

**Anmolpreet Singh** ...**Appellant**

**Versus**

**U.T. Chandigarh** ...**Respondent**

|    |                                                                                                      |                |
|----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|
| 1. | The date when the judgment is reserved                                                               | 22.05.2026     |
| 2. | The date when the judgment is pronounced                                                             | 17.07.2026     |
| 3. | The date when the judgment is uploaded                                                               | 20.07.2026     |
| 4. | Whether only operative part of the judgment is pronounced or whether the full judgment is pronounced | Full           |
| 5. | The delay, if any of the pronouncement of full judgment, and reasons thereof                         | Not applicable |

Present : Mr. Davinder Kumar, Advocate for  
Mr. PKS Phoolka, Advocate,  
For the appellant.

Mr. Manish Bansal, Public Prosecutor with  
Mr. Ankur Bali, Additional Public Prosecutor and  
Ms. Diksha Sharma, Advocate,  
For respondent-U.T. Chandigarh

***LAPITA BANERJI, J.***

The appellant has challenged the order dated July 16, 2024, passed by Special Judge, NIA Court, Chandigarh, whereby his bail application in FIR No.29 of 26.02.2024 registered under Section 25,54,59 of the Arms Act, 1959, Sections 419, 471, 201, 120-B of the



Indian Penal Code, 1860 (hereinafter referred to as “the IPC”) and Sections 17, 18, 18-B, 20 of The Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 (hereinafter referred to as “the UAPA”), at Police Station Sector-36, Chandigarh, has been dismissed. The provisions of UAPA were later added to the FIR on March 11, 2024.

2. Learned counsel for the appellant submits that although it has been alleged that the appellant was involved in unlawful activities under the UAPA, but except for disclosure of one Kailash Chauhan @ Tiger, who had allegedly stated that the appellant was a member of terrorist Goldy Brar’s gang and had given shelter to the said Kailash Chauhan @ Tiger and some of the co-accused, there was no other incriminating material against him. It is only the statement of Kailash Chauhan @ Tiger alleging that the appellant and one Parwinder Singh @ Pindu have harboured the gang members of Goldy Brar and given them money on various occasions at the asking of Goldy Brar which led to the arrest of the appellant. There was also no legally admissible material on record to establish the involvement of appellant with any *designated terrorist* which could even suggest that the appellant has committed any offence and much less an offence under the UAPA.

3. It is further argued that the case of the prosecution, at best, was that the appellant harboured Sunny @ Sachin @ Maddy Manchanda, Umang and Kailash Chauhan @ Tiger at his flat in TDI City, Mohali and gave them money on several occasions at the asking of Goldy Brar, a *designated terrorist*. Under Section 19 of the UAPA, the punishment for harbouring any purported terrorist was three years upto life imprisonment



and the appellant is in custody for more than two years. There was no evidence to show that the aforesaid people were harboured at the instance of Goldy Brar. Therefore, on the basis of prolonged custody alone, the appellant should be released on bail.

4. He has relied on the judgment of *Hitendra Vishnu Thakur v. State of Maharashtra* reported in (1994)4 SCC 602 to submit that there was no allegation or the material to argue that the essential ingredients “constituting a terrorist act” as defined under Section 15 is present in this case. When such material is absent, the accused cannot be charged by invoking provisions of UAPA.

5. He has further placed reliance on the judgments of the Apex Court in *Union of India v. K.A. Najeeb*, reported in (2021) 3 SCC 713, *Shoma Kanti Sen v. State of Maharashtra and another*, reported in 2024 SCC OnLine SC 498, *Vernon v. The State of Maharashtra and another*, reported in 2023 SCC OnLine SC 885, *Sheikh Javed Iqbal @ Ashfaq Ansari @ Javed Ansari v. State of Uttar Pradesh*, reported in 2024 SCC OnLine SC 1755 and *Javed Gulam Nabi Shaikh v. State of Maharashtra and another*, reported in 2024 SCC OnLine SC 1693, wherein it has been held that long custody by itself would entitle the accused being tried under UAPA to the grant of bail by invoking Article 21 of the Constitution of India.

6. The Court had directed the State to file a comprehensive affidavit after filing of the supplementary challan, vide order dated January 15, 2026. Pursuant to the said direction, the State has filed a



comprehensive affidavit of Dhiraj Kumar, Deputy Superintendent of Police (Crime), Chandigarh Police.

7. Learned counsel for the State submits that appellant along with his co-accused is involved in anti-national activities. The prosecution's case is that on the basis of secret information, two boys were apprehended at around 11:45 pm on February 25, 2024 near Bus Stand, Sector-43, Chandigarh. The said boys were riding a white Activa without helmets. Upon enquiry, they revealed their names as Sunny @ Sachin @ Maddy Manchanda and Umang. Upon search being conducted one pistol and a live cartridge was found from the right pocket of Sunny's trousers and 03 live cartridges were recovered from Umang's trousers. All the cartridges bore the mark of "KF 7.65" on the back. FIR No.29 was initially registered on February 26, 2024 under Sections 25/54/59 of the Arms Act.

