

2026:PHHC:007357



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IN THE HIGH COURT OF PUNJAB AND HARYANA AT CHANDIGARH

CRM-M-56989-2025

Harjit Singh @ Mintu

....Petitioner

versus

State of Punjab

....Respondent

Date of decision: January 20, 2026

Date of Uploading: January 20, 2026

CORAM: HON'BLE MR. JUSTICE SUMEET GOEL

Present:- Mr. Deepak Arora, Advocate for the petitioner.

Mr. Jaypreet Singh, DAG Punjab.

SUMEET GOEL, J. (ORAL)

Present fourth petition has been filed under Section 439 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 (for short 'Cr. P.C.') for grant of regular bail to the petitioner, in case bearing FIR No.67 dated 06.04.2020, registered for the offences punishable under Section 22 of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985 (for short 'NDPS Act') and Section 188 of the Indian Penal Code, 1860 (for short 'IPC') (Sections 29/ 61/ 85 of the NDPS Act added later on), at Police Station Tanda, District Hoshiarpur.

2. The gravamen of the FIR in question is that on 06.04.2020, while the police party was on patrol duty for checking miscreants, they were present in the area of Adda Jhawan. During patrol, they received a secret information that Harpreet Singh alias Happy (co-accused), Varinder Singh alias Bindri (co-accused), and Harjit Singh alias Mintu (*petitioner herein*) were consuming and supplying intoxicant powder from a shop situated near *Hardeep Marble House*, Tanda. Considering the said information to be reliable, the police party proceeded

to the disclosed location and intercepted the aforesaid persons. After completing the necessary statutory formalities under the relevant Act, a search was conducted. From the glazed envelope recovered from the right pocket of the trousers of Harpreet Singh alias Happy (co-accused), 122 grams of intoxicant powder were recovered, and from the left pocket of his trousers, 12 syringes, one lighter, and two plastic *pannis* were recovered. From the glazed envelope recovered from the right pocket of the trousers of Varinder Singh alias Bindri (co-accused), 135 grams of intoxicant powder were recovered, along with 13 syringes, one digital weighing scale, one lighter, and two plastic *pannis*. From the glazed envelope recovered from the left pocket of Harjit Singh alias Mintu (*petitioner herein*), 105 grams of intoxicant powder were recovered, and from his other pocket, eight syringes, one lighter, two plastic *pannis*, and one burnt spoon were recovered. As per FSL report, the recovered contraband was Alprazolam.

3. Learned counsel for the petitioner has iterated that the petitioner is in custody since 07.04.2020. Learned counsel for the petitioner has further submitted that mandatory provisions of the NDPS Act have not scrupulously been complied with, and thus, the prosecution case suffers from inherent defects. Learned counsel for the petitioner has iterated that the trial is delayed and the liability thereof cannot be fastened upon the petitioner. Learned counsel has also argued that co-accused of the petitioner, namely, Harpreet Singh alias Happy has been afforded the concession of regular bail by the co-ordinate Bench of this Court, vide order dated 04.07.2025 passed in **CRM-M-31246-2025**. Learned counsel has further argued that investigation in this case is complete and challan has been presented on 28.09.2021 and out of total 09 prosecution witnesses, 02 have already been examined. Learned counsel has further iterated that the petitioner has suffered incarceration for more than 02 years. Thus, regular bail is prayed for.

4. Learned State counsel seeks to place on record custody certificate dated 19.01.2026 and status report by way of an affidavit dated 07.12.2025, in the Court today, which are taken on record. Raising submissions in tandem with the said status report, learned State counsel has opposed the present petition by arguing that the allegations raised against the petitioner are serious in nature and, thus, the petitioner does not deserve the concession of the regular bail. Learned State counsel has further submitted that the instant bail plea is barred by the rigors of Section 37 of the NDPS Act, and thus, the same ought to be dismissed. On the strength of averments contained in the said status report, learned State counsel, however, submits that the petitioner is at parity with his co-accused, namely, Harpreet Singh alias Happy, who has been granted concession of regular bail by the co-ordinate Bench of this Court, vide order dated 04.07.2025 passed in **CRM-M-31246-2025**.

