

IN THE HIGH COURT OF PUNJAB AND HARYANA
AT CHANDIGARH

CRM-M-60647-2024
Reserved on: 05.05.2025
Pronounced on: 19.05.2025

Uttambir Singh Danewala @ Uttamveer @ Utambeer Singh ...Petitioner

Versus

State of Punjab ...Respondent

CORAM: HON'BLE MR. JUSTICE ANOOP CHITKARA

Present: Ms. Manju Goyal, 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 14 of the bail petition, the accused declares that he has no criminal antecedents.

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. The counsel for the petitioner has referred to para 5 of the bail petition, which reads as follows:

“5. That Challan in present FIR has been presented before Learned Trial court 07.11.2024 and charges have not been framed, the trial is underway and is set for prosecution evidence

and charge has not been framed till date against the petitioner and no useful purpose will be served by keeping the petitioner in custody and he is also not a previous convict rather keeping the petitioner at this age with the harden criminals will adversely affect the mind and prospect of the petitioner in future life. The rigors of Section 37 of the NDPS Act are required to be balanced with Article 21 of the Constitution of India providing for the fundamental right of life and liberty, of which the speedy trial forms part. The prosecution has cited 16 witnesses, examining them will take considerable time.”

5. Counsel for the petitioner seeks bail on the ground of pre-trial custody of around 11 months. He submits that the petitioner has no criminal antecedents under the NDPS Act; he has prolonged custody and the poppy husk allegedly recovered is 70 kg, which is marginally above the commercial quantity. He further submits that in case, this Court grants bail to the petitioner, he would have no objection in case any stringent conditions this Court might put upon the petitioner. He contends that further pre-trial incarceration would cause an irreversible injustice to the petitioner and his family.

6. State counsel opposes bail and refers to following portions of of the status report, which reads as follows:

“C. The evidence against the petitioner

Before search, on being asked, the petitioner reposed faith in Sh. Arun Mundan, PPS, DSP, Abohar and replied that he can conduct the search and the petitioner also signed the consent memo of this effect in the presence of the witnesses. The recovery memo was prepared which was signed by the witnesses. The consent memo, recovery memo and the statements of the witnesses are sufficient evidence against the petitioner to prove his guilt. The offending vehicle (belonging to the father of the petitioner namely Gurdilraj Singh) being used by the petitioner at the time of occurrence, has been released to the said Gurdilraj Singh on sapurdari by the learned Court.

D. The role of the petitioner. *The petitioner was in conscious possession of the contraband at the time of its recovery.*

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 was the driver of the vehicle, from which the police had recovered 70 kgs of poppy husk. Counsel for the petitioner seeks bail on the ground of pre-trial custody of around 11 months, but he did not cite any judicial precedents of Hon’ble Supreme Court, where Hon’ble the Supreme Court had granted bail in around 70 kgs of

poppy husk and where the custody of accused was for 11 months, as such, the petitioner is not entitled to bail.

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 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

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.

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 4 of the bail petition, the petitioner's in custody since 15.05.2024, 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 (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.

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 around one year 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 in case involving 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.