8. The prosecution's case is that the co-accused Parwinder Singh @ Pindu with the intention of harbouring the terrorists, had gone to Chandigarh Railway Station and brought back Sunny and Umang (members of Goldy Brar's gang) to his flat in TDI City, Sector-111, SAS Nagar, Mohali, in his Verna car. Thereafter, he shifted said Sunny and Umang to his friend's i.e the present appellant's flat. Kailash Chauhan @ Tiger along with Sunny and Umang, was then given shelter by the present appellant. Upon disclosure made by co-accused Kailash Chauhan @ Tiger, the present appellant-Anmolpreet Singh was arrested on February 28, 2024 from TDI City, Sector-111, SAS Nagar, Mohali after being identified by Sunny.



9. The prosecution further alleges that upon instructions from a *designated terrorist* Goldy Brar, co-accused Sunny, Umang and Maya had done *recce* at the premises of District Courts at Mohali, Chandigarh and Panchkula on February 12, 2024 with the motive of killing one gangster- Bhupinder @ Bhuppi Rana when he would come for his court hearing. Co-accused Sunny used to communicate with terrorists like Goldy Brar and Vicky Chauhan through his phone on Signal App and the present appellant has harboured members of Goldy Brar's gang.

10. The prosecution has also relied upon the account statement of the appellant for the relevant period to bring home his guilt in its comprehensive affidavit. Since there was a common intention to harbour members of a gang belonging to a *designated terrorist*, it is submitted that the appellant should not be enlarged on bail before the witnesses are fully examined

11. This Court has heard learned counsel for the parties and perused the material on record.

12. At the outset, it is appropriate to refer to Section 43(D) of the UAPA. Section 43(D) of the UAPA is reproduced hereinafter for ready reference:-

***“43 D. Modified application of certain provisions of the Code.—***

***(1) Notwithstanding anything contained in the Code or any other law, every offence punishable under this Act shall be deemed to be a cognizable offence within the meaning of clause (c) of section 2 of the Code, and “cognizable case” as defined in that clause shall be construed accordingly.***

***(2) Section 167 of the Code shall apply in relation to a case involving an offence punishable under this Act subject to the modification that in sub-section (2),—***



*(a) the references to “fifteen days”, “ninety days” and “sixty days”, wherever they occur, shall be construed as references to “thirty days”, “ninety days” and “ninety days” respectively; and*

*(b) after the proviso, the following provisos shall be inserted, namely:—*

*“Provided further that if it is not possible to complete the investigation within the said period of ninety days, the Court may if it is satisfied with the report of the Public Prosecutor indicating the progress of the investigation and the specific reasons for the detention of the accused beyond the said period of ninety days, extend the said period up to one hundred and eighty days:*

*Provided also that if the police officer making the investigation under this Act, requests, for the purposes of investigation, for police custody from judicial custody of any person in judicial custody, he shall file an affidavit stating the reasons for doing so and shall also explain the delay, if any, for requesting such police custody.*

*(3) Section 268 of the Code shall apply in relation to a case involving an offence punishable under this Act subject to the modification that—*

*(a) the reference in sub-section (1) thereof—*

*(i) to “the State Government” shall be construed as a reference to “the Central Government or the State Government.”;*

*(ii) to “order of the State Government” shall be construed as a reference to “order of the Central Government or the State Government, as the case may be”; and*

*(b) the reference in sub-section (2) thereof, to “the State Government” shall be construed as a reference to “the Central Government or the State Government, as the case may be”.*

*(4) Nothing in section 438 of the Code shall apply in relation to any case involving the arrest of any person accused of having committed an offence punishable under this Act*

*(5) Notwithstanding anything contained in the Code, no person accused of an offence punishable under Chapters IV and VI of this Act shall, if in custody, be released on bail or*



*on his own bond unless the Public Prosecutor has been given an opportunity of being heard on the application for such release: Provided that such accused person shall not be released on bail or on his own bond if the Court, on a perusal of the case diary or the report made under section 173 of the Code is of the opinion that there are reasonable grounds for believing that the accusation against such person is prima facie true.*

*(6) The restrictions on granting of bail specified in sub-section (5) is in addition to the restrictions under the Code or any other law for the time being in force on granting of bail.*

*(7) Notwithstanding anything contained in sub-sections (5) and (6), no bail shall be granted to a person accused of an offence punishable under this Act, if he is not an Indian citizen and has entered the country unauthorisedly or illegally except in very exceptional circumstances and for reasons to be recorded in writing."*

13. As per Section 43-D(5) of the UAPA, no person accused of an offence punishable under Chapter IV and VI of the UAPA shall, if in custody, be released on bail unless the public prosecutor has been given an opportunity of being heard on the application made by him for such relief and if the Court, on perusing the case diary or the report filed under Section 173 Cr.P.C is of the opinion that there are reasonable grounds for believing that the accusations against such persons are *prima facie* proved. Section 43-D(6) further stipulates that restrictions for grant of bail specified in Section 43-D(5) would be in addition to the restrictions provided under the Cr.P.C or any other law for the time being in force on granting of bail.