5. I have heard counsel for the rival parties and have gone through the available records of the case.

6. The petitioner was arrested on 07.04.2020, whereinafter, investigation was carried out and challan has been presented on 28.09.2021. Total 09 prosecution witnesses have been cited, out of which, 02 have been examined till date. Indubitably, conclusion of the trial will take long time. Admittedly, co-accused of the petitioner, namely, Harpreet Singh alias Happy has been granted regular bail by the co-ordinate Bench of this Court, vide order dated 04.07.2025 passed in **CRM-M-31246-2025**. The rival contentions raised at Bar give rise to debatable issues, which shall be ratiocinated upon during the course of trial. This Court does not deem it appropriate to delve deep into these rival contentions, at this stage, lest it may prejudice the trial. Nothing tangible has been brought forward to indicate the likelihood of the petitioner absconding from the process of justice or interfering with the prosecution evidence.

6.1. The trial is indeed procrastinating and folly thereof cannot be saddled upon the petitioner. As per custody certificate dated 19.01.2026 filed by the learned State counsel, the petitioner has already suffered incarceration for a period of 02 years, 04 months and 04 days.

6.2. This Court in a judgment titled as *Kulwinder versus State of Punjab* passed in **CRM-M-64074-2024** (2025:PHHC:002695); after relying upon the *ratio decidendi* of the judgments of the Hon'ble Supreme Court in Hussainara Khatoon vs. Home Secy., State of Bihar (1980) 1 SCC 81; Abdul Rehman Antulay vs R.S. Nayak (1992) 1 SCC 225; Javed Gulam Nabi Shaikh vs. State of Maharashtra and another, 2024(3) RCR (Criminal) 494; Mohd Muslim @ Hussain vs. State (NCT of Delhi) reported as 2023 INSC 311; Criminal Appeal No.245/2020 dated 07.02.2020 titled as "Chitta Biswas Alias Subhas vs. The State of West Bengal"; "Nitish Adhikary @ Bapan vs. The State of West Bengal", Special Leave to Appeal (Crl.) No.5530-2022 dated 22.08.2022 titled as "Mohammad Salman Hanif Shaikh vs. The State of Gujarat"; Criminal Appeal No.1169 of 2022 dated 05.08.2022 titled as Gopal Krishna Patra @ Gopalrusma vs. Union of India, and Ankur Chaudhary vs. State of Madhya Pradesh, 2024(4) RCR (Criminal) 172; has held, thus:

"7.8. The right to a speedy and expeditious trial is not only a vital safeguard to prevent undue and oppressive incarceration; to mitigate anxiety and concern accompanying the accusation as well as to curtail any impairment in the ability of an accused to defend himself, but there is an overarching societal interest paving way for a speedy trial. This right has been repeatedly actuated in the recent past and the ratio decidendi of the above-referred to Supreme Court's judgments have laid down a series of decisions opening up new vistas of fundamental rights. The concept of speedy trial is amalgamated into the Article 21 as an essential part of the fundamental right to life and liberty, guaranteed and preserved under our Constitution. The right to speedy trial begins with the actual restraint imposed at the time of the arrest of the accused and consequent incarceration which continues at all stages, namely, the stage of investigation, inquiry, trial, appeal and revision so that any possible prejudice that may result due to impermissible and avoidable delay since the time of the commission of the offence till the criminal proceedings consummate into a finality, could be averted. The speedy trial, early hearing and quick disposal are sine qua non of criminal jurisprudence. The

