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IN THE HIGH COURT OF PUNJAB & HARYANA
AT CHANDIGARH

CRM-M-38541-2024 (O&M)

Date of Decision: 30.04.2025

ZAHID ALI

...PETITIONER

Versus

STATE OF PUNJAB

...RESPONDENT

CORAM: HON'BLE MR. JUSTICE HARPREET SINGH BRAR

Present: Mr. Satnam Singh Gill, Advocate
for the petitioner.

Mr. Sandeep Kumar, DAG Punjab.

Harpreet Singh Brar, J. (Oral)

1. This is the first petition filed under Section 483 of Bhartiya Nagrik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023 for grant of regular bail to the petitioner in case bearing FIR No. 14 dated 03.02.2023 registered under Sections 21, 22 and 29 of Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985 (for short 'NDPS Act') at Police Station Sandaur, District Malerkotla.

2. As per the prosecution case, on 03.02.2023, SI Surjit Singh was present along with police party, when he received secret information at about 04:30 PM, on the basis of which *naka* was laid down and a car i.e. Swift Dzire bearing registration No.PB-13-AY-4249 was stopped from which Jahid Ali and Mohd. Nadeem were apprehended and from footwell, a polythene bag was recovered from which 25 intoxicant vials, make WINCIREX Cough Syrup and 20 grams of chitta/heroin were recovered. On the basis of the alleged recovery, the FIR (supra) was registered.

3. Learned counsel for the petitioner *inter alia* contends that the petitioner has been falsely implicated and in fact, he was wrongly picked up



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from a tea stall at Manna Phatak, Malerkotla along with his cousin Mohd. Nadeem @ Raja, who has been granted the concession of regular bail by this Court vide order dated 24.02.2025 passed in CRM-M-9503-2025 and there is no direct evidence to link the petitioner with the alleged recovery. The allegations made in the FIR are exaggerated and lacks concrete evidence to establish the petitioner's guilt.

4. Learned counsel for the petitioner further submits that there are total 18 prosecution witnesses cited in the list of witnesses, out of which, only 01 PW has been examined till date and the trial is likely to take long time in conclusion.

5. *Per contra*, learned State counsel has filed custody certificate today in the Court which is taken on record and he opposes the prayer made by learned counsel for the petitioner on the ground that huge quantity of contraband was recovered from the conscious possession of the petitioner, which falls within the ambit of commercial quantity and as such, the petitioner is not entitled for any relief, however, he could not controvert the fact that the petitioner is behind the bars since 06.02.2023.

6. Having heard learned counsel for the parties and after perusing the record of the case, it transpires that the petitioner is behind the bars from the last 02 years 02 months and 23 days. Investigation is complete. The final report under Section 173 Cr.P.C. was presented before the concerned Court. Charges were framed and trial of the case has not made much progress. Out of 18 prosecution witnesses, only 01 PW has been examined so far.

7. A two Judge bench of the Hon'ble Supreme Court in ***Nandlal Mondal @ Abhay Mondal Vs. The State of West Bengal SLP (Crl) No(s).12788/2023*** released the accused on bail after completion of 18 months of



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custody on account of protracted trial in NDPS case involving commercial quantity of contraband. Reliance in this regard can also be placed upon the judgments rendered by the Hon'ble Supreme Court passed in *Md. Aliul Islam @ Aliul Islam @ Alius Vs. The State of West Bengal SLP (Crl.) No. 000736/2024*, *Debrata Mondal Vs. State of West Bengal SLP(Crl.) No. 14970-2023*, *Santarul Islam @ Santa Vs. The State of West Bengal SLP(Crl.) No. 13169/2023*, *Indrajit Mondal @ Piglu Vs. The State of West Bengal SLP(Crl.) No. 8512/2023*, *Narjul Islam @ Najbul Hoque Vs. The State of West Bengal SLP(Crl.) No. 14172/2023*, *Subhashri Das @ Rana @ Subhoshree Vs. The State of West Bengal SLP(Crl.) No. 15284/2023*, *Mithun Sk. & Anr. Vs. The State of West Bengal SLP (Crl.) No.016598/2023*, *SK. Nasiruddin @ Nasirdin SK. Vs. State of West Bengal SLP (Crl.) No.003402/2024*, *Indadul Shah Vs. The State of West Bengal SLP(Crl.) No. 12670/2023*, *Hanef Kharsani @ Hanef Sheikh Vs. Union of India, Ripon Seikh & Ors. Vs. State of West Bengal SLP(Crl.) No. 16663/2023*, *Moidul Sarkar Vs. The State of West Bengal SLP(Crl.) No. 15668/ 2023*, *Saniya Bibi @ Soniya Bibi Vs. The State of West Bengal SLP(Crl.) No. 2354/2024*, *Saddam Hossain Vs. State of West Bengal SLP(Crl.) No. 15496/2023*, *Bijon SK @ Golam Murselim Vs. The State of West Bengal SLP (Crl.) No. 6046/2024* and *Subhas Vs. The State of West Bengal SLP(Crl.) No. 8823/2019*.

8. Further, the culpability, if any, would be determined at the time of trial and as such, no useful purpose will be served by further detention of the petitioner-accused. Keeping the petitioner in further detention without the prospect of the trial being concluded in the near future, would be violative of his rights under Article 21 of the Constitution of India. A two Judge bench of the Hon'ble Supreme Court in *Mohd. Muslim @ Hussain vs. State (NCT of Delhi)*



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2023 AIR SC 1648 has held that the concept of fairness enshrined under Article 21 of the Constitution of India would trump the bar on granting bail in cases involving commercial quantity of contraband, as stipulated by Section 37 of the NDPS Act. Speaking through Justice S. Ravindra Bhat, has opined as follows:

*“20. The standard to be considered therefore, is one, where the court would look at the material in a broad manner, and reasonably see whether the accused’s guilt may be proved. The judgments of this court have, therefore, emphasized that the satisfaction which courts are expected to record, i.e., that the accused may not be guilty, is only prima facie, based on a reasonable reading, which does not call for meticulous examination of the materials collected during investigation (as held in *Union of India v. Rattan Malik*). **Grant of bail on ground of undue delay in trial, cannot be said to be fettered by Section 37 of the Act, given the imperative of Section 436A which is applicable to offences under the NDPS Act too (ref. *Satender Kumar Antil supra*).** Having regard to these factors the court is of the opinion that in the facts of this case, the appellant deserves to be enlarged on bail.*

*21. **Before parting, it would be important to reflect that laws which impose stringent conditions for grant of bail, may be necessary in public interest; yet, if trials are not concluded in time, the injustice wrecked on the individual is immeasurable.** Jails are overcrowded and their living conditions, more often than not, appalling.” (emphasis added)*

9. A two Judge Bench of Hon’ble Supreme Court in ‘**Satender Kumar Antil v. CBI**’ (2022) 10 SCC 51, with respect to prevailing conditions of undertrial prisoner in India has observed:

“6. Jails in India are flooded with undertrial prisoners. The statistics placed before us would indicate that more than 2/3rd of the inmates of the prisons constitute undertrial prisoners. Of this category of prisoners, majority may not even be required to be arrested despite registration of a cognizable offence, be-

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ing charged with offences punishable for seven years or less. They are not only poor and illiterate but also would include women. Thus, there is a culture of offence being inherited by many of them. As observed by this Court, it certainly exhibits the mindset, a vestige of colonial India, on the part of the investigating agency, notwithstanding the fact arrest is a draconian measure resulting in curtailment of liberty, and thus to be used sparingly. In a democracy, there can never be an impression that it is a police State as both are conceptually opposite to each other.”

10. In view the discussion above, the present petition is allowed. Accordingly, without commenting upon the merits of the case, the petitioner-Zahid Ali is ordered to be released on regular bail during trial on his furnishing bail bonds/surety bonds to the satisfaction of Illaqa Magistrate/Trial Court.

11. Nothing observed hereinabove shall be construed to be expression of an opinion by this Court on merits of the case. The learned Court below is directed to proceed with the matter on its own merits, lest it may prejudice the trial.

(HARPREET SINGH BRAR)
JUDGE

30.04.2025

Ajay Goswami

Whether speaking/reasoned

Whether reportable

Yes/No

Yes/No