14. It appears from the comprehensive affidavit affirmed by Shri Dhiraj Kumar, DSP (Crime), Chandigarh Police, that *prima-facie* no incriminating material has been found against the present appellant.



Furthermore, no link evidence has also been established to connect the appellant to the commission of any crime, more so, to a crime/offence showing his involvement under UAPA.

15. The prosecution has not recovered any incriminating material like mobile phone etc from the present appellant which will show any link between the terrorist Goldy Brar and the present Appellant and also the co-accused Sunny, Umang, Maya and Parwinder Singh @Pindu. No link evidence is brought on record to show who had deposited the money, at whose instructions it was withdrawn and to whom it was paid. In case of Parwinder Singh @ Pindu, a CCTV footage is obtained to show after withdrawing the cash, Parwinder Singh @ Pindu paid the same to co-accused Umang. Just because in some photographs the appellant was found together with Sunny and Umang, it cannot be held that the appellant had the intent of committing a terrorist act. Apart from disclosure statements of Sunny and Kailash Chauhan @ Tiger, *prima-facie* no evidence has been collected against the appellant by the prosecution. The appellant is in custody for more than two years.

16. From the comprehensive affidavit of Shri Dhiraj Kumar, DSP (Crime), Chandigarh Police, it transpires that upon disclosure by Kailash Chauhan @ Tiger and identification by Sunny, the appellant was arrested on February 28, 2024 from TDI City, Sector-111, SAS Nagar, Mohali.

17. Article 21 of the Constitution of India enshrines the fundamental right to protection of life and liberty which also includes the right to a speedy trial. It has been held by the Supreme Court in a catena





of judgments that long custody by itself would entitle the accused under UAPA to the grant of bail by invoking Article 21 of the Constitution of India. The Constitutional Court would like to prevent a situation where the lengthy and arduous process of trial becomes the punishment in itself. Reference can be made to the judgment of the Supreme Court in *K.A. Najeeb's case (supra)*, wherein it has been held that long custody would be an essential factor while granting bail under UAPA. Article 21 of the Constitution of India provides right to speedy trial and long period of incarceration would be a good ground to grant bail to an under-trial for an offence punishable under UAPA. It has also been held that the embargo under Section 43-D of UAPA would not negate the powers of the Court to give effect to Article 21 of the Constitution of India. The relevant extract of the aforesaid judgment is as follows:

*“17. It is thus clear to us that the presence of statutory restrictions like Section 43-D(5) of UAPA per se does not oust the ability of Constitutional Courts to grant bail on grounds of violation of Part III of the Constitution. Whereas at commencement of proceedings, the Courts are expected to appreciate the legislative policy against grant of bail but the rigours of such provisions will melt down where there is no likelihood of trial being completed within a reasonable time and the period of incarceration already undergone has exceeded a substantial part of the prescribed sentence. Such an approach would safeguard against the possibility of provisions like Section 43-D (5) of UAPA being used as the sole metric for denial of bail or for wholesale breach of constitutional right to speedy trial.*

xxxxxxxxxxxxx

19. xxxxxx

*Instead, Section 43-D (5) of UAPA merely provides another possible ground for the competent Court to refuse bail, in addition to the well settled considerations like gravity of the offence, possibility of tampering with evidence, influencing the witnesses or chance of the accused evading the trial by absconsion etc.”*



18. The Supreme Court in the case of *Vernon (supra)* has held that serious allegations against accused by itself cannot be a reason to deny bail to the accused. The relevant extract thereof is reproduced hereunder:-

*“44. In the case of Zahoor Ahmad Shah Watali (supra) reference was made to the judgment of Jayendra Saraswathi Swamigal v. State of Tamil Nadu [(2005) 2 SCC 13] in which, citing two earlier decisions of this court in the cases of State v. Jagjit Singh (AIR 1962 SC 253) and Gurcharan Singh v. State of (UT of Delhi) [(1978) 1 SCC 118], the factors for granting bail under normal circumstances were discussed. It was held that the nature and seriousness of the offences, the character of the evidence, circumstances which are peculiar to the accused, a reasonable possibility of the presence of the accused not being secured at the trial; reasonable apprehension of witnesses being tampered with; the larger interest of the public or the State would be relevant factors for granting or rejecting bail. Juxtaposing the appellants’ case founded on Articles 14 and 21 of the Constitution of India with the aforesaid allegations and considering the fact that almost five years have lapsed since they were taken into custody, we are satisfied that the appellants have made out a case for granting bail. Allegations against them no doubt are serious, but for that reason alone bail cannot be denied to them. While dealing with the offences under Chapters IV and VI of the 1967 Act, we have referred to the materials available against them at this stage. These materials cannot justify continued detention of the appellants, pending final outcome of the case under the other provisions of the 1860 Code and the 1967 Act.”*

