

IN THE HIGH COURT OF HIMACHAL PRADESH, SHIMLA

Cr. MP (M) No. 1960 of 2025

Reserved on: 14.11.2025

Date of Decision: 24.11.2025.

Vidya Nath

...Petitioner

Versus

State of Himachal Pradesh

...Respondent

Coram

Hon'ble Mr Justice Rakesh Kainthla, Judge.

Whether approved for reporting?¹ Yes.

For the Petitioner : Mr Mukesh Sharma, Advocate.

For the Respondent/State : Mr Jitender Sharma,
Additional Advocate General.

Rakesh Kainthla, Judge

The petitioner has filed the present petition for seeking regular bail in FIR No. 172 of 2024, dated 20.10.2024, registered at Police Station, Ghumarwin, District Bilaspur, H.P., for the commission of offences punishable under Sections 20 and 29 of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act (NDPS).

¹ Whether reporters of Local Papers may be allowed to see the judgment? Yes.

2. It has been asserted that, as per the prosecution, the petitioner was travelling in a taxi bearing registration No. HP-01K-4679 with co-accused Duni Chand. Amar Nath was driving the taxi. The police intercepted it and recovered 1.5111 kgs of charas. The police arrested the petitioner. The prosecution has failed to complete the evidence, and the petitioner's right to a speedy trial is being violated. The bar under Section 37 of the NDPS Act does not automatically apply because of the recovery of the commercial quantity. The recovery was not effected from the conscious possession. The co-accused Amar Nath has been granted bail by this Court on 16.07.2025. The prosecution has relied upon the statement of Puneet Kaundal, who was projected as an independent witness, but he turned hostile. The testimony of this witness made the prosecution's case doubtful. Therefore, it was prayed that the present petition be allowed and the petitioner be released on bail.

3. The petition is opposed by filing a status report asserting that the police party was on Nakabandi duty on 20.10.2024. A taxi bearing registration No. HP-01K-4679 came from Mandi at 8.10 PM. The police signalled the driver to stop the vehicle. The driver stopped the vehicle. The police started

checking the documents. The person sitting beside the driver tried to conceal a bag. The police asked him the reason for doing so, but he could not give a satisfactory answer. The driver identified himself as Amarnath, the person sitting beside the driver identified himself as Vidya Nath, and the person sitting in the rear seat identified himself as Duni Chand. The police checked the bag kept by Vidya Nath and found 1.511 kgs of charas in it. The police seized the charas and arrested the occupants. The charas was sent to FSL and was confirmed to be the extract of cannabis and a sample of charas. The police checked the call detail record and the bank statements, but could not find the involvement of any other person. All the people were known to each other. Vidya Nath and Amar Nath are remotely related to each other. The police filed the charge sheet before the learned Special Judge on 5.5.2025. The matter was listed before the learned Additional Sessions Judge, Ghumarwin, Bilaspur, on 26.9.2025, for recording the statements of prosecution witnesses. Hence, the status report.

4. I have heard Mr Mukesh Sharma, learned counsel for the petitioner and Mr Jitender Sharma, learned Additional Advocate General, for the respondent-State.

5. Mr Mukesh Sharma, learned counsel for the petitioner, submitted that the petitioner is innocent and he was falsely implicated. Mere presence of the petitioner in the vehicle is not sufficient to connect him to the commission of the crime. The independent witness turned hostile, and there is no material against the petitioner. There is an inordinate delay in the progress of the trial. Therefore, he prayed that the present petition be allowed and the petitioner be released on bail.

6. Mr Jitender Sharma, learned Additional Advocate General for the respondent/State, submitted that the petitioner was found travelling in the vehicle from which the recovery of the contraband was effected. The quantity of cannabis recovered by the police was commercial, and the rigours of Section 37 of the NDPS Act apply to the present case. Hence, he prayed that the present petition be dismissed.

7. I have given considerable thought to the submissions made at the bar and have gone through the records carefully.

8. The parameters for granting bail were considered by the Hon'ble Supreme Court in *Pinki v. State of U.P.*, (2025) 7 SCC

314: 2025 SCC OnLine SC 781, wherein it was observed at page 380:

(i) Broad principles for the grant of bail

56. In *Gudikanti Narasimhuluv. High Court of A.P.*, (1978) 1 SCC 240: 1978 SCC (Cri) 115, Krishna Iyer, J., while elaborating on the content of Article 21 of the Constitution of India in the context of personal liberty of a person under trial, has laid down the key factors that should be considered while granting bail, which are extracted as under: (SCC p. 244, paras 7-9)

“7. It is thus obvious that the nature of the charge is the vital factor, and the nature of the evidence is also pertinent. The punishment to which the party may be liable, if convicted or a conviction is confirmed, also bears upon the issue.

