the purpose of giving him a taste of imprisonment as a lesson.”

Presumption of innocence

14. Innocence of a person accused of an offence is presumed through a legal fiction, placing the onus on the prosecution to prove the guilt before the court. Thus, it is for that agency to satisfy the court that the arrest made was warranted and enlargement on bail is to be denied.

15. Presumption of innocence has been acknowledged throughout the world. Article 14(2) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1966 and Article 11 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948 acknowledge the presumption of innocence, as a cardinal principle of law, until the individual is proven guilty.”

17. The Supreme Court in a landmark decision of 1978 in the case of *Gudikanti Narasimhulu & Ors. Vs. Public Prosecutor, High Court of Andhra Pradesh*⁴ observed as under:-

“6. Let us have a glance at the pros and cons and the true principle around which other relevant factors must revolve. When the case is finally disposed of and a person is sentenced to incarceration, things stand on a different footing. We are concerned with the penultimate stage and the principal rule to guide release on bail should be to secure the presence of the applicant who seeks to be liberated, to take judgment and serve sentence in the event of the court punishing him with imprisonment. In this perspective...” (emphasis supplied)

18. Thereafter the Supreme Court in a plethora of judgements have discussed the rights conferred by Article 21 qua grant of bail and that such rights cannot be taken away unless the procedure is reasonable and fair and in cases where there is unreasonable delay in trial it would undoubtedly impact the rights of an undertrial. Some of the important decisions of the Supreme Court and some of the High Courts are discussed herein under:-

4 1978 (1) SCC 240

18.1. In the landmark judgment of *Maneka Gandhi Vs. Union of India*⁵, the Supreme Court held that the right to life and personal liberty under Article 21 is not limited to mere physical existence but includes the right to live with dignity. The court emphasized that the procedure established by law must be fair, just, and reasonable, and it cannot be arbitrary, oppressive, or unreasonable.

18.2. In the case of *Hussainara Khatoon Vs. Home Secy., State of Bihar*⁶ the Supreme Court held as under:-

“Now obviously procedure prescribed by law for depriving a person of liberty cannot be “reasonable, fair or just” unless that procedure ensures a speedy trial for determination of the guilt of such person. No procedure which does not ensure a reasonably quick trial can be regarded as “reasonable, fair or just” and it would fall foul of Article 21. There can, therefore, be no doubt that speedy trial, and by speedy trial we mean reasonably expeditious trial, is an integral and essential part of the fundamental right to life and liberty enshrined in Article 21. The question which would, however, arise is as to what would be the consequence if a person accused of an offence is denied speedy trial and is sought to be deprived of his liberty by imprisonment as a result of a long delayed trial in violation of his fundamental right under Article 21.”

18.3. The Supreme Court in the case of *Shaheen Welfare Association Vs. Union Of India*⁷ dealing with a Public Interest Litigation seeking relief for undertrial prisoners charged under the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act, 1987 due to gross delay in disposal of cases qua Article 21 of the Constitution of India held as under:-

5 1978 (1) SCC 248

6 (1980) 1 SCC 81

7 1996 SCC (2) 616

“10. Bearing in mind the nature of the crime and the need to protect the society and the nation, TADA has prescribed in Section 20(8) stringent provisions for granting bail. Such stringent provisions can be justified looking to the nature of the crime, as was held in Kartar Singh’s case (supra), on the presumption that the trial of the accused will take place without undue delay. No one can justify gross delay in disposal of cases when undertrials perforce remain in jail, giving rise to possible situations that may justify invocation of Article 21.”

18.4. The Supreme Court in the case of ***Union of India v. K. A. Najeeb***⁸ while commenting upon the possibility of early completion of trial and extended incarceration held as under:-

“18. Adverting to the case at hand, we are conscious of the fact that the charges levelled against the respondent are grave and a serious threat to societal harmony. Had it been a case at the threshold, we would have outrightly turned down the respondent's prayer. However, keeping in mind the length of the period spent by him in custody and the unlikelihood of the trial being completed anytime soon, the High Court appears to have been left with no other option except to grant bail. An attempt has been made to strike a balance between the appellant's right to lead evidence of its choice and establish the charges beyond any doubt and simultaneously the respondent's rights guaranteed under Part III of our Constitution have been well protected.”