19. In the case of *Shoma Kanti Sen (supra)*, the Supreme Court has held that generally pre-conviction detention at the investigation stage is necessary to maintain purity in the course of trial and also to prevent an accused from being a fugitive from justice or to prevent further commission of an offence. Once it is apparent that a timely trial is not possible and the accused has suffered incarceration for a significant period of time, the Court would ordinarily be obligated to enlarge them



on bail as any form of deprivation of liberty must be proportionate to the facts of the case and also follow a just and fair procedure. A balance must be made between the prosecution's right to lead evidence of its choice and establish the charges beyond any doubt and simultaneously, the respondent's rights guaranteed under Part-III of the Constitution. The relevant extract is reproduced hereinafter:

“xxx

37. *In the case of K.A. Najeeb v. Union of India [(2021) 3 SCC 713], a three Judge Bench of this Court (of which one of us Aniruddha Bose, J was a party), has held that a Constitutional Court is not strictly bound by the prohibitory provisions of grant of bail in the 1967 Act and can exercise its constitutional jurisdiction to release an accused on bail who has been incarcerated for a long period of time, relying on Article 21 of Constitution of India. This decision was sought to be distinguished by Mr. Nataraj on facts relying on judgment of this Court in the case of Gurwinder Singh v. State of Punjab [2024 INSC 92]. In this judgment it has been held:-*

*"32. The Appellant's counsel has relied upon the case of KA Najeeb (supra) to back its contention that the appellant has been in jail for last five years which is contrary to law laid down in the said case. While this argument may appear compelling at first glance, it lacks depth and substance. In KA Najeeb's case this court was confronted with a circumstance wherein except the respondent-accused, other co-accused had already undergone trial and were sentenced to imprisonment of not exceeding eight years therefore this court's decision to consider bail was grounded in the anticipation of the impending sentence that the respondent accused might face upon conviction and since the respondent-accused had already served portion of the maximum imprisonment i.e., more than five years, this court took it as a factor influencing its assessment to grant bail. Further, in KA Najeeb's case the trial of the respondent accused was severed from the other co-accused owing to his absconding and he was traced back in 2015 and was being separately tried thereafter and the NIA had filed a long list of witnesses that were left to be examined with reference to the said accused therefore this*



*court was of the view of unlikelihood of completion of trial in near future. However, in the present case the trial is already under way and 22 witnesses including the protected witnesses have been examined. As already discussed, the material available on record indicates the involvement of the appellant in furtherance of terrorist activities backed by members of banned terrorist organization involving exchange of large quantum of money through different channels which needs to be deciphered and therefore in such a scenario if the appellant is released on bail there is every likelihood that he will influence the key witnesses of the case which might hamper the process of justice. Therefore, mere delay in trial pertaining to grave offences as one involved in the instant case cannot be used as a ground to grant bail. Hence, the aforesaid argument on the behalf of the appellant cannot be accepted.”*

38. Relying on this judgment, Mr. Nataraj, submits that bail is not a fundamental right. Secondly, to be entitled to be enlarged on bail, an accused charged with offences enumerated in Chapters IV and VI of the 1967 Act, must fulfill the conditions specified in Section 43D (5) thereof. We do not accept the first part of this submission. This Court has already accepted right of an accused under the said offences of the 1967 Act to be enlarged on bail founding such right on Article 21 of the Constitution of India. This was in the case of *Najeeb (supra)*, and in that judgment, long period of incarceration was held to be a valid ground to enlarge an accused on bail in spite of the bail-restricting provision of Section 43D (5) of the 1967 Act. Pre-conviction detention is necessary to collect evidence (at the investigation stage), to maintain purity in the course of trial and also to prevent an accused from being fugitive from justice. Such detention is also necessary to prevent further commission of offence by the same accused. Depending on gravity and seriousness of the offence alleged to have been committed by an accused, detention before conclusion of trial at the investigation and post-charge sheet stage has the sanction of law broadly on these reasonings. But any form of deprivation of liberty results in breach of Article 21 of the Constitution of India and must be justified on the ground of being reasonable, following a just and fair procedure and such deprivation must be proportionate in the facts of a given case. These would be the overarching principles which the law Courts would have to apply while testing prosecution's