overcrowded Court-dockets, the heavy volume of work and the resultant pressure on the prosecution and the Police, indubitably keeps the entire criminal jurisprudential mechanism under stress and strain. However, this cannot be an excuse for keeping the sword of Damocles hanging on the accused for an indefinite period of time. It does not serve any credit to the criminal justice system, rather it makes for a sad state of affairs. The guarantee of a speedy trial is intended to avoid oppression and prevent delay by imposing on the Court and the prosecution an obligation to proceed with the trial with a reasonable dispatch. The guarantee serves a threefold purpose. Firstly, it protects the accused against oppressive pre-trial imprisonment; secondly, it relieves the accused of the anxiety and public suspicion due to unresolved criminal charges and lastly, it protects against the risk that evidence will be lost or memories dimmed by the passage of time, thus, impairing the ability of the accused to defend himself. It goes without saying that the consequences of pre-trial detention are grave. Accused, presumed innocent, till proven otherwise, are subjected to psychological and physical deprivations of jail-life, usually under onerous conditions. Equally important, the burden of detention of such an accused frequently falls heavily on the innocent members of his family.

There is yet another aspect of the matter which deserves consideration at this stage. The allegations in the present case relate to accused being involved in an FIR relating to commercial quantity of contraband under the NDPS Act, 1985. While considering a bail petition in a case involving commercial quantity, the Court has to keep in mind the rigours enumerated under Section 37 of NDPS Act, 1985 which mandates that Courts can grant bail to an accused only after hearing the public prosecutor and after having satisfied itself of twin conditions which are reasonable grounds for believing that the accused is not guilty of the offence charged/alleged and that, he is not likely to commit any offence while on bail. The stringent rigours of Section 37 of the NDPS Act, 1985 must be meticulously scrutinized against the backdrop of accused's fundamental right to a speedy trial. The right to life and personal liberty cannot be rendered nugatory by unwarranted delays in the judicial process, particularly where such delay(s) is neither attributable to the accused nor justified at the end of the prosecution by cogent reasons. An individual cannot be kept behind bars for an inordinate period of time by taking refuge in rigours laid down in Section 37 of the NDPS Act, 1985. The legislature in its wisdom, in order to ensure speedy and timely disposal of the cases under the Act, has provided for the constitution of special Courts under Section 36-A of the Act. However, this Court cannot turn Nelson's eye to the protracted delays and systematic inefficiency that frustrate this legislative purpose. A Court of law is duty-bound to ensure that it does not become complicit in violation of an individual's fundamental rights, notwithstanding anything contained in a statute. While dealing with bail petition in a case governed by the rigours of Section 37 of the NDPS Act, 1985, the Court must strike a judicious balance between the legislative intent to curb the menace of drugs and the sacrosanct right of the accused to a fair and expeditious trial. Prolonged incarceration, without justifiable cause, risks transforming pre-trial detention into punitive imprisonment, an outcome antithetical to the principle of justice and equity.

Ergo, the unequivocal inference is that where the trial has failed to conclude within a reasonable time, resulting in prolonged incarceration, it militates against the precious fundamental rights of life and liberty granted under the law and, as such, conditional liberty overriding the statutory embargo created under Section 37 of the NDPS Act, 1985 ought to be considered as per facts of a given case. In other

words, grant of bail in a case pertaining to commercial quantity, on the ground of undue delay in trial, cannot be said to be fettered by Section 37 of the NDPS Act, 1985.”

6.3. Further, as per the said custody certificate, the appellant is stated to be convicted in 01 FIR(s). However, this factum cannot be a ground sufficient by itself, to decline the concession of regular bail to the appellant in the FIR in question when a case is made out for grant of regular bail *qua* the FIR in question by ratiocinating upon the facts/circumstances of the said FIR. Reliance in this regard can be placed upon the judgment of the Hon’ble Supreme Court in ***Maulana Mohd. Amir Rashadi v. State of U.P. and another, 2012 (1) RCR (Criminal) 586***; a Division Bench judgment of the Hon’ble Calcutta High Court in case of ***Sridhar Das v. State, 1998 (2) RCR (Criminal) 477*** & judgments of this Court in CRM-M No.38822-2022 titled as ***Akhilesh Singh v. State of Haryana***, decided on 29.11.2021, and ***Balraj v. State of Haryana, 1998 (3) RCR (Criminal) 191***.

In this view of the matter, the rigor imposed under Section 37 of the NDPS Act stands diluted in light of the Article 21 of the Constitution of India.