8. *Another relevant factor is whether the course of justice would be thwarted by him who seeks the benignant jurisdiction of the Court to be freed for the time being. [Patrick Devlin, “The Criminal Prosecution in England” (Oxford University Press, London 1960) p. 75 — Modern Law Review, Vol. 81, Jan. 1968, p. 54.]*

9. *Thus, the legal principles and practice validate the Court considering the likelihood of the applicant interfering with witnesses for the prosecution or otherwise polluting the process of justice. It is not only traditional but rational, in this context, to enquire into the antecedents of a man who is applying for bail to find whether he has a bad record, particularly a record which suggests that he is likely to commit serious offences while on bail. In regard to habituals, it is part of criminological history that a thoughtless bail order has enabled the bailee to exploit the opportunity to inflict further crimes on the members of society. Bail discretion, on the basis of evidence about the criminal record of a defendant, is therefore not an exercise in irrelevance.” (emphasis supplied)*

57. In *Prahlad Singh Bhativ.State (NCT of Delhi)*, (2001) 4 SCC 280: 2001 SCC (Cri) 674, this Court highlighted various aspects that the courts should keep in mind while dealing with an application seeking bail. The same may be extracted as follows: (SCC pp. 284-85, para 8)

“8. The jurisdiction to grant bail has to be exercised on the basis of well-settled principles, having regard to the circumstances of each case and not in an arbitrary manner. While granting the bail, the court has to keep in mind the nature of accusations, the nature of evidence in support thereof, the severity of the punishment which conviction will entail, the character, behaviour, means and standing of the accused, circumstances which are peculiar to the accused, reasonable possibility of securing the presence of the accused at the trial, reasonable apprehension of the witnesses being tampered with, the larger interests of the public or State and similar other considerations. It has also to be kept in mind that for the purposes of granting the bail the legislature has used the words “reasonable grounds for believing” instead of “the evidence” which means the court dealing with the grant of bail can only satisfy it (sic itself) as to whether there is a genuine case against the accused and that the prosecution will be able to produce prima facie evidence in support of the charge.” (emphasis supplied)

58. This Court in *Ram Govind Upadhyay v.Sudarshan Singh*, (2002) 3 SCC 598: 2002 SCC (Cri) 688, speaking through Banerjee, J., emphasised that a court exercising discretion in matters of bail has to undertake the same judiciously. In highlighting that bail should not be granted as a matter of course, bereft of cogent reasoning, this Court observed as follows: (SCC p. 602, para 3)

“3. Grant of bail, though being a discretionary order, but, however, calls for the exercise of such a discretion in a judicious manner and not as a matter of course. An order for bail bereft of any cogent reason cannot be sustained. Needless to record, however, that the grant of bail is dependent upon the contextual facts of the matter being

dealt with by the court and facts do always vary from case to case. While the placement of the accused in society, though it may be considered by itself, cannot be a guiding factor in the matter of grant of bail, the same should always be coupled with other circumstances warranting the grant of bail. The nature of the offence is one of the basic considerations for the grant of bail — the more heinous is the crime, the greater is the chance of rejection of the bail, though, however, dependent on the factual matrix of the matter.” (emphasis supplied)

59. In *Kalyan Chandra Sarkar v. Rajesh Ranjan*, (2004) 7 SCC 528: 2004 SCC (Cri) 1977, this Court held that although it is established that a court considering a bail application cannot undertake a detailed examination of evidence and an elaborate discussion on the merits of the case, yet the court is required to indicate the prima facie reasons justifying the grant of bail.