*plea of pre-trial detention, both at investigation and post-charge sheet stage.”*

39. *As regards second part of Mr Nataraj's argument which we have noted in the preceding paragraph, we accept it with a qualification. The reasoning in Najeeb (supra) case would also have to be examined, if it is the constitutional court which is examining prosecution's plea for retaining in custody an accused charged with bail-restricting offences. He cited the case of Gurwinder Singh (supra) in which the judgment of K.A. Najeeb (supra) was distinguished on facts and a judgment of the High Court rejecting the prayer for bail of the appellant was upheld. But this was a judgment in the given facts of that case and did not dislocate the axis of reasoning on constitutional ground enunciated in the case of Najeeb (supra). On behalf of the prosecution, another order of a coordinate Bench passed on 18-1-2024, in the case of Mazhar Khan v. NIA was cited. In this order, the petitioner's prayer for overturning a bail-rejection order of the High Court under similar provisions of the 1967 Act was rejected by the coordinate Bench applying the ratio of the case of Watali (supra) judgment and also considering the case of Vernon (supra). We have proceeded in this judgment accepting the restrictive provisions to be valid and applicable and then dealt with the individual allegations in terms of the proviso to Section 43-D (5) of the 1967 Act. Thus, the prosecution's case, so far as the appellant is concerned, does not gain any premium from the reasoning forming the basis of Mazhar Khan (supra).’*

*[emphasis supplied].*

20. In the case of ***Javed Gulam Nabi Shaikh*** (supra), the Supreme Court has observed that criminals are not born but made out. Howsoever serious a crime may be, an accused has a right to a speedy trial as enshrined under the Constitution of India. Moreover, the purpose of bail is only to secure the attendance of the accused at the trial and bail is not to be withheld as a form of punishment. The relevant extract thereof is reproduced hereunder:

*“13. The aforesaid observations have resonated, time and again, in several judgments, such as Kadra Pahadiya & Ors. v. State of Bihar reported in (1981) 3 SCC 671 and Abdul*



*Rehman Antulay v. R.S. Nayak* reported in (1992) 1 SCC 225. In the latter the Court reemphasized the right to speedy trial, and further held that an accused, facing prolonged trial, has no option:

*“The State or complainant prosecutes him. It is, thus, the obligation of the State or the complainant, as the case may be, to proceed with the case with reasonable promptitude. Particularly, in this country, where the large majority of accused come from poorer and weaker sections of the society, not versed in the ways of law, where they do not often get competent legal advice, the application of the said rule is wholly inadvisable. Of course, in a given case, if an accused demands speedy trial and yet he is not given one, may be a relevant factor in his favour. But we cannot disentitle an accused from complaining of infringement of his right to speedy trial on the ground that he did not ask for or insist upon a speedy trial.”*

14. In *Mohd Muslim @ Hussain v. State (NCT of Delhi)* reported in 2023 INSC 311, this Court observed as under:

*“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. According to the Union Home Ministry’s response to Parliament, the National Crime Records Bureau had recorded that as on 31st December 2021, over 5,54,034 prisoners were lodged in jails against total capacity of 4,25,069 lakhs in the country. Of these 122,852 were convicts; the rest 4,27,165 were undertrials.*

*22. The danger of unjust imprisonment, is that inmates are at risk of “prisonisation” a term described by the Kerala High Court in *A Convict Prisoner v. State* reported in 1993 Cri LJ 3242, as “a radical transformation” whereby the prisoner loses his identity. He is known by a number. He loses personal possessions. He has no personal relationships. Psychological problems result from loss of freedom, status, possessions, dignity any autonomy of personal life. The inmate culture of prison turns out to be dreadful. The prisoner becomes hostile by ordinary standards. Self-perception changes.*

*23. There is a further danger of the prisoner turning to crime, “as crime not only turns admirable, but the*



*more professional the crime, more honour is paid to the criminal” (also see Donald Clemmer’s ‘The Prison Community’ published in 1940). Incarceration has further deleterious effects - where the accused belongs to the weakest economic strata: immediate loss of livelihood, and in several cases, scattering of families as well as loss of family bonds and alienation from society. The courts therefore, have to be sensitive to these aspects (because in the event of an acquittal, the loss to the accused is irreparable), and ensure that trials – especially in cases, where special laws enact stringent provisions, are taken up and concluded speedily.”*

Xxxxxxx

*18. Criminals are not born out but made. The human potential in everyone is good and so, never write off any criminal as beyond redemption. This humanist fundamental is often missed when dealing with delinquents, juvenile and adult. Indeed, every saint has a past and every sinner a future. When a crime is committed, a variety of factors is responsible for making the offender commit the crime. Those factors may be social and economic, may be, the result of value erosion or parental neglect; may be, because of the stress of circumstances, or the manifestation of temptations in a milieu of affluence contrasted with indigence or other privations.”*