19. Applicant in present case has been in custody for more than 3 years. There is no possibility of the trial completing in the near future. Detaining an under-trial prisoner for such an extended period further violates his fundamental right to speedy trial flowing from Article 21 of the Constitution. At this juncture I deem it appropriate to list certain observations of the Supreme Court shedding light on concerns underlying the “Right to speedy trial” from the point of view of an accused in custody whose liberty is affected. In the case of ***Abdul***

Rehman Antulay & Ors. Vs R.S. Nayak & Anr.⁹ the Supreme Court held as under:-

“86. In view of the above discussion, the following propositions emerge, meant to serve as guidelines. We must forewarn that these propositions are not exhaustive. It is difficult to foresee all situations. Nor is it possible to lay down any hard and fast rules. These propositions are:

(1) Fair, just and reasonable procedure implicit in Article 21 of the Constitution creates a right in the accused to be tried speedily. Right to speedy trial is the right of the accused. The fact that a speedy trial is also in public interest or that it serves the societal interest also, does not make it any-the-less the right of the accused. It is in the interest of all concerned that the guilt or innocence of the accused is determined as quickly as possible in the circumstances.

(2) Right to Speedy Trial flowing from Article 21 encompasses all the stages, namely the stage of investigation, inquiry, trial, appeal, revision and retrial. That is how, this Court has understood this right and there is no reason to take a restricted view.

(3) The concerns underlying the Right to speedy trial from the point of view of the accused are:

(a) the period of remand and pre-conviction detention should be as short as possible. In other words, the accused should not be subjected to unnecessary or unduly long incarceration prior to his conviction;

(b) the worry, anxiety, expense and disturbance to his vocation and peace, resulting from an unduly prolonged investigation, inquiry or trial should be minimal; and

(c) undue delay may well result in impairment of the ability of the accused to defend himself, whether on account of death, disappearance or non-availability of witnesses or otherwise.

(4) – (11) -----X-----” (emphasis supplied)

20. The Supreme Court has also held in a series of judgments and orders that in situations where the under-trial-prisoner / accused persons have suffered incarceration rather long incarceration for a considerable period of time and there is no possibility of the trial being completed within the foreseeable future, Constitutional Courts can

⁹ 1992 (1) SCC 225

exercise power to release the accused under-trial on bail, as bail is the rule and jail is the exception.

21. In the following decisions of the Supreme Court and various High Courts concerning such long detention and imprisonment of undertrial prisoner / accused on being apprehended with commercial quantity of various contrabands, the Courts have in the backdrop of the aforementioned propositions exercised its unfettered jurisdiction in releasing an undertrial on bail on account of long incarceration by using its discretionary powers:-

21.1. In the case of *Dheeraj Kumar Vs. State of Uttar Pradesh*¹⁰ the Supreme Court considering long incarceration granted bail to an undertrial-accused who was incarcerated for 2 years and 6 months granted him bail. The contraband in question was Ganja the commercial quantity of which is 20 Kilograms. In this case recovery of 65 Kilograms was allegedly made from the accused despite which, the Court invoking the right to speedy justice flowing from Article 21 and foreseeable delay in trial granted bail to the Accused.

21.2. In the case of *Balkishan Vs. State of Madhya Pradesh*¹¹ the Supreme Court considering long incarceration of an undertrial-accused who was incarcerated for 2 years and 5 months granted him bail. The contraband in question was Poppy Straw, the commercial quantity of

¹⁰ 2023 SCC OnLine 918

¹¹ Petition for Special Leave to Appeal (Cri) No. 8415 of 2024

which is 50 kilograms when recovery of 80 kilograms was allegedly made from the accused.

21.3. In the case of *Badsha Sk. Vs. State of West Bengal*¹² the Supreme Court considering long incarceration of an undertrial-accused who was incarcerated for 2 years and 4 months granted him bail. The contraband in question was Codeine Phosphate, the commercial quantity of which is 1 kilograms when recovery of 100 bottles each of 100 ml. was allegedly made from the accused.

21.4. In the case of *Man Mandal and Anr. Vs. State of West Bengal*¹³ the Supreme Court considering long incarceration of an undertrial-accused who was incarcerated for 2 years granted him bail despite being alleged to be in possession of commercial quantity of contraband.

21.5. In the case of *Ankur Chaudhary Vs. State of Madhya Pradesh*¹⁴ the Supreme Court considering long incarceration of an undertrial-accused granted him bail to an undertrial-accused who was incarcerated for about 2 years.

21.6. In the case of *Nitish Adhikary alias Bapan Vs. State of West Bengal*¹⁵ the Supreme Court considering long incarceration of an undertrial-accused granted him bail to an undertrial-accused who was

12 2023 SCC OnLine SC 1867

13 2023 SCC OnLine SC 1868

14 Petition for Special Leave to Appeal (Cri) No. 4648 of 2024

15 2022 SCC OnLine SC 2068

incarcerated for 1 year and 7 months despite being alleged to be in possession of commercial quantity of contraband.