60. In *Prasanta Kumar Sarkar v. Ashis Chatterjee*, (2010) 14 SCC 496: (2011) 3 SCC (Cri) 765, this Court observed that where a High Court has granted bail mechanically, the said order would suffer from the vice of non-application of mind, rendering it illegal. This Court held as under with regard to the circumstances under which an order granting bail may be set aside. In doing so, the factors which ought to have guided the Court's decision to grant bail have also been detailed as under: (SCC p. 499, para 9)

“9. ...It is trite that this Court does not, normally, interfere with an order passed by the High Court granting or rejecting bail to the accused. However, it is equally incumbent upon the High Court to exercise its discretion judiciously, cautiously and strictly in compliance with the basic principles laid down in a plethora of decisions of this Court on the point. It is well settled that, among other circumstances, the factors to be borne in mind while considering an application for bail are:

- (i) whether there is any *prima facie* or reasonable ground to believe that the accused had committed the offence;
- (ii) nature and gravity of the accusation;
- (iii) severity of the punishment in the event of conviction;
- (iv) danger of the accused absconding or fleeing, if released on bail;
- (v) character, behaviour, means, position and standing of the accused;
- (vi) likelihood of the offence being repeated;
- (vii) reasonable apprehension of the witnesses being influenced; and
- (viii) danger, of course, of justice being thwarted by grant of bail.” (emphasis supplied)

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62. One of the judgments of this Court on the aspect of application of mind and requirement of judicious exercise of discretion in arriving at an order granting bail to the accused is *Brijmani Deviv. Pappu Kumar*, (2022) 4 SCC 497 : (2022) 2 SCC (Cri) 170, wherein a three-Judge Bench of this Court, while setting aside an unreasoned and casual order (*Pappu Kumarv. State of Bihar*, 2021 SCC OnLine Pat 2856 and *Pappu Singhv. State of Bihar*, 2021 SCC OnLine Pat 2857) of the High Court granting bail to the accused, observed as follows: (*Brijmani Deviv. Pappu Kumar*, (2022) 4 SCC 497: (2022) 2 SCC (Cri) 170], SCC p. 511, para 35)

“35. While we are conscious of the fact that liberty of an individual is an invaluable right, at the same time while considering an application for bail courts cannot lose sight of the serious nature of the accusations against an accused and the facts that have a bearing in the case, particularly, when the accusations may not be false, frivolous or vexatious in nature but are supported by adequate material brought on record so as to enable a court to

arrive at a prima facie conclusion. While considering an application for the grant of bail, a prima facie conclusion must be supported by reasons and must be arrived at after having regard to the vital facts of the case brought on record. Due consideration must be given to facts suggestive of the nature of crime, the criminal antecedents of the accused, if any, and the nature of punishment that would follow a conviction vis-à-vis the offence(s) alleged against an accused.” (emphasis supplied)

9. Hon’ble Supreme Court held in *State of Rajasthan v. Balchand*, (1977) 4 SCC 308: 1977 SCC (Cri) 594: 1977 SCC OnLine SC 261 that the normal rule is bail and not jail, but the gravity and heinousness of the crime should weigh with the Court while considering the bail petition. It was observed at page 308:

2. The basic rule may perhaps be tersely put as bail, not jail, except where there are circumstances suggestive of fleeing from justice or thwarting the course of justice or creating other troubles in the shape of repeating offences or intimidating witnesses and the like, by the petitioner who seeks enlargement on bail from the Court. We do not intend to be exhaustive but only illustrative.

3. It is true that the gravity of the offence involved is likely to induce the petitioner to avoid the course of justice and must weigh with us when considering the question of jail. So also, the heinousness of the crime....”

10. The present petition has to be decided as per the parameters laid down by the Hon’ble Supreme Court.

11. The status report shows that the petitioner was travelling in the vehicle from which the recovery was effected.

Petitioner and Amar Nath are residing within the jurisdiction of the same Post Office and the same Tehsil. Petitioner Vidya Nath and Amar Nath are remotely related to each other. The contents of the status report *prima facie* show that the petitioner and Amar Nath were known to each other. In *Madan Lal versus State of H.P. (2003) 7 SCC 465; 2003 SCC (Cri) 1664; 2003 SCC OnLineSC 874*, the contraband was recovered from a vehicle, and it was held that all the occupants of the vehicle would be in conscious possession of the contraband. It was observed:

“19. Whether there was conscious possession has to be determined with reference to the factual backdrop. The facts which can be culled out from the evidence on record are that all the accused persons were travelling in a vehicle, and as noted by the trial court, they were known to each other, and it has not been explained or shown as to how they travelled together from the same destination in a vehicle which was not a public vehicle.