21. In the case of ***Sheikh Javed Iqbal @ Ashfaq Ansari @ Javed Ansari*** (*supra*), it has been held that right to life and personal liberty enshrined under Article 21 of the Constitution of India is overarching and sacrosanct. A Constitutional Court cannot be restrained from granting bail to an accused on account of restrictive statutory provisions in a penal statute if it finds that the right of the accused-undertrial under Article 21 of the Constitution of India has been infringed. In that event, such statutory restrictions would not come in the way. Even in the case of interpretation of a penal statute, howsoever stringent it may be, a constitutional court has to lean in favour of constitutionalism and the rule of law, of which liberty is an intrinsic part.



Furthermore, it was held that the view taken in *K.A. Najeeb's case* (*supra*) rendered by a three Judge Bench of the Apex Court was binding on a Two Judge Bench like *Sheikh Javed Iqbal's case* (*supra*). The relevant extract of *Sheikh Javed Iqbal's case* (*supra*) is reproduced hereunder:-

“31. In *Gurwinder Singh's case* (*supra*) on which reliance has been placed by the respondent, a two Judge Bench of this Court distinguished *K.A. Najeeb's case* (*supra*) holding that the appellant in *K.A. Najeeb's case* (*supra*) was in custody for five years and that the trial 25 of the appellant in that case was severed from the other co-accused whose trial had concluded whereupon they were sentenced to imprisonment of eight years; but in *Gurwinder Singh*, the trial was already underway and that twenty two witnesses including the protected witnesses have been examined. It was in that context, the two Judge Bench of this Court in *Gurwinder Singh* observed that mere delay in trial pertaining to grave offences cannot be used as a ground to grant bail.

32. This Court has, time and again, emphasized that right to life and personal liberty enshrined under Article 21 of the Constitution of India is overarching and sacrosanct. A constitutional court cannot be restrained from granting bail to an accused on account of restrictive statutory provisions in a penal statute if it finds that the right of the accused-undertrial under Article 21 of the Constitution of India has been infringed. In that event, such statutory restrictions would not come in the way. Even in the case of interpretation of a penal statute, howsoever stringent it may be, a constitutional court has to lean in favour of constitutionalism and the rule of law of which liberty is an intrinsic part. In the given facts of a particular case, a constitutional court may decline to grant bail. But it would be very wrong to say that under a particular statute, bail cannot be granted. It would run counter to the very grain of our constitutional jurisprudence. In any view of the matter, *K.A. Najeeb's case* (*supra*) being rendered by a three Judge Bench is binding on a Bench of two Judges like us.

Xxxxxx

33. xxx

Continued incarceration of the appellant cannot be justified  
xxx.”





22. In *Jalaluddin Khan v. Union of India* reported in (2024) 10 SCC 574, the appellant was, *inter-alia*, charged under Sections 13, 18, 18-A and 20 of the UAPA. He was arrested on July 12, 2022 and a charge-sheet was filed on January 07, 2023. The relevant part of the charge-sheet reads as follows:

“xxx

*17.1 Bihar Police had received information about a plan to disturb the proposed visit of Hon'ble Prime Minister to Bihar by some suspected persons who had assembled in Phulwarisharif area. On 11.07.2022 at about 19:30 hrs, on secret information, a raid was carried out by the police officers of PS Phulwarisharif, Patna at the rented house/premises of Athar Parvej (A-1) and recovered 05 sets of documents “India 2047 Towards Rule of Islamic India, Internal Document: Not for Circulation”, Pamphlets “Popular Front of India 20-2-2021” – 25 copies in Hindi and 30 copies in Urdu, 49 cloth flags, 02 magazines “Mulk ke liye Popular Front ke saath” and one copy of rent agreement on non-judicial stamp by Farhat Bano w/o Md. Jalaluddin Khan (A-2) with tenant Athar Parvej (A-1) son of Abdul Qayum Ansari. The recovered articles and a Samsung mobile phone having SIM card of accused Md. Jalaluddin (A-2) were seized in the instant case. They were related to anti-India activities.”*

Xxx”

23. The Hon'ble Supreme Court was of the opinion that nothing in the charge-sheet showed that the appellant had taken part in or committed unlawful activities as defined in UAPA. No material was produced on record to show that the appellant advocated, abetted, advised or incited the commission of terrorist acts or preparatory activity. Succinct reasoning leading to the grant of bail is reproduced herein under:

“xxx

*30. Therefore, on plain reading of the charge-sheet, it is not possible to record a conclusion that there are reasonable*



*grounds for believing that the accusation against the appellant of commission of offences punishable under UAPA is prima-facie true. We have taken the charge-sheet and the statement of witness Z as they are without conducting a mini-trial. Looking at what we have held earlier, it is impossible to record a prima-facie finding that there were reasonable grounds for believing that the accusation against the appellant of commission of offences under UAPA was prima-facie true. No antecedents of the appellant have been brought on record.*