21.7. In the case of *Babor Ali Mondal Vs. State of West Bengal*¹⁶ the Supreme Court considering the long incarceration granted bail to an undertrial-accused who was incarcerated for 1 year and 4 months.

21.8. In the case of *Sukhvinder Singh Bittu Vs. State of Punjab*¹⁷ the Supreme Court considering long incarceration of an undertrial-accused granted him bail who was incarcerated for 1 year despite being alleged to be in possession of commercial quantity of poppy straw.

21.9. In the case of *Tinku Vs. State (NCT of Delhi)*¹⁸ the Delhi High Court considering the long incarceration of an undertrial-accused granted him bail who was incarcerated for 2 years and 5 months. The contraband in question was Heroin, the commercial quantity of which is 250 grams. In this case recovery of 945 grams was allegedly made from the accused despite which the High Court invoking the right to speedy justice flowing from Article 21 of the Constitution and foreseeable delay in trial granted bail to the accused.

21.10. In the case of *Kulwinder Singh Vs. State of Punjab*¹⁹ the Punjab and Haryana High Court considering long incarceration of an

¹⁶ Criminal Appeal No. 3349 of 2024

¹⁷ Cri. Appeal No.1204 of 2024

¹⁸ 2024 SCC OnLine Del 9132

¹⁹ CRM-M-26704 of 2024

undertrial-accused granted him bail who was incarcerated for 2 years and 8 months. The contraband in question was Etizolam Salt, the commercial quantity of which is 2.5 grams. In this case recovery of 99.876 grams was allegedly made from accused despite which the High Court invoking the right to speedy justice flowing from Article 21 of the Constitution and delay in trial granted bail to the accused.

21.11. In the case of *Amey Sanjay Jadhav Vs. State of Maharashtra*²⁰ this Court on 03.01.2025 considering long incarceration of the undertrial-accused has granted bail to the undertrial accused who was incarcerated for 2 years and 11 months. The contraband in question was 1.3 kilograms of Charas, the commercial quantity of which is 1000 grams.

21.12. In the case of *Mohd. Mobin Jahurul Hasan Manihar Vs. State of Maharashtra*²¹ - this Court on 20.01.2025 considering long incarceration of the under-trial accused granted bail to him who was incarcerated for 1 year 11 months. The contraband in question was 220 gms of MD , the commercial quantity of which is 50 gms.

22. In all the above cases the right to speedy justice flowing from Article 21 of the Constitution of India and the foreseeable delay trial were considered as imminent grounds for grant of bail apart from the rigours of Section 37 of the NDPS Act in the facts of the said case.

²⁰ BA No.911 of 2024 decided on 03.01.2025

²¹ BA No.713 of 2024 decided on 20.01.2025

23. Needless to state that complicity of Applicant in the crime can be proved by prosecution at the trial.

24. In view of my above *prima facie* observations and the judicial citations, Applicant has made out a fit case for grant of bail. Hence, Bail Application is allowed subject to the following terms and conditions:-

- (i) Applicant is directed to be released on bail on furnishing P.R. Bond in the sum of Rs.25,000/- with one or two sureties in the like amount;
- (ii) Before his actual release from jail, Applicant shall furnish his address where he proposes to reside after his release from jail to the concerned Police Station and also to the trial Court;
- (iii) After his release from jail, Applicant shall report to the Investigating Officer as and when called for;
- (iv) Applicant shall attend the trial Court on first Tuesday of every month between 11.00 a.m. and 1.00 p.m. to mark his presence. If the first Tuesday of the said month falls on a holiday and/or non Court working day, the Applicant shall mark presence on the next working day;
- (v) Applicant shall co-operate with the conduct of trial and attend the trial Court on all dates unless specifically

exempted and will not take any unnecessary adjournments, if he does so, it will entitle the prosecution to apply for cancellation of this order;

(vi) Applicant shall not leave the State of Maharashtra without prior permission of the Trial Court;

(vii) Applicant shall not influence any of the witnesses or tamper with the evidence in any manner; and

(viii) In case of any infraction of the above conditions and/or two consecutive defaults in marking his attendance before trial Court, it shall attract the provisions of Section 439(2) of Cr.P.C. i.e. for cancellation of bail.

25. It is clarified that the observations made in this order are limited for the purpose of granting bail only and I have not made any observations on merits of the case. The trial shall be adjudicated on the strength of the evidence led and strictly on its own merits being uninfluenced with any of the *prima facie* observations made herein above in this order.

26. Bail Application is allowed and disposed.

[MILIND N. JADHAV, J.]