

IN THE HIGH COURT OF PUNJAB AND HARYANA AT CHANDIGARH

CRM-M-11664-2025
Reserved on: 05.05.2025
Pronounced on: 19.05.2025

Navjot Singh ...Petitioner

Versus

State of Punjab ...Respondent

CORAM: HON'BLE MR. JUSTICE ANOOP CHITKARA

Present: Mr. Karanjeet Singh Brar, Advocate, for the petitioner.
Mr. Akshay Kumar, AAG, Punjab.

ANOOP CHITKARA, J.

FIR No.	Dated	Police Station	Sections
53	15.05.2024	Khuian Sarwar, District Fazilka	15 C and 29 of NDPS Act

1. The petitioner incarcerated in the FIR captioned above had come up before this Court under Section 483 of Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023, [BNSS], seeking regular bail.

2. In paragraph 17 of the bail petition, the accused declares that he has no criminal antecedents. However, as per paragraph 3 (vii) (E), the petitioner has the following criminal antecedents:

Sr. No.	FIR No.	Dated	Offense	Police Station
1.	62	22.04.2020	188 IPC	City-2, Abohar

3. The facts and allegations are taken from the status report filed by the State. On 14.05.2024, the police team headed by ASI Aniket Kumar were patrolling for checking suspicious persons and had erected a barricade for that purpose on the road side. At that time, they noticed a Scorpio car which was stopped by signaling from torch light. The driver stopped the car at some distance and from there two persons tried to run away, however, the police officials were able to nab them and on enquiry the driver of the car revealed his name as Uttambir Singh and the other person told his name as Navjot Singh (petitioner). Police noticed plastic bag in their vehicle. After that, the police claimed to have complied with the provisions of NDPS Act, and search was conducted which led to recovery of 70 kgs of poppy husk.

4. Counsel for the petitioner submits that the trial is at initial stage; charges were framed in the year 2024, out of 16 witnesses, none has been examined so far. There were two more people sitting in the car, subsequently, they were arrested. He further submits

that the petitioner is in custody since 15.05.2024 and the poppy husk allegedly recovered is 70 kg, which is marginally above the commercial quantity and the petitioner has clean antecedents.

5. The petitioner's counsel prays for bail by imposing any stringent conditions and contends that further pre-trial incarceration would cause an irreversible injustice to the petitioner and his family.

6. State counsel opposes bail and submits that the FSL report (Annexure R-1) has confirmed the contraband to be poppy husk and has further submitted that it is proved that the petitioner was in conscious possession of 70 kg of poppy husk and the trial has already commenced.

REASONING:

7. I have heard learned counsel for the parties and have gone through the record. An analysis of the arguments would lead to the following outcome.

8. The petitioner's stand as mentioned in para 5 of the bail petition that he was sitting in the car by taking lift, firstly establish the petitioner's presence in the vehicle and secondly, shift the burden upon him to show that he did not notice the bags. A perusal of para 5 of the bail petition does not mention that from where and to which place the petitioner was going and why did he take lift because there is no mention of any mode of commutation. There is also no mention that from which place the co-accused was driving the car. A reference can be made to the judgment pronounced by Hon'ble the Supreme Court in the case of *Madan Lal Vs. State of HP 2003 (7) SCC, 465*, where the recovery was from a vehicle and in addition to the driver, co-passengers were held to be in conscious possession. The quantity involved is commercial.

9. The quantity allegedly involved in this case is commercial. Given this, the rigors of S. 37 of the NDPS Act apply in the present case. The petitioner must satisfy the twin conditions put in place by the Legislature under Section 37 of the NDPS Act.

10. Section 37¹ of the NDPS Act mandates under sub-section (1) (b) of section 37 that no person accused of an offense punishable for offenses involving commercial quantity shall be released on bail unless- (i) the Public Prosecutor has been given an opportunity

¹ **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 27A 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.

to oppose the application of release, and (ii) where the Public Prosecutor opposes the application, the Court is satisfied that there are reasonable grounds for believing that accused is not guilty of such offense and is not likely to commit any offense while on bail. Thus, the rigors of S. 37 of the NDPS Act apply in the present case, and the burden is on the petitioner to satisfy the twin conditions put in place by the Legislature under Section 37 of the NDPS Act. Given the legislative mandate of S. 37 of the NDPS Act, the Court can release a person accused of an offense punishable under the NDPS Act for possessing a commercial quantity of contraband only after recording reasonable satisfaction of its rigors.

11. The State's Counsel argues that a plain reading of Section 37 reveals that the legislature intends to make the law stringent to curb the drug menace. It is further to be noticed that the provisions are couched in negative language, meaning that to grant bail, the Court needs to record a finding that there are reasonable grounds for believing that the petitioner is not guilty of the offense. The burden of proof is also on the petitioner to satisfy the Court about his non-involvement in the case. While interpreting the provisions of Section 37 of the NDPS Act, the Court must be guided by the objective sought to be achieved by putting these stringent conditions.

12. Satisfying the fetters of S. 37 of the NDPS Act is candling the infertile eggs. The stringent conditions of section 37 placed in the statute by the legislature do not create a bar for bail for specified categories, including the commercial quantity; however, it creates hurdles by placing a reverse burden on the accused, and once crossed, the rigors no more exist, and the factors for bail become similar to the bail petitions under general penal statutes like IPC. Thus, both the twin conditions need to be satisfied before a person accused of possessing a commercial quantity of drugs or psychotropic substance is to be released on bail. The first condition is to provide an opportunity to the Public Prosecutor, enabling them to take a stand on the bail application. The second stipulation is that the Court must be satisfied that reasonable grounds exist for believing that the accused is not guilty of such an offense and is not likely to commit any offense while on bail. If either of these conditions is not met, the ban on granting bail operates. The expression "reasonable grounds" means something more than prima facie grounds. It contemplates substantial probable causes for believing the accused is not guilty of the alleged offense. Even on fulfilling one of the conditions, the reasonable grounds for believing that the accused is not guilty of such an offense, the Court still cannot give a finding on the assurance that the accused is not likely to commit any such crime again.