20. Section 20(b) makes possession of contraband articles an offence. Section 20 appears in Chapter IV of the Act, which relates to offences for possession of such articles. It is submitted that to make the possession illicit, there must be conscious possession.

21. It is highlighted that unless the possession was coupled with the requisite mental element, i.e., conscious possession and not mere custody without awareness of the nature of such possession, Section 20 is not attracted.

22. The expression “possession” is a polymorphous term which assumes different colours in different contexts. It may carry different meanings in contextually different

backgrounds. It is impossible, as was observed in the *Supdt. & Remembrancer of Legal Affairs, W.B. v. Anil Kumar Bhunja* [(1979) 4 SCC 274: 1979 SCC (Cri) 1038: AIR 1980 SC 52] to work out a completely logical and precise definition of “possession” uniformly applicable to all situations in the context of all statutes.

23. The word “conscious” means awareness of a particular fact. It is a state of mind which is deliberate or intended.

24. As noted in *Gunwantlal v. State of M.P.* [(1972) 2 SCC 194: 1972 SCC (Cri) 678: AIR 1972 SC 1756], possession in a given case need not be physical possession but can be constructive, having power and control over the article in the case in question, while the person to whom physical possession is given holds it subject to that power or control.

25. The word “possession” means the legal right to possession (see *Heath v. Drown* [(1972) 2 All ER 561: 1973 AC 498: (1972) 2 WLR 1306 (HL)]). In an interesting case, it was observed that where a person keeps his firearm in his mother's flat, which is safer than his own home, he must be considered to be in possession of the same. (See *Sullivan v. Earl of Caithness* [(1976) 1 All ER 844: 1976 QB 966: (1976) 2 WLR 361 (QBD)].)

26. Once possession is established, the person who claims that it was not a conscious possession has to establish it because how he came to be in possession is within his special knowledge. Section 35 of the Act gives a statutory recognition of this position because of the presumption available in law. Similar is the position in terms of Section 54, where a presumption is also available to be drawn from possession of illicit articles.

27. In the factual scenario of the present case, not only possession but conscious possession has been established. It has not been shown by the accused-appellants that the possession was not conscious in the logical background of Sections 35 and 54 of the Act.”

12. Reliance was placed upon the judgment of this Court in *Amar Nath* (supra), wherein this Court held that a Taxi driver cannot be held to be in possession when he had not behaved abnormally. The contraband was not hidden, but it was visible. These considerations do not apply to the petitioner. The petitioner knew Amar Nath, who had tried to conceal the bag kept by him from which the recovery was ultimately effected. Once the possession is proved, there would be a presumption regarding the mental state under Sections 35 and 54 of the NDPS Act, and the burden would shift upon the accused to rebut it. Hence, *prima facie*, the version of the prosecution has to be accepted as correct that the petitioner was found in possession of 1.511 kilograms of charas, which is a commercial quantity. Hence, the rigours of Section 37 of the NDPS Act apply to the present case.

13. Section 37 of the NDPS Act provides that in an offence involving a commercial quantity, the Court should be satisfied that the accused is not guilty of the commission of an offence and is not likely to commit any offence while on bail. It reads as follows:

“37. Offences to be cognisable 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 cognisable.

(b) no person accused of an offence punishable for offences under section 19, section 24, or section 27A and also for offences involving commercial quantity, shall be released on bail or 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 an 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.”

14. This Section was interpreted by the Hon'ble Supreme Court in *Union of India Versus Niyazuddin & Another* (2018) 13 SCC 738, and it was held that in the absence of the satisfaction that the accused is not guilty of an offence and he is not likely to commit an offence while on bail, he cannot be released. It was observed:

“7. Section 37 of the NDPS Act contains special provisions with regard to the grant of bail in respect of certain offences enumerated under the said Section. They are:

- (1) In the case of a person accused of an offence punishable under Section 19,
- (2) Under Section 24,
- (3) Under Section 27A and
- (4) offences involving a commercial quantity.

8. The accusation in the present case is with regard to the fourth factor, namely, commercial quantity. Be that as it may, once the Public Prosecutor opposes the application for bail to a person accused of the enumerated offences under Section 37 of the NDPS Act, in case the court proposes to grant bail to such a person, two conditions are to be mandatorily satisfied in addition to the normal requirements under the provisions of the Cr.P.C. or any other enactment.

