



# Courts and Tribunals Judiciary

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**Prabjeet Veadhesa**

**Sukhman Shergill**

**Wolverhampton Crown Court**

**Sentencing Remarks of Mr Justice Choudhury**

**13 July 2023**

1. **Prabjeet Veadhesa, Sukhman Shergill:** You have both been found guilty of the murder of Ronan Kanda. You have both also pleaded guilty to the offence of possessing a bladed article, namely a knife, in a public place. I must now sentence you for those offences. You may remain seated until I tell you to stand up.
2. At just after half past 8 in the evening on 29 June last year, Ronan Kanda was fatally stabbed and killed as he was innocently walking along his own street back to his home. He was just yards from his front door when he was stabbed and left to die in the middle of the road. Ronan was only 16 years old. The devastation caused by that cowardly act of running up behind Ronan and stabbing him, not once, but twice, is hard to comprehend and for his family almost too great to bear. Ronan was much loved by all those who were fortunate enough to have had him in their lives. He was a joyful young lad always intent on making those around him happy. He was described by his friends as “always the one with the biggest smile”. He was fun, playful, good at school and had no enemies. We have heard this morning the powerful and moving victim personal statements from his father, mother and sister. We have also had read to us the VPS of Ronan’s uncle and grandmother. Their loss is incalculable. They describe Ronan as the soul of the family, whose loss has broken them all. Chander Kanda, Ronan’s dad, says that Ronan was his best friend, a Liverpool fan who liked going to the gym and playing pool. He

describes his pride in watching Ronan grow into a kind and compassionate boy who always gave money to the homeless and would encourage people around him to do more for charity. He misses his son constantly.

3. Pooja Kanda, Ronan's mum, eloquently expresses the psychological torture she suffers every day at losing her kind and caring son for absolutely no reason at all, and the utter despair she feels upon realising that he can no longer be part of her life. Nikita Kanda, Ronan's older sister, speaks lovingly of him as the glue that held the family together and how he deserved so much more from life. It is no surprise that the depth of their loss has taken its toll on their mental health with some of Ronan's relatives being treated for depression and PTSD. Nothing I can do or say today can relieve the pain of that loss. No term of years will seem sufficient punishment to Ronan's family for your crime. No term of years will begin to compensate them for their loss.
4. This case is another instance of the national scourge of knife crime, as a result of which young lives are brutally cut short because of the ease with which lethal weapons can be obtained and used on our streets. The added tragedy in this case is that Ronan was truly an innocent victim. He had nothing to do with gangs, nothing to do with drugs and nothing to do with violence or knives. He had no enemies or even anyone that did not like him. He was just a normal 16-year old who liked being with his friends, playing football and computer games. He did not even have any issue with the two of you. He was targeted by mistake. Had you not been carrying knives, that mistake would not have turned into the unfathomable tragedy that it did.
5. What were the events leading up to Ronan's tragic death?.
6. Both of you were at the same school as Ronan, the Khalsa Academy in Wolverhampton. For different reasons, you both had an issue with another pupil at the school, Pavandeep. In your case, Mr Veadhesa, you had known Pavandaeep for some years and had no problem with him until an incident in Year 9 or 10 after which others began to think there was some issue, or some "beef", between you and Pavandeep. On 6 May 2022, you were leaving school when Pavandeep came and grabbed you and put you in a headlock. This developed into a fight that had to be broken up by teachers. You were angered by that and decided to get your own back a few days later when you threatened Pavandeep outside a shop. He suggested that you had a knife although you denied that. The matter was

reported to the police and you were questioned about it. What is not in doubt is that by that stage you did indeed have a strong association with knives. Since about November 2021, you had been buying knives online and selling these on for a profit. The Court was shown a sample of the kinds of knives you purchased and resold. Most were frightening even to look at. These were for the most part large machetes and swords which have no legitimate use on our streets. It is disturbing that a 16 year old could so easily purchase such items online. The businesses engaged in this kind of trade should reflect on their facilitation of knife crime and the devastating consequences for the lives of so many.