31. *The upshot of the above discussion is that there was no reason to reject the bail application filed by the appellant.*

32. *Before we part with the judgment, we must mention here that the Special Court and the High Court did not consider the material in the charge-sheet objectively. Perhaps the focus was more on the activities of PFI, and therefore, the appellant's case could not be properly appreciated. When a case is made out for a grant of bail, the Courts should not have any hesitation in granting bail. The allegations of the prosecution may be very serious. But, the duty of the Courts is to consider the case for grant of bail in accordance with the law. "Bail is the rule and jail is an exception" is a settled law.*

33. *Even in a case like the present case where there are stringent conditions for the grant of bail in the relevant statutes, the same rule holds good with only modification that the bail can be granted if the conditions in the statute are satisfied. The rule also means that once a case is made out for grant of bail, the Court cannot decline to grant bail. If the Courts start denying bail in deserving cases, it will be a violation of the rights guaranteed under Article 21 of our Constitution.*  
xxx"

24. In the case of "**Mukesh Salam v. State of Chhattisgarh and another**" SLP (Criminal) No.3655 of 2024, vide an order dated August 30, 2024, the petitioner was charged under Sections 10, 13, 17, 38 (1) (2), 40, 22-A and 22-C of UAPA and directed to be released on bail as he was in custody since May 06, 2020 and 40 out of 100 prosecution witnesses had been examined. The Apex Court observed that continued



detention of the petitioner would not subserve the ends of justice as there was no likelihood of early conclusion of the trial. However, along with the conditions that may be imposed by the Special Judge (NIA Act) following two conditions were imposed as the conditions for grant of bail:

*6 (i) The petitioner shall report to the nearest police station once every week and*

*(ii) The petitioner shall remain present before the trial Judge on every date of the trial without fail, unless his presence is dispensed with by the trial Court, and shall cooperate in the early conclusion of the trial.”*

25. In a recent case in ***Tapas Kumar Palit v. State of Chhattisgarh***, reported in 2025 SCC OnLine SC 322, by a judgment dated February 14, 2025, the Supreme Court set-aside the impugned order passed by the High Court, rejecting the bail of the appellant. As per the prosecution’s case, the appellant was travelling in a vehicle carrying articles which could be ordinarily related to Naxalite activities. Upon search being conducted, it was alleged that the appellant was in conscious possession of the following articles:

“xxx

*4. The search was undertaken and the following articles were recovered from the car alleged to be in conscious possession of the appellant herein:-*

- (i) 95 pair of shoes*
- (ii) Green black printed cloth*
- (iii) Two bundles of electric wire each of 100 metere*
- (iv) LED lens and*
- (v) Walki talki and other articles.*

*Xxx”*



26. In that case, the appellant was arrested on March 24, 2020. After filing of the charge-sheet, the prosecution was only able to examine 42 witnesses and intended to examine as many as 100 witnesses. It was observed that even after the passing of five years of the appellant being in judicial custody, learned counsel appearing for the State had no idea regarding time that would be consumed to complete the recording of oral evidence. The Supreme Court recorded that in the aforesaid circumstances, it was left with no other option but to get the appellant released on bail despite the seriousness of the crime alleged. Furthermore, it was of the view that the Public Prosecutor who was in-charge of the trial, had to decide which of the witnesses were to be examined and who were to be dropped as no useful purpose would be served if several witnesses were examined for establishing the same fact. The relevant extract of the said judgment is reproduced hereinafter:

“xxx

10. *However, many times we have made ourselves very clear that howsoever serious a crime may be the accused has a fundamental right of speedy trial as enshrined in Article 21 of the Constitution.*

Xxx

12. *The aforesaid results in indefinite delay in conclusion of trial. It is expected of the Public Prosecutor to wisely exercise his discretion insofar as examination of the witness is concerned.*

Xxx

14. *In this regard, the role of the Special Judge (NIA) would also assume importance. The Special Judge should inquire with the Special Public Prosecutor why he intends to examine a particular witness if such witness is going to depose the very same thing that any other witness might have deposed earlier. We may sound as if laying some guidelines, but time has come to consider this issue of delay and bail in its true and proper perspective. 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. The stress of long trials on accused persons- who remain innocent until proven guilty- can also be significant. Accused persons are not financially compensated for what might be a lengthy period of pre-trial incarceration. They may also have lost a job for accommodation, experienced damage to personal relationships while incarcerated, and spent a considerable amount of money on legal fees. If an accused person is found not guilty, they have likely endured many months of being stigmatized and perhaps even ostracized in their community and will have to rebuild their lives with their own resources.*

*15. We would say 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.  
Xxx”*

27. In the present case, even if one assumes that the co-accused were indulging in ‘terrorist acts’ or were participating in acts preparatory to the commission of terrorist acts, relevant material connecting the accused to advocating, abetting, advising, inciting or conspiring to commit any terrorist act had to be brought on record to justify rejection of bail especially after a long period of incarceration. However, no worthwhile material has been brought on record by the prosecution, at this stage.