- (1) The court must be satisfied that there are reasonable grounds for believing that the person is not guilty of such an offence;
- (2) that person is not likely to commit any offence while on bail.”

15. This position was reiterated in *State of Kerala Versus Rajesh*, AIR 2020 SC 721, wherein it was held:

“19. This Court has laid down broad parameters to be followed while considering the application for bail moved by the accused involved in offences under the NDPS Act. In *Union of India vs Ram Samujh and Ors.*, (1999) 9 SCC 429, it has been elaborated as under: –

"7. It is to be borne in mind that the aforesaid legislative mandate is required to be adhered to and followed. It should be borne in mind that in a murder case, the accused commits the murder of one or two persons, while those persons who are

dealing in narcotic drugs are instrumental in causing death or in inflicting death-blow to a number of innocent young victims, who are vulnerable; it causes deleterious effects and a deadly impact on the society; they are a hazard to the society; even if they are released temporarily, in all probability, they would continue their nefarious activities of trafficking and/or dealing in intoxicants clandestinely. The reason may be the large stake and illegal profit involved. This Court, dealing with the contention with regard to punishment under the NDPS Act, has succinctly observed about the adverse effect of such activities in *Durand Didier vs Chief Secy., Union Territory of Goa*, (1990) 1 SCC 95) as under:

24. With deep concern, we may point out that the organised activities of the underworld and the clandestine smuggling of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances into this country and illegal trafficking in such drugs and substances have led to drug addiction among a sizeable section of the public, particularly the adolescents and students of both sexes and the menace has assumed serious and alarming proportions in the recent years. Therefore, in order to effectively control and eradicate this proliferating and booming devastating menace, causing deleterious effects and a deadly impact on society as a whole, Parliament, in its wisdom, has made effective provisions by introducing Act 81 of 1985 specifying mandatory minimum imprisonment and fine.

8. To check the menace of dangerous drugs flooding the market, Parliament has provided that the person accused of offences under the NDPS Act should not be released on bail during trial unless

the mandatory conditions provided in Section 37, namely,

(i) there are reasonable grounds for believing that the accused is not guilty of such offence; and

(ii) that he is not likely to commit any offence while on bail are satisfied. The High Court has not given any justifiable reason for not abiding by the aforesaid mandate while ordering the release of the respondent accused on bail. Instead of attempting to take a holistic view of the harmful socio-economic consequences and health hazards which would accompany trafficking illegally in dangerous drugs, the court should implement the law in the spirit with which Parliament, after due deliberation, has amended."

20. The scheme of Section 37 reveals that the exercise of power to grant bail is not only subject to the limitations contained under Section 439 of the CrPC but is also subject to the limitation placed by Section 37, which commences with the non-obstante clause. The operative part of the said section is in the negative form prescribing the enlargement of bail to any person accused of the commission of an offence under the Act unless the two conditions are satisfied. The first condition is that the prosecution must be given an opportunity to oppose the application, and the second is that the Court must be satisfied that there are reasonable grounds for believing that he is not guilty of such an offence. If either of these two conditions is not satisfied, the ban on granting bail operates.

21. The expression "reasonable grounds" means something more than prima facie grounds. It contemplates substantial probable causes for believing that the accused is not guilty of the alleged offence. The

reasonable belief contemplated in the provision requires the existence of such facts and circumstances as are sufficient in themselves to justify satisfaction that the accused is not guilty of the alleged offence. In the case at hand, the High Court seems to have completely overlooked the underlying object of Section 37 that, in addition to the limitations provided under the CrPC, or any other law for the time being in force, regulating the grant of bail, its liberal approach in the matter of bail under the NDPS Act is indeed uncalled for.”

16. A similar view was taken in *Union of India v. Mohd. Nawaz Khan*, (2021) 10 SCC 100: (2021) 3 SCC (Cri) 721: 2021 SCC OnLine SC 1237, wherein it was observed at page 110:

“21. Under Section 37(1)(b)(ii), the limitations on the grant of bail for offences punishable under Sections 19, 24 or 27-A and also for offences involving a commercial quantity are:

- (i) The Prosecutor must be given an opportunity to oppose the application for bail; and
- (ii) (ii) There must exist “reasonable grounds to believe” that (a) the person is not guilty of such an offence, and (b) he is not likely to commit any offence while on bail.