7. You claimed that after the incident on 10 May you had no issue with Pavandeep. However, it is plain that you continued to harbour strong resentment towards Pavandeep, and when the opportunity arose to violently confront Pavandeep again, you readily took it.
8. That opportunity arose as a result of the dealings that you, Mr Shergill, had with Pavandeep. In November 2021 you lent him some money, about £200. You had lent him money before and had always been paid back. This time, however, Pavandeep did not pay the money back. You asked for it repeatedly but he started to cut you off and posted messages on social media flaunting the fact that he had a lot of cash. A final demand for the money was made in April 2022, but Pavandeep just responded that you would not be getting your money and referred to you as “PJ’s boy”, PJ being a reference to Mr Veadhesa.
9. It was this seemingly trivial dispute over £200 that led you to formulate a plan to scare Pavandeep into giving your money back. You knew that Mr Veadhesa dealt in knives and you asked him to obtain a pair of Ninja swords for you. Mr Veadhesa did so.
10. On 28 June 2022, the day before Ronan was killed, you, Mr Veadhesa, arranged transportation to help you find Pavandeep and to execute the plan. You, Mr Shergill, expected Pavandeep to be at a snooker club frequented by your friends the next day.
11. On 29 June 2022, at around 2.40pm, you Mr Veadhesa went to your local post office to collect the knives you had ordered and which you would use just a few hours later to commit murder. You both prepared for your encounter with Pavandeep by dressing in dark clothing with hoods and masks, despite it being a warm summer’s evening, and concealing down your trouser leg, a large knife. The arranged transport came to collect you near your home, Mr Veadhesa, at around 7.30pm. You spent the next hour

or so looking for Pavandeep. You went to the snooker hall but Pavandeep was not there. Ronan was there with a group of friends. He left the club at around 8.15, his friends of course not having any idea that that would be the last they would ever see of Ronan.

12. You went to Pavandeep's house to look for him there. By a tragic coincidence, Ronan had gone to Pavandeep's house after getting home from the snooker club. He had arranged to buy a PS controller from Pavandeep's younger brother and had walked over from his house to Pavandeep's house to collect it. Ronan's back was to the street as you passed Pavandeep's house and you assumed that Ronan was Pavandeep. After a few further minutes driving around the area, you, Mr Veadhesa asked the driver of the vehicle to stop at the bottom of Beech Road. By this time Ronan was walking back along Mount Road to his home. He was walking away from you when you both jumped out the car with your knives and ran towards Ronan. You Mr Veadhesa were in front. Ronan was wearing headphones and listening to music. He had no idea what was about to happen. You thrust the Ninja sword towards Ronan's hip. Ronan stopped and turned round. You then thrust your sword towards Ronan again, this time hitting him on the chest. All of this was captured on a domestic CCTV camera system. That system also recorded the sound and no one who heard it will forget the terrified scream emitted by Ronan as he realised what had just happened.
13. By this stage, you both realised that it was not Pavandeep but Ronan. But instead of showing some humanity and helping your injured friend, you both ran, jumped into the waiting car and sped off, leaving your friend to die on the street. Passers by saw Ronan and called the emergency services. They quickly arrived but were unable to save Ronan. He suffered two wounds, the one to the chest being 17 cm deep. It cut through Ronan's heart and caused unsurvivable blood loss. The commotion on the street led to Ronan's dad to come and find out what was going on. One cannot even begin to imagine his horror at discovering that it was in fact his own son who had just been killed.
14. After leaving the scene, you both then disposed of your outer clothing and the weapons by or in the canal and went back to Mr Veadhesa's home and carried on as if nothing had happened. You, Mr Shergill, did inform your mother and your uncle the next day and you handed yourself in. It must have been an extraordinarily difficult moment for your uncle and your mother to put their sense of doing the right thing above their concern for you and take you to the police station.

15. The jury rejected your claims that you were just intending to scare Pavandeep. It is clear from all of your preparatory activity and your persistence in tracking Pavandeep down that your intention was to do more than just scare him. By this stage you had decided you were going to teach Pavandeep a lesson by exacting some punishment on him. Instead, you murdered innocent young Ronan. By carrying a knife on the streets with the intention of using it, you have taken away Ronan's life and destroyed his family. Your actions have also ruined your own lives and that of your own families, although of course you still have your lives. All of this pain, grief and misery, spreading beyond your families to the whole community, could have been so easily avoided if you had made the simple choice not to carry knives that day.

