

IN THE HIGH COURT OF PUNJAB AND HARYANA
AT CHANDIGARH

CRM-M-44081-2025
Reserved on: 10.09.2025
Pronounced on: 29.09.2025

Sukhwinder Singh @ Rohit ...Petitioner

Versus

State of Punjab ...Respondent

CORAM: HON'BLE MR. JUSTICE ANOOP CHITKARA

Present: Mr. Vidul Kapoor, Advocate
for the petitioner.

Mr. Jasdev Singh Thind, DAG, Punjab.

ANOOP CHITKARA, J.

FIR No.	Dated	Police Station	Sections
22	01.02.2025	Kartarpur, Jalandhar Rural	22 of NDPS Act (Section 61, 85 of NDPS Act added later on)

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. Per paragraph 23 of the bail petition, the petitioner has no criminal antecedents.

3. The facts and allegations are taken from the status report filed by the State. On 01-02-2025, based on a chance recovery, the Police seized 30 tablets containing Etizolam from a bag thrown by the petitioner on noticing the police. The Investigator claims to have complied with all the statutory requirements of the NDPS Act, 1985, and BNSS, 2023.

4. The petitioner's counsel refers to the bail petition. It would be relevant to refer to paras 5 to 8, which read as follows:

“5. That moreover, as per the FSL report, the weight of each tablet has been recorded as 105 mg, and the total weight of 30 tablets is shown as 3.150 grams. However, the FSL has not quantified the exact content of the active narcotic substance (Etizolam) within the tablets. The total weight of the tablet cannot be equated with the weight of the contraband unless the proportion of the narcotic substance is specifically identified. Therefore, in the absence of such quantification, it cannot be presumed that the total recovered substance amounts to commercial quantity. This aspect strikes at the very root of the prosecution's case under Section 22 of the NDPS Act and disentitles the prosecution from taking benefit of the rigours of Section 37.

6. That nothing possession of the petitioner. The case is allegedly

based on a chance recovery, from a transparent bag on the roadside and no connecting link has been established was recovered from the conscious between the petitioner and the contraband.

7. That most importantly, despite alleged recovery from a thorough fare, yet the police did not join any independent witness. This lacuna casts a serious doubt on the prosecution story. That in the absence of any independent witness, the seals remained with the police itself and therefore, chances of tampering with it cannot be ruled out.

8. That allegedly the police recovered 30 intoxicant tablets. weighing 3.150 grams. It is pertinent to mention that 1 strip contains 15 tablets, so at the maximum it could be 2 strips, which is not more than Rs. 60 in total. The cost factor and surrounding circumstances raise concerns worth examining.”

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 their family.

6. The State’s counsel opposes bail and refers to the status report.

7. As per paragraph 4 of the status report, the drug is 30 tablets of Etizolam and its weight is 3.150 grams.

8. Given the above, the total weight of 30 tablets is 3.150 grams.

9. Dealing in 3.150 grams of etizolam in contravention of the NDPS Act, 1985, constitutes an offense under the following provisions and notifications:

Substance Name	Etizolam
Quantity detained	3.15 Gram
Punishable U/s	S.22(c) of NDPS Act, 1985
Quantity type	Commercial
Drug Quantity in % to upper limit of Intermediate	126.00%

Drug's Small & Commercial Qty. suggested by Committee report	
Notification No. & date	S.O. 1351 (E) dated 13.03.2019

<i>Specified as small & Commercial in S.2(viia) & 2(xxiii) NDPS Act, 1985</i>		
Notification No. & dated	S.O.1276(E)	3/23/2021
Sr. No.	238ZZC	

Common Name (Name of Narcotic Drug and Psychotropic Substance (International non-proprietary name (INN)	Etizolam
Other non-proprietary name	*****
Chemical Name	4-(2-Chlorophenyl)-2-ethyl-9-methyl-6H-thieno[3,2-f][1,2,4]triazolo[4,3a][1,4]diazepine
Small Quantity	< 0.05 Gram
Commercial Quantity	> 2.5 Gram

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Declared as punishable under NDPS Act and as per schedule defined in S.2(xi) & 2(xxiii) NDPS Act, 1985		
Notification No. & dated	S.O.1275(E)	3/23/2021

Sr. No.	110ZN
Common Name (Name of Narcotic Drug and Psychotropic Substance (International non-proprietary name (INN)	Etizolam
Other non-proprietary name	*****
Chemical Name	4-(2-Chlorophenyl)-2-ethyl-9-methyl-6H-thieno[3,2-f][1,2,4]triazolo[4,3a][1,4]diazepine

10. 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.

11. 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 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

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.

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.

12. It shall be relevant to refer to para 3 of the status report, which reads as follows:

“3. That brief and relevant facts of the case are that the aforesaid was registered FIR No. 22 dated 01.02.2025 was registered on the basis of a Ruga (Intimation) sent by ASI Narinder Singh No. 223/JAL-R mentioning therein on 01.02.2025 at about 10:00 PM, he along with his Police party apprehended the petitioner at the drain bridge near Duggri during patrolling after he had thrown a transparent polythene bag from the pocket of his jeans on the side of the path on seeing the Police party and on search of the aforesaid transparent polythene bag, a total of 30 intoxicant tablets of orange colour were recovered from that. The petitioner could not produce any license, or authorization to keep the aforesaid intoxicant tablets in his possession, which were taken into Police possession by ASI Narinder Singh after preparing parcel and sealing the same with his seal N.S. The detailed facts mentioned in the aforesaid Ruga (Intimation) have been reproduced in the true translation of the FIR No. 22 dated 01.02.2025 attached with the petition as Annexure P-1, which may kindly be read as part of present paragraph as same are not repeated here for the sake of brevity.”

13. 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.

14. 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.

15. The petitioner’s arguments did not point toward any material contradictions.

16. 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.

17. 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.

18. In *Narayan Takri v. State of Odisha*, decided on 10 Sep 2024, SLP (Crl.) 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.

19. A perusal of the bail petition and the documents attached prima facie points towards the petitioner's involvement and does 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.

20. The petitioner's custody of around eight months cannot be termed prolonged, given the minimum sentence prescribed for the offense.

21. Regarding the delay in the trial, if the trial does not conclude within one year and six months of the petitioner's custody, and the delay is not attributable to the petitioner, the petitioner may apply for bail before the trial Court. The Court shall not be influenced by the dismissal of bail on merits or by criminal history and shall decide it on changed

circumstances and the prolonged trial.

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

23. **Petition dismissed.** All pending applications, if any, stand disposed of.

(ANOOP CHITKARA)
JUDGE

29.09.2025
Jyoti Sharma

Whether speaking/reasoned: Yes
Whether reportable: No.