22. The standard prescribed for the grant of bail is “reasonable ground to believe” that the person is *not* guilty of the offence. Interpreting the standard of “reasonable grounds to believe”, a two-judge Bench of this Court in *Union of India v. Shiv Shanker Kesari*, (2007) 7 SCC 798: (2007) 3 SCC (Cri) 505, held that: (SCC pp. 801-02, paras 7-8 & 10-11)

“7. The expression used in Section 37(1)(b)(ii) is “reasonable grounds”. The expression means something more than *prima facie* grounds. It connotes

substantial probable causes for believing that the accused is not guilty of the offence charged, and this reasonable belief contemplated, in turn, points to the existence of such facts and circumstances as are sufficient in themselves to justify the recording of satisfaction that the accused is not guilty of the offence charged.

8. The word “reasonable” has in law the prima facie meaning of reasonable in regard to those circumstances of which the actor, called on to act reasonably, knows or ought to know. It is difficult to give an exact definition of the word “reasonable”.

‘7. ... *Stroud's Judicial Dictionary*, 4th Edn., p. 2258 states that it would be unreasonable to expect an exact definition of the word “reasonable”. Reason varies in its conclusions according to the idiosyncrasies of the individual and the times and circumstances in which he thinks. The reasoning which built up the old scholastic logic sounds now like the jingling of a child's toy.’

[See *MCD v. Jagan Nath Ashok Kumar*, (1987) 4 SCC 497, SCC p. 504, para 7 and *Gujarat Water Supply & Sewerage Board v. Unique Erectors (Gujarat) (P) Ltd.*, (1989) 1 SCC 532]

10. The word “reasonable” signifies “in accordance with reason”. In the ultimate analysis, it is a question of fact whether a particular act is reasonable or not, which depends on the circumstances in a given situation. (See *Municipal Corpn. of Greater Mumbai v. Kamla Mills Ltd.* (2003) 6 SCC 315]

11. The court, while considering the application for bail with reference to Section

37 of the Act, is not called upon to record a finding of not guilty. It is for the limited purpose essentially confined to the question of releasing the accused on bail that the court is called upon to see if there are reasonable grounds for believing that the accused is not guilty and records its satisfaction about the existence of such grounds. But the court has not to consider the matter as if it is pronouncing a judgment of acquittal and recording a finding of not guilty.”(emphasis supplied)

23. Based on the above precedent, the test which the High Court and this Court are required to apply while granting bail is whether there are reasonable grounds to believe that the accused has *not* committed an offence and whether he is likely to commit any offence while on bail. Given the seriousness of offences punishable under the NDPS Act and in order to curb the menace of drug trafficking in the country, stringent parameters for the grant of bail under the NDPS Act have been prescribed.”

17. It was held in *Union of India v. Ajay Kumar Singh, 2023 SCC OnLine SC 346*, that bail cannot be granted without complying with the requirement of Section 37 of the NDPS Act. It was observed:

4. This apart, it is noticed that the High Court, in passing the impugned order of bail, had lost sight of Section 37 of the NDPS Act, which, *inter alia*, provides that no person accused of an offence involving commercial quantity shall be released on bail unless the twin conditions laid down therein are satisfied, namely, (i) the public prosecutor has been given an opportunity to oppose the bail application; and (ii) the court is satisfied that there are reasonable grounds for believing that he is not guilty

of such an offence and that he is not likely to commit any such offence while on bail.

15. For the sake of convenience Section 37(1) is reproduced hereinbelow:—

“37. Offences to be cognisable and non-bailable.—

(1) Notwithstanding anything contained in the Criminal Procedure Code, 1973 (2 of 1974)–

(a) every offence punishable under this Act shall be cognisable.

(b) no person accused of an offence punishable for 2[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.”

16. In view of the above provisions, it is implicit that no person accused of an offence involving trade in a commercial quantity of narcotics is liable to be released on bail unless the court is satisfied that there are reasonable grounds for believing that he is not guilty of such an offence and that he is not likely to commit any offence while on bail.

18. It was held in *State of Meghalaya v. Lalrintluanga Sailo*, 2024 SCC OnLine SC 1751, that the grant of bail without considering Section 37 of the NDPS Act is impermissible. It was observed:

“5. There cannot be any doubt with respect to the position that, in cases involving the commercial quantity of narcotic drugs or psychotropic substances, while considering the application of bail, the Court is bound to ensure the satisfaction of conditions under Section 37(1)(b)(ii) of the NDPS Act. The said provision reads thus:—

“37(1)(b)(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.”