13. The petitioner's arguments did not point toward any material contradictions.

14. The submissions made above and the grounds in the bail petition do not shift the burden the legislature places on the accused under S. 37 of the NDPS Act. The petitioner has not stated anything in the bail petition to discharge the burden put by the stringent

conditions placed in the statute by the legislature under section 37 of the NDPS Act. The investigation reveals sufficient prima facie evidence to connect the petitioner with the crime; thus, the petitioner fails to make out a case for bail. Any detailed discussions about the evidence may prejudice the case of the petitioner, the State, or the other accused.

15. As per paragraph 10 of the bail petition, the petitioner's custody is more than nine months, which cannot be considered prolonged.

16. In Union of India (NCB) v. Khalil Uddin, decided on 21 Oct 2022, 2022 SCC OnLine SC 2109, Hon'ble Supreme Court holds,

[4]. According to the prosecution, contraband material weighing about 13 kgs. of morphine was found in a motor vehicle which was driven by co-accused named Md. Jakir Hussain. During the course of investigation, it was found that the motor vehicle was recorded in the name of Md. Nizam Uddin who had executed a sale letter and handed over the custody of the vehicle to accused Md. Abdul Hai and that accused Md. Jakir Hussain was the driver employed by accused Md. Abdul Hai and that contraband material in question was to be handed over to accused-Khalil Uddin, an owner of a tea shop.

[5]. The High Court by its order which is presently under challenge, directed release of both the accused as stated above on bail after they had undergone custody to the tune of about a year. Questioning grant of relief to said accused, the instant appeals have been preferred.

[7]. What emerges from the record is that large quantity of contraband weighing about 13 kgs of morphine was found in a car which was driven by Md. Jakir Hussain. Whether the role played by said Md. Jakir Hussain could get connected with both the accused is a question.

[8]. The answer to said question could be the statement recorded of Md. Nizam Uddin. The statement of Md. Jakir Hussain recorded under Section 67 of the Act has also named his owner accused Abdul Hai. We are conscious of the fact that the validity and scope of such statements under Section 67 has been pronounced upon by this Court in *Tofan Singh v. State of Tamil Nadu* . In *State by (NCB) Bengaluru v. Pallulabid Ahmad Arimutta* , the rigour of law lay down by this Court in *Tofan Singh* was held to be applicable even at the stage of grant of bail.

[9]. However, going by the circumstances on record, at this stage, on the strength of the statement of Md. Nizam Uddin, though allegedly retracted later, the matter stands on a different footing. In our considered view, in the face of the mandate of Section 37 of the Act, the High Court could not and ought not to have released the accused on bail. We, therefore, allow these appeals, set aside the view taken by the High Court and direct that both the appellants be taken in custody forthwith.

[10]. We have been given to understand that the charge-sheet has been filed. In the circumstances, we direct the Trial Court to take up the matter and conclude the proceedings as early as possible and preferably within six months from the receipt of this order.

17. In Narayan Takri v. State of Odisha, decided on 10 Sep 2024, SLP (CrI.) 8198-2024, Hon'ble Supreme Court holds,

The petitioners are in custody since 28th May, 2022 for alleged commission of alleged offence under Section 20(b)(ii)(c) of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985. As per the FIR allegation, 125.3 kg. of "Ganja" was recovered from the petitioners.

[3]. It is not in dispute that the trial has commenced and that three prosecution witnesses have been examined till date.

[4]. Learned counsel for the petitioners submits that the third prosecution witness was examined as far back as on 28th January, 2024 and since then, no other prosecution witness has been examined. There is, however, no such averment in the petition.

[5]. Learned counsel appearing for the respondent submits that every endeavor shall be made on behalf of the prosecution to have all the witnesses examined by the end of this year.

[6]. The trial court is encouraged to expedite the trial and give its decision as early as possible, in accordance with law.

[7]. We, however, do not see any reason to interfere the impugned judgment and order at this stage; however, it is clarified that in the event the trial is not completed by the end of this year, the petitioners shall be at liberty to renew their prayer for bail before the trial court.

18. A perusal of the bail petition and the documents attached prima facie points towards the petitioner's involvement and do not make out a case for bail. The impact of crime would also not justify bail. Any further discussions will likely prejudice the petitioner; this court refrains from doing so.

19. The petitioner's custody of more than nine months cannot be termed prolonged, given the minimum sentence prescribed for the offense.

20. Any observation made hereinabove is neither an expression of opinion on the case's merits nor shall the trial Court advert to these comments.

21. **Petition dismissed.** All pending applications, if any, stand disposed of. The petitioner would be at liberty to file a fresh bail petition after referring to the judicial precedents of Hon'ble the Supreme Court, where Hon'ble the Supreme Court has granted bail has been granted around 70 kgs or greater quantity of poppy straw and where the period of pre-trial custody is closer to the pre-trial custody of the petitioner.

(ANOOP CHITKARA)
JUDGE

19.05.2025
Jyoti-II

Whether speaking/reasoned:	Yes
Whether reportable:	No.