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* **IN THE HIGH COURT OF DELHI AT NEW DELHI**

\+ BAIL APPLN. 3337/2025

BHASKAR PONNALLA .....Petitioner

Through: Ms. Ruchi Munjal, Adv.

versus

STATE OF NCT OF DELHI, THROUGH SECRETARY .....Respondent

Through: Mr.Manoj Pant, APP for the State along with SI Bijrender Kumar.

CORAM:
HON'BLE DR. JUSTICE SWARANA KANTA SHARMA

O R D E R

% 08.01.2026

CRL.M.A. 26045/2025 (exemption)

1. Allowed, subject to all just exceptions.

2. Application stands disposed of.

BAIL APPLN. 3337/2025

3. By way of the present application, the applicant seeks grant of regular bail in FIR bearing No.90/2022, registered at Police Station Economic Offenses Wing, New Delhi for the commission of offences punishable under Sections 420/467/468/471/120-B of the Indian Penal Code, 1860 (hereafter '*IPC*').

4. Briefly stated, the facts of the present case are that a joint complaint had been lodged by S. Ravichandran and others at PS EOW alleging a large-scale Railway Job Placement fraud to the tune of approximately ₹5 crores, purportedly committed by the accused persons, Ms. S. Uma and Mr.

Bhaskar Ponnalla. It was alleged that on the basis of false representations and forged documents prepared by the accused, the complainant had been induced to collect and pay substantial amounts on the assurance of securing employment in the Indian Railways for certain identified persons. Fake appointment letters purportedly issued by the Ministry of Railways, along with forged seals and signatures of railway officials, had allegedly been used to deceive the complainant and the prospective candidates. It was further alleged that a sum of ₹1,69,50,000/- had been transferred to the account of Mr. Bhaskar Ponnalla and ₹98,00,000/- to the account of Ms. Uma, partly through banking channels and partly in cash, which amounts were claimed to be the proceeds of crime and suspected to have been laundered. The accused were also alleged to have misrepresented that they had influential connections in the Central Government and could exercise influence over public servants to secure employment in the Railways. In this manner, offences of cheating, forgery, fabrication of false documents and criminal conspiracy had been alleged to have been committed. The complainant had further stated that he had refunded the amounts to the victims from his own funds and had thereby suffered a personal loss of approximately ₹5 crores. Upon conducting a preliminary enquiry, the present case had come to be registered.

5. The learned counsel for the applicant submits that the applicant has been falsely implicated in the present case, contending that he had no independent role to defraud any person and had merely acted under the instructions, guidance and false assurances of the principal accused, Ms. S. Uma, who had projected herself as the genuine facilitator for securing government employment, and that the applicant had bona fide believed the

activities to be part of legitimate consultancy services. It is argued that the applicant was neither the originator nor the mastermind of the alleged scheme and exercised no control or dominion over the fabrication of forged documents or fake appointment letters, all of which, as per the investigation, were prepared and issued by Ms. Uma, with the applicant's role being limited and mechanical. It is further argued that the earlier rejection of bail on 17.09.2024 was premised largely on the seriousness of allegations and the pendency of the FSL report, and despite repeated directions, no progress has been made and the report remains pending, thereby eroding the basis for continued incarceration. The applicant is stated to have undergone nearly two years of judicial custody since 27.06.2023. It is argued that the matter is still at the stage of arguments on charge with the next date listed far ahead, and the delay is attributable to prosecutorial lapses, violating the applicant's right to speedy trial. It is argued that co-accused Ms. Uma has already been granted bail, and the age distinction is negligible. Thus, it is prayed that the present applicant be enlarged on bail.

6. The learned APP for the State has strongly opposed the bail application, submitting that the allegations are extremely serious and involve a large-scale, well-planned fraud relating to railway job placement. It is contended that the applicant is a key conspirator and major beneficiary of the crime, having received substantial amounts including approximately ₹72 lakhs through bank transfers from co-accused Ms. S. Uma and huge sums in cash. The applicant is alleged to have impersonated himself as having close links with Railway officials, misrepresented his influence, induced innocent job seekers and the complainant, and actively participated in preparing and circulating forged appointment letters and documents. It is further argued

that the applicant absconded after committing the offence and was arrested from Mumbai by Telangana Police, reflecting a clear intent to evade the law. The learned APP also points out that the applicant is a habitual offender with multiple similar cases registered against him in Telangana, and there is a strong apprehension that he may abscond, influence witnesses, or assist other absconding co-accused if released on bail. In view of the gravity of the offence, the magnitude of the fraud, and the applicant's criminal antecedents, it is prayed that the bail application be dismissed.

7. This Court has **heard** arguments addressed by learned counsel for the applicant and learned APP for the State, and has perused the material on record.

8. The allegations against the present applicant, in brief, are that he, in conspiracy with co-accused Ms. S. Uma and other associates, had orchestrated a large-scale fraud by falsely representing himself as a person having close connections with senior officials of the Indian Railways. It is alleged that he induced innocent job seekers and intermediaries to part with substantial sums of money on the false promise of securing employment in the Railways. In furtherance of the said conspiracy, forged appointment letters and fabricated documents purportedly issued by Railway authorities were generated and circulated to deceive the victims and obtain wrongful gain.

9. This Court notes that the investigation reveals that multiple meetings were organised in Delhi and other places, where the applicant and co-accused assured the complainant and several candidates of Group 'C' and Group 'D' appointments in the Railways, as well as tender work contracts. As of date, at least 23 victims have come forward, either directly or through

the complainant, alleging that they were deceived and induced to make payments running into crores of rupees. The total amount involved, as per the prosecution, exceeds ₹5 crores.

10. From the material on record, it *prima facie* emerges that the applicant is not a peripheral or passive participant, but a central figure in the conspiracy. The investigation discloses that the applicant received approximately ₹2.75 crores directly into his bank account from the complainant and co-victims, and an additional sum of about ₹72 lakhs routed through the account of co-accused Ms. S. Uma. The prosecution has also placed on record the material to suggest that large amounts were received in cash and subsequently deposited into the bank account of the applicant. The alleged forged appointment letters and documents were verified from the office of the Divisional Railway Manager (DRM), Southern Zone, Chennai, as well as the Railway Recruitment Board (RRB), Chennai, and both authorities have categorically confirmed that no such documents were ever issued by their departments. This lends prima facie credence to the prosecution version regarding fabrication and forgery.

11. The role attributed to the applicant is not limited to receipt of money alone. He is alleged to have actively participated in preparing forged and fabricated documents, impersonated himself as a person having influence in the Railways, and personally interacted with victims to gain their confidence. The allegations, therefore, disclose a deep-rooted conspiracy involving deception, impersonation, forgery and criminal breach of trust, affecting a large number of unsuspecting victims.

12. It is also significant to note that certain co-accused are stated to be still absconding and yet to be apprehended. The prosecution has expressed a

reasonable apprehension that if the applicant is released on bail, he may influence witnesses, pass on information to absconding co-accused, or otherwise impede the course of justice. The fact that the applicant was arrested from Mumbai by the Telangana Police further indicates a tendency to evade the process of law.

13. The fact that co-accused Ms. S. Uma has been enlarged on bail does not, by itself, entitle the present applicant to similar relief. The record shows that Ms. S. Uma was enlarged on bail primarily considering her gender and senior citizen status. Parity, in criminal jurisprudence, is not a mechanical or abstract principle, and must be applied having regard to the specific role attributed to each accused. In the present case, the applicant is alleged to be a principal conspirator and major beneficiary of the proceeds of crime. Therefore, the plea of parity is clearly misconceived.

14. Equally important is the fact that the applicant is stated to be involved in multiple other cases of a similar nature registered in Telangana. Such antecedents, at the stage of bail, are a relevant consideration, particularly in cases involving economic offences and organised fraud. The material placed on record indicating the applicant's involvement in similar offences cannot be disregarded.

15. This Court is also mindful of the settled position of law that economic offences, especially those involving large-scale cheating, forgery, and criminal conspiracy, have serious ramifications on public confidence and the social order. Such offences are not merely private disputes, but impact a large number of victims and shake trust in public institutions. The gravity of the offence, the magnitude of the fraud, the number of victims involved, and the organised manner in which the alleged crime has been executed, all

weigh against the grant of bail.

16. Considering the overall facts and circumstances, the central role attributed to the applicant, the substantial magnitude of the amount involved, the multiplicity of victims affected, the criminal antecedents of the applicant, and the manner in which the alleged offences appear to have been executed with a high degree of planning and deceit, this Court is of view that the applicant has failed to make out a case for grant of bail.

17. The bail application is, therefore, dismissed.

18. It is, however, clarified that nothing expressed herein above shall tantamount to an expression of opinion on merits of the case.

19. The order be uploaded on the website forthwith.

DR. SWARANA KANTA SHARMA, J

JANUARY 08, 2026/A