6. While considering the cases under the NDPS Act, one cannot be oblivious of the objects and reasons for bringing the said enactment after repealing the then-existing laws relating to Narcotic drugs. The object and reasons given in the acts themselves read thus:—

“An act to consolidate and amend the law relating to narcotic drugs, to make stringent provisions for the control and regulation of operations relating to narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, to provide for the forfeiture of property derived from, or used in, illicit traffic in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, to implement the provisions of the International Convention on Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances and for matters connected therewith.”

In the decision in *Collector of Customs, New Delhi v. Ahmadaliev Nodira* (2004) 3 SCC 549, the three-judge bench of this Court considered the provisions under Section 37(1)(b) as also 37(1)(b)(ii) of the

NDPS Act, with regard to the expression “reasonable grounds” used therein. This Court held that it means something more than the *prima facie* grounds and that it contemplates substantial and probable causes for believing that the accused is not guilty of the alleged offence. Furthermore, it was held that the reasonable belief contemplated in the provision would require the existence of such facts and circumstances as are sufficient in themselves to justify satisfaction that the accused is not guilty of the alleged offence.

As relates to the twin conditions under Section 37(1)(b)(ii) of the NDPS Act, viz., that, firstly, there are reasonable grounds for believing that the accused is not guilty of such offence and, secondly, he is not likely to commit any offence while on bail it was held therein that they are cumulative and not alternative. Satisfaction of the existence of those twin conditions had to be based on the ‘reasonable grounds’, as referred to above.

7. In the decision in *State of Kerala v. Rajesh* (2020) 12 SCC 122, after reiterating the broad parameters laid down by this Court to be followed while considering an application for bail moved by an accused involved in offences under the NDPS Act, in paragraph 18 thereof this Court held that the scheme of Section 37 of the NDPS Act would reveal that the exercise of power to grant bail in such cases is not only subject to the limitations contained under Section 439 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, but also subject to the limitation placed by Section 37(1)(b)(ii), NDPS Act. Further, it was held that in case one of the two conditions thereunder is not satisfied, the ban on granting bail would operate.

8. Thus, the provisions under Section 37(1)(b)(ii) of the NDPS Act and the decisions referred supra reveal the consistent view of this Court that while considering the application for bail made by an accused involved in an offence under the NDPS Act, a liberal approach ignoring

the mandate under Section 37 of the NDPS Act is impermissible. Recording a finding mandated under Section 37 of the NDPS Act, which is a *sine qua non* for granting bail to an accused under the NDPS Act, cannot be avoided while passing orders on such applications.”

19. In the present case, the prosecution has collected sufficient material to connect the petitioner with the commission of the crime. There is nothing on record to show that the petitioner would not indulge in the commission of an offence if released on bail. Hence, he has not satisfied the twin conditions laid down in Section 37 of the NDPS Act.

20. It was submitted that an independent witness has turned hostile, and the petitioner is entitled to bail on this consideration. Reliance was placed upon the judgment of the Delhi High Court in *Sonu @ Sam Vs. Government of NCT Delhi, Bail Application No. 2740 of 2023, decided on 22.03.2024*. This submission and the judgment will not help the petitioner. It was laid down by the Hon’ble Supreme Court in *X Vs. State of Rajasthan MANU/SC/1267/2024* that ordinarily, in serious offences Trial Court or the High Court should not entertain the bail application of the accused after the commencement of the trial and grant bail because of some discrepancy in the testimony. It was observed: –

“14. Ordinarily, in serious offences like rape, murder, dacoity, etc., once the trial commences and the prosecution starts examining its witnesses, the Court, be it the Trial Court or the High Court, should be loath in entertaining the bail application of the Accused.

15. Over a period of time, we have noticed two things, i.e., (i) either bail is granted after the charge is framed and just before the victim is to be examined by the prosecution before the trial court, or (ii) bail is granted once the recording of the oral evidence of the victim is complete by looking into some discrepancies here or there in the deposition and thereby testing the credibility of the victim.