## **Sentence**

16. I turn now to the approach to sentence. You are both now 17 and were 16 at the time of the murder. There is only one sentence that the law allows me to pass for the offence of murder, and that is a life sentence. Due to the fact that you were both under 18 when the murder was committed, the sentence is one of Detention for life at His Majesty's Pleasure.

17. I am required to specify the minimum term that must elapse before you can be considered for release on licence by the Parole Board.

18. By Schedule 21 to the Sentencing Act 2020, Parliament has determined the starting point where a person takes a knife to the scene and commits murder. For those aged over 18 when the offence is committed, the starting point for the minimum term is 25 years. By virtue of s.127 of the Police Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022, which came into force on 28 June 2022, the starting point for offenders aged 16 at the time of the offence is 17 years detention.

19. The fact that you both took large knives to the scene and that Ronan was killed, means that the starting point of 17 years applies. Having determined that starting point of 17 years, I am required then to take into account the aggravating and mitigating factors in each of your cases.

20. Of the statutory aggravating features set out in paragraph 9 of Schedule 21 to the Sentencing Code, the only one of relevance here is that there was a significant degree of planning or premeditation. Whilst Ronan may not have been the intended victim, it is clear that a significant amount of planning went into the attack. Knives were purchased specifically for this confrontation. Whilst it is correct that you Mr Veadhesa ordered several

knives from DNA Leisure for delivery on 29 June 2022, there is no doubt that at least two of them were purchased at Mr Shergill's request in order to confront Pavandeep as planned. You both took steps to wear dark hooded clothing taking care to cover your faces with masks. You pre-arranged transportation and drove to various locations where you thought your intended victim might be. The planning may not have been particularly sophisticated or well-thought through, but it was, in my judgment significant, and the attack was far from being spontaneous.

21. Mr Mason KC for the Crown suggests that a further aggravating feature is that Ronan was particularly vulnerable by reason of his age as he was only 16. Whilst that might be a significant factor in some cases, I do not consider that any particular vulnerability was present by reason of age in this case. You were both the same age as your victim, and any person attacked from behind whilst walking down the street wearing headphones would have been as vulnerable as Ronan then was.
22. As for other aggravating features, it is notable that you both took steps to conceal your offending. You both went to the canal together to dispose of your weapons and outer clothing.
23. The offence was committed on a public street in broad daylight. Distress was caused to a number of witnesses and bystanders.
24. As for the statutory mitigating factors, I need to consider first, whether or not there was an intention to cause serious bodily harm rather than an intention to kill. In your case, Mr Veadhesa, the Prosecution submit that I can be sure, given the nature of the weapon, the fact that two blows were struck in quick succession and the depth of the wounds, that there was an intent to kill. I agree. An attack with a sword as large as the one used, which is thrust first, into the victim's back hip area to a depth of 20cm and then into the front of the chest to a depth of 17cm, cannot realistically be said to reveal anything other than an intention to kill. There was no attempt here, for example to injure a less vulnerable part of the body such as the arms or legs or to inflict a less penetrating injury. The wounds, including the fatal one to the chest, were caused by deep thrusts with a vicious weapon aimed at highly vulnerable parts of the body. I am satisfied so that I am sure that at the point at which you attacked Ronan, an intent to kill had been formed, even though that intent was directed at P, with whom you had a history of animosity. Accordingly, there is no mitigation in your case on the basis of a lack of intention to kill.

25. In your case, Mr Shergill, whilst there was a shared intention with Mr Veadhesa to do the victim at least really serious harm, I do not find that you shared the intention that I have found Mr Veadhesa had formed at the time of the attack to kill the victim. You were a few steps behind Mr Veadhesa, did not land any blows on the victim yourself and immediately turned around and ran away after the attack. There was no history of violence between you and P and there is nothing to suggest that you had ever had a knife such as the one you carried that night. In these circumstances, I cannot be sure that you had formed an intention to kill P by the time of the attack. Accordingly, allowance is made for the lack of an intention to kill in your case.
26. The second mitigating factor is that you are both of good character. You have no previous convictions and had never had any involvement with the police. That is something that I take into account in your favour.
27. You have both expressed some remorse. However, you both appear not to be ready to accept full responsibility for your actions. That is consistent with your young age and your current level of maturity. Perhaps, as you mature and reflect on what you have done during your time in custody, you will come to fully accept your responsibility for what occurred. Ronan was, as you acknowledged, your friend and there has been