6.4. Indubitably, the present petition is the fourth attempt by the petitioner to secure regular bail. The last bail plea was dismissed on 28.01.2025. However, keeping in view the entirety of the factual matrix of the case in hand; especially, factum of the petitioner having suffered extended incarceration for almost 01 year & pace of trial; this Court is inclined to affirmatively consider the instant plea for bail. A profitable reference, in this regard, can be made to a judgment of this Court passed in ***CRA-S-2332-2023*** titled as ***Rafiq Khan versus State of Haryana and another***, relevant whereof reads as under:

“10. As an epilogue to the above discussion, the following principles emerge:

I Second/successive regular bail petition(s) filed is maintainable in law & hence such petition ought not to be rejected solely on the ground of maintainability thereof.

II. Such second/successive regular bail petition(s) is maintainable whether earlier petition was dismissed as

withdrawn/dismissed as not pressed/dismissed for non-prosecution or earlier petition was dismissed on merits.

III For the second/successive regular bail petition(s) to succeed, the petitioner/applicant shall be essentially/pertinently required to show substantial change in circumstances and showing of a mere superficial or ostensible change would not suffice. The metaphoric expression of seeking second/successive bail plea(s) ought not be abstracted into literal iterations of petition(s) without substantial, effective and consequential change in circumstances.

IV No exhaustive guidelines can possibly be laid down as to what would constitute substantial change in circumstances as every case has its own unique facts/circumstance. Making such an attempt is nothing but an utopian endeavour. Ergo, this issue is best left to the judicial wisdom and discretion of the Court dealing with such second/successive regular bail petition(s).

V In case a Court chooses to grant second/successive regular bail petition(s), cogent and lucid reasons are pertinently required to be recorded for granting such plea despite such a plea being second/successive petition(s). In other words, the cause for a Court having successfully countenanced/entertained such second/successive petition(s) ought to be readily and clearly decipherable from the said order passed.”

Suffice to say, further detention of the petitioner as an undertrial is not warranted in the facts and circumstances of the case.

7. In view of above, the present petition is allowed. Petitioner is ordered to be released on regular bail, if not required in any other case, on his furnishing bail/surety bonds to the satisfaction of the Ld. concerned trial Court/Duty Magistrate. However, in addition to conditions that may be imposed by the concerned trial Court/Duty Magistrate, the petitioner shall remain bound by the following conditions:

- (i) The petitioner shall not mis-use the liberty granted.
- (ii) The petitioner shall not tamper with any evidence, oral or documentary, during the trial.
- (iii) The petitioner shall not absent himself on any date before the trial.
- (iv) The petitioner shall not commit any offence while on bail.
- (v) The petitioner shall deposit his passport, if any, with the trial Court.
- (vi) The petitioner shall give his cellphone number to the Investigating Officer/SHO of concerned Police Station and shall not change his cell-phone number without prior permission of the trial Court/Illaq Magistrate.
- (vii) The petitioner shall not in any manner try to delay the trial.
- (viii) The petitioner shall submit, on the first working day of every month, an affidavit, before the concerned trial Court, to the

effect that he has not been involved in commission of any offence after being released on bail. In case the petitioner is found to be involved in any offence after his being enlarged on bail in the present FIR, on the basis of his affidavit or otherwise, the State is mandated to move, forthwith, for cancellation of his bail which plea, but of course, shall be ratiocinated upon merits thereof.

8. In case of breach of any of the aforesaid conditions and those which may be imposed by concerned trial Court/Duty Magistrate as directed hereinabove or upon showing any other sufficient cause, the State/complainant shall be at liberty to move cancellation of bail of the petitioner.
9. Ordered accordingly.
10. Nothing said hereinabove shall be construed as an expression of opinion on the merits of the case.
11. Since the main case has been decided, pending miscellaneous application, if any, shall also stands disposed off.

(SUMEET GOEL)
JUDGE

January 20, 2026

mahavir

Whether speaking/reasoned: Yes/No

Whether reportable: Yes/No