28. The definition of a “terrorist act” under Section 15 is relevant to be considered at this juncture and the same is reproduced hereinafter:

*“15. Terrorist Act- (1) whoever does any act with intent to threaten or likely to threaten the unity, integrity, security [economic security] or sovereignty of India or with intent to*



*strike terror or likely to strike terror in the people or any section of the people in India or in any foreign country,-*

*(a) by using bombs, dynamite or other explosive substances or inflammable substances or firearms or other lethal weapons or poisonous or noxious gases or other chemicals or by any other substances (whether biological radioactive, nuclear or otherwise) of a hazardous nature or by any other means of whatever nature to cause or likely to cause -*

*(i) death of, or injuries to, any person or persons; or*

*(ii) loss of, or damage to, or destruction of, property; or*

*(iii) disruption of any supplies or services essential to the life of the community in India or in any foreign country; or*

*[(iiia) damage to, the monetary stability of India by way of production or smuggling or circulation of high quality counterfeit Indian paper currency, coin or of any other material; or]*

*(iv) damage or destruction of any property in India or in a foreign country used or intended to be used for the defence of India or in connection with any other purposes of the Government of India, any State Government or any of their agencies; or*

*(b) overawes by means of criminal force or the show of criminal force or attempts to do so or causes death of any public functionary or attempts to cause death of any public functionary; or*

*(c) detains, kidnaps or abducts any person and threatens to kill or injure such person or does any other act in order to compel the Government of India, any State Government or the Government of a foreign country or [an international or inter-governmental organisation or any other person to do or abstain from doing any act; or], commits a terrorist act.*

*[(2) The terrorist act includes an act which constitutes an offence within the scope of, and as defined in any of the treaties specified in the Second Schedule.]*

29. The charge sheet under Sections 120-B, 201, 419, 471 of the IPC, Section 25/54/59 of the Arms Act and Sections 17, 18, 18-B and 20



of UAPA was filed on March 10, 2026 and only 01 witness out of 56 prosecution witnesses has been examined till date. Learned State counsel is also unable to give any reasonable estimate of the time that may be required for completion of the trial. Therefore, the Court is left with no other option but to release the appellant on bail.

30. In view of the aforesaid discussion and the law laid down by the Supreme Court, especially when the appellant is in custody for almost two and a half years and the end of the trial is not in sight and considering only 01 out of 56 witnesses has been examined, the appeal is allowed and the impugned order dated July 16, 2024 is set aside. The appellant is ordered to be released on regular bail subject to following conditions besides furnishing of requisite bail bonds to the satisfaction of the trial Court/Duty Magistrate concerned:-

- (i) He shall furnish bond of ₹10 lakh with two sureties of ₹10 lakh each;
- (ii) He shall surrender his passport in the Trial Court, if he is holding the same and is still with him;
- (iii) He shall appear before the Trial Court on each and every date, unless exempted by the Court;
- (iv) He shall appear before the Investigating Officer, as and when summoned;
- v) He shall not directly or indirectly make any inducement, threat or promise to any person acquainted with the facts of the case or who is cited as witness;
- vi) He shall not involve in any criminal activity and if during the pendency of trial, he is found involved in commission of any offence punishable under UAPA, the prosecuting agency would be free to approach this Court for recalling this order and cancellation of his bail;



- vii) He shall not sell, transfer or in any other manner create third party right over his immovable property;
- viii) He shall furnish an undertaking to the effect that in case of his absence, Trial Court may proceed with the trial and he shall not claim re-examination of any witness.
- ix) At the time of release of the appellant, the concerned SHO shall be informed. He shall appear before the SHO on every alternate Monday till the conclusion of the trial.

31. In the event there is a breach of any of the abovementioned conditions, or of the conditions to be imposed by the Trial Court independently, it would be open to the prosecution to seek cancellation of the bail of the defaulting appellant without any further reference to this Court. Similarly, if the appellant seeks to threaten or otherwise influence any of the witnesses, whether directly or indirectly, then also the prosecution shall be at liberty to seek cancellation of bail of the concerned appellant by making appropriate application before the Trial Court.

(DEEPAK SIBAL)  
JUDGE

(LAPITA BANERJI)  
JUDGE

JULY 17, 2026  
shalini

|                            |        |
|----------------------------|--------|
| Whether speaking/reasoned: | Yes/No |
| Whether reportable:        | Yes/No |