



CRM-M-37798-2025 (O&M)

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**IN THE HIGH COURT OF PUNJAB & HARYANA AT
CHANDIGARH**

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CRM-M-37798-2025 (O&M)
Date of decision : 15.01.2026

Vansh Atwal

..... Petitioner

VERSUS

State of Punjab

..... Respondent

CORAM: HON'BLE MR. JUSTICE SURYA PARTAP SINGH

Present : Ms. Ruhani Chadha, Advocate for the petitioner.

Mr. Rohit Bansal, Sr. DAG, Punjab.

SURYA PARTAP SINGH, J. (oral)

1. For the commission of offence punishable under Section 21 of 'Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act', hereinafter being referred to as 'NDPS Act', the FIR No.128 dated 24.08.2024 has been lodged in Police Station Special Task Force, District SAS Nagar (Mohali). The petitioner is being prosecuted for the commission of abovementioned offence and he has been arrested. The petitioner is in custody and, therefore, craving for bail.

2. In nut-shell, the facts emerging from record are that the FIR of this case came into being in view of the report of ASI Satpal, who had reported that when he was heading a police party deputed for patrolling duty, on the basis of a tip-off given by a reliable source, a motorcycle bearing registration No.PB05-AS-4765 was intercepted and on enquiry, the



motorcyclists disclosed their names as 'Lovepreet @Labhi' (driver) and 'Vansh Atwal' (pillion rider), petitioner herein. As per prosecution, on search of abovesaid two boys, from the pocket of trouser of Lovepreet @Labhi 280 gms of heroin was recovered.

3. It is the case of the prosecution that on recovery of abovementioned contraband, necessary formalities with regard to seizure & sealing of contraband, lodging of FIR, and arrest of the accused were performed, and further investigation taken up.

4. The learned State Counsel has already filed custody certificate of the petitioner. The same be taken on record.

5. Heard.

6. It has been contended on behalf of petitioner that the petitioner has been falsely implicated in the present case as the contraband was not found in conscious possession of the petitioner. Rather it was in the conscious possession of Lovepreet @Labhi, who was riding the motorcycle. It was also contended by learned counsel for the petitioner that the petitioner has already suffered prolonged incarceration for being in custody for a period of more than 01 year and 04 months, and that nothing is left to be recovered from the possession of petitioner.

7. In addition to above, learned counsel for the petitioner has also argued that the former bail petition filed by the petitioner was dismissed as withdrawn and no decision on merit was taken thereupon. As per learned counsel for the petitioner from the date of dismissal of former bail petition, a very long period has passed, but no significant progress in trial is taking



place, as out of 16 prosecution witnesses only one witness has been examined so far. It has also been contended by learned counsel for the petitioner that the petitioner has no criminal antecedents.

8. The learned State Counsel has controverted the abovementioned arguments. According to learned State Counsel, since the petitioner was travelling on the same motorcycle, whereupon his co-accused, carrying contraband, was travelling, the petitioner is equally liable for being in possession of commercial quantity of contraband. As per learned State Counsel, without satisfying the twin conditions enshrined under Section-37 of NDPS Act, the petitioner cannot be enlarged on bail.

9. The record has been perused carefully.

10. As far as the principles governing the benefit of bail in a case related to NDPS Act, are concerned, the principles of law laid down by the Hon'ble Supreme Court in the case of '***Mohd. Muslim @ Hussain v. State (NCT of Delhi), 2023 SCC OnLine SC 352***' are relevant, wherein the Hon'ble Supreme Court has held that grant of bail on account of undue delay in trial cannot be said to be fettered under Section-37 of the NDPS Act, given the imperative of Section 436-A which is applicable to offences under the Act.

11. In this regard it is also relevant to mention here that the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India in the case of '***Manmandal and Another v. State of West Bengal, Special Leave Petition (Criminal) No.8656 of 2023 decided on 14.09.2023***' and '***Rabi Prakash v. State of Odisha, 2023 SCC Online SC***'



1109, extended the benefit of bail to the accused, who had been incarcerated for a period of almost 2-3 years and the trial was likely to take considerable time. The above-mentioned benefit has been given by observing that prolonged incarceration generally militates against the most precious fundamental right guaranteed under Article-21 of the Constitution, and in such a situation, the constitutional principles must override the statutory embargo contained under Section-37 of the NDPS Act.

12. In addition to above, in a recently pronounced verdict in the case of *Santosh Pawar Vs. State of Chhattishgarh & Anr.* **Criminal Appeal No.4883/2025**, the Hon'ble Supreme Court observed that rigors of Section 37 of NDPS Act will not be a bar for considering the case of an accused for bail as it comes with a condition that the prosecution would press for an early completion of trial. In the above-mentioned case the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India held that appellant who was being prosecuted for being in possession of commercial quantity of narcotic substance, was entitled for bail in view of her incarceration for a period of 19 months.

13. Similarly in another case i.e. in the case of *Satender Kumar Antil v. Central Bureau of Investigation (2022) 10 SCC 51* prolonged incarceration and inordinate delay engaged the attention of the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India, which considered the correct approach towards bail, with respect to several enactments, including Section 37 NDPS Act. The court expressed the opinion that Section 436A (which requires inter alia the



accused to be enlarged on bail if the trial is not concluded within specified periods) of the Criminal Procedure Code, 1973 would apply.

14. In the case of *Ismail Khan @ Pathan vs. State of Rajasthan Criminal Appeal No.4911 of 2025* with regard to recovery of commercial quantity of narcotic substance the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India accorded the benefit of bail to the accused in view of prolonged incarceration for a period of 02 years and 08 months of the accused.

15. The similar benefit has been taken in another appeal i.e. *SLP No.15699-2025 titled as Ebrahim @ Ibrahim SK vs. The State of West Bengal* and in the case of *Pamesh Arora vs. UT Chandigarh Criminal Appeal No.4872 of 2025*.

16. If the facts and circumstances of the present case are analyzed in the light of above-mentioned principles of law, it transpires that:-

- (i) that the petitioner is already in custody for a period of more than 01 year and 04 months;
- (ii) that the prosecution has been successful to examine only 01 prosecution witness out of 16, and thus, there is every likelihood that the trial is not going to conclude in near future;
- (iii) that the petitioner was not found in actual/conscious possession of contraband;
- (iv) that the quantity of contraband recovered from the possession of co-accused is marginally above the lower limit prescribed for commercial quantity;



- (v) that the former bail petition of the petitioner was not decided on merits, and from the date of dismissal of former bail petition, considerable time has elapsed, but there is no progress in the trial;
- (vi) that nothing is left to be recovered from the possession of petitioner;
- (vii) that detention of petitioner in judicial lock up is not likely to serve any purpose;
- (viii) that there is nothing on record to show that if released on bail, the petitioner may tamper with the evidence or influence the witnesses; and
- (ix) that there is nothing on record to show that if released on bail, the petitioner will not co-operate/participate in the trial.

17. With regard to fact situation of present case, the principles of law laid down by the Hon'ble Supreme Court in the case of "Dataram versus State of Uttar Pradesh and another", 2018(2) R.C.R. (Criminal) 131, are relevant, wherein it has been observed that "a fundamental postulate of criminal jurisprudence is the presumption of innocence, meaning thereby that a person is believed to be innocent until found guilty. However, there are instances in our criminal law where a reverse onus has been placed on an accused with regard to some specific offences but that is another matter and does not detract from the fundamental postulate in respect of other offences. Yet another important facet of our criminal jurisprudence is that the grant of bail is the general rule and putting a person in jail or in a prison or in a correction home (whichever expression one may wish to use) is an



exception. Unfortunately, some of these basic principles appear to have been lost sight of with the result that more and more persons are being incarcerated and for longer periods. This does not do any good to our criminal jurisprudence or to our society. There is no doubt that the grant or denial of bail is entirely the discretion of the judge considering a case but even so, the exercise of judicial discretion has been circumscribed by a large number of decisions rendered by this Court and by every High Court in the country. Yet, occasionally there is a necessity to introspect whether denying bail to an accused person is the right thing to do on the facts and in the circumstances of a case”.

18. The principles laid down by the Hon’ble the Supreme Court of India in the case of ‘Satender Kumar Antil Vs. Central Bureau of Investigation and Another’, (2022) 10 SCC 51, are also relevant in this case. In the abovementioned case, it has been observed that “the rate of conviction in criminal cases in India is abysmally low. It appears to us that this factor weighs on the mind of the Court while deciding the bail applications in a negative sense. Courts tend to think that the possibility of a conviction being nearer to rarity, bail applications will have to be decided strictly, contrary to legal principles. We cannot mix up consideration of a bail application, which is not punitive in nature with that of a possible adjudication by way of trial. On the contrary, an ultimate acquittal with continued custody would be a case of grave injustice”.

19. Recently, in the case of ‘Tapas Kumar Palit Vs. State of Chhattisgarh’, 2025 SCC Online SC 322, the Hon’ble Supreme Court of



India has observed that “if an accused is to get a final verdict after incarceration of six to seven years in jail as an undertrial prisoner, then, definitely, it could be said that his right to have a speedy trial under Article 21 of the Constitution has been infringed”. It has also been observed by the Hon’ble Supreme Court of India in the abovementioned case that “delays are bad for the accused and extremely bad for the victims, for Indian society and for the credibility of our justice system, which is valued. Judges are the masters of their Courtrooms and the Criminal Procedure Code provides many tools for the Judges to use in order to ensure that cases proceed efficiently”.

20. Therefore, to elucidate further, this Court is conscious of the basic and fundamental principle of law that right to speedy trial is a part of reasonable, fair and just procedure enshrined under Article 21 of the Constitution of India. This constitutional right cannot be denied to the accused as mandated by Hon’ble Apex court in “Balwinder Singh versus State of Punjab and Another”, 2024 SCC Online SC 4354.

21. If the cumulative effect of all the abovementioned factors, involved in the instant case, is taken into consideration, it leads to a conclusion that the petitioner is entitled for the benefit of bail, and that the present petition deserves to be allowed.

22. Accordingly, without commenting anything on the merits of the case, the present petition is hereby ***allowed***. The petitioner is hereby ordered to be released on bail on his furnishing personal bond and surety bond(s) to the satisfaction of learned trial Court, subject to the following conditions:-



- (i) that the petitioner shall not directly or indirectly make any inducement, threat or promise to any person acquainted with the facts of the case, so as to dissuade him to disclose such facts to the Court or to any other authority.
- (ii) that the petitioner shall at the time of execution of bond, furnish the address to the Court concerned and shall notify the change in address to the trial Court, till the final decision of the trial; and
- (iii) that the petitioner shall not leave India without prior permission of the trial Court.

(SURYA PARTAP SINGH)
JUDGE

15.01.2026
Gaurav Thakur

Whether speaking / reasoned	Yes/No
Whether Reportable	Yes/No