16. We are of the view that the aforesaid is not a correct practice that the Courts below should adopt. Once the trial commences, it should be allowed to reach its conclusion, which may either result in the conviction of the Accused or the acquittal of the Accused. The moment the High Court exercises its discretion in favour of the Accused and orders the release of the Accused on bail by looking into the deposition of the victim, it will have its own impact on the pending trial when it comes to appreciating the oral evidence of the victim. It is only if the trial gets unduly delayed and that, too, for no fault on the part of the Accused, the Court may be justified in ordering his release on bail on the ground that the right of the Accused to have a speedy trial has been infringed.”

21. Similarly, it was held by this Court in *Suraj Singh v.*

State of H.P., 2022 SCC OnLine HP 268 that the Court exercising

bail jurisdiction cannot appreciate the evidence. It was observed:

“10. Petitioner has placed reliance on the statements of witnesses already recorded by the learned Special Judge, in support of his argument to the effect that, from perusal of these statements, reasonable grounds can be entertained for concluding prima facie innocence of the

petitioner. The arguments raised on behalf of the petitioner deserve to be rejected for the reason that this Court, while dealing with the bail application, will not appreciate the evidence being recorded during the trial. Undisputedly, only some of the witnesses out of the entire list of witnesses relied upon by the prosecution have been examined. In these circumstances, it is not prudent to form any opinion as to the innocence or guilt of the petitioner on the basis of such partial evidence.”

22. Therefore, the submission that the petitioner is entitled to bail because an independent witness has turned hostile cannot be accepted.

23. It was submitted that there is a delay in the progress of the trial, and the petitioner is entitled to bail. This submission will not help the petitioner. It was laid down by the Hon’ble Supreme Court in *Union of India vs. Vijin K. Varghese* 2025:INSC:1316 that bail cannot be granted on the prolonged incarceration without satisfying the twin conditions laid down under Section 37 of the NDPS Act. It was observed: -

“17. The High Court then, on the strength of those premises, recorded a finding that there exist reasonable grounds to believe that the applicant is not guilty of the alleged offence, treating prolonged incarceration and likely delay as the justification for bail. Such a finding is not a casual observation. It is the statutory threshold under Section 37(1)(b)(ii), which would disentitle the discretionary relief and grant of bail must necessarily rest on careful appraisal of the material available. A conclusion of this nature, if returned without addressing

the prosecution's assertions of operative control and antecedent involvement, risks trenching upon the appreciation of evidence which would be in the domain of the trial court at first instance.

18. This Court ordinarily shows deference to the discretion exercised by the High Court while considering the grant of bail. However, offences involving a commercial quantity of narcotic drugs stand on a distinct statutory footing. Section 37 enacts a specific embargo on the grant of bail and obligates the Court to record satisfaction on the twin requirements noticed above, in addition to the ordinary tests under the Code of Criminal Procedure.

19. In the present case, the High Court has not undertaken the analysis of those twin requirements with reference to the material placed by the prosecution. The orders dated 22.01.2025 and 12.03.2025 do not advert to the allegation regarding the respondent's prior involvement in a seizure of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances only days prior to the seizure forming the subject matter of the present complaint, nor do they engage with the prosecution's assertion as to the respondent's role in arranging, importing, clearing and supervising the consignments. The omission to consider these factors bears directly upon the statutory satisfaction required by Section 37(1)(b)."

24. A similar view was taken in *Union of India v Namdeo Ashruba Nakade SLP (Crl.) 9792/2025, decided on 07.11.2025*, wherein it was observed:

"11. In the present case, this Court finds that though the Respondent-accused was in custody for one year, four months, and charges have not been framed, yet the allegations are serious inasmuch as not only is the recovery much in excess of the commercial quantity, but the Re-

spondent-accused allegedly got the cavities ingeniously fabricated below the trailer to conceal the contraband.

12. Prima facie, this Court is of the opinion that the Respondent-accused is involved in drug trafficking in an organised manner. Consequently, no case for dispensing with the mandatory requirement of Section 37 of the NDPS Act is made out in the present matter.”

25. Therefore, in view of the binding precedent of the Hon’ble Supreme Court, the bail cannot be granted because of the long incarceration when the twin conditions laid down under Section 37(1)(b) are not satisfied.

26. No other point was urged.

27. In view of the above, the present petition fails and the same is dismissed.

28. The observations made hereinabove are regarding the disposal of this petition and will have no bearing, whatsoever, on the case's merits.

(Rakesh Kainthla)
Judge

24th November 2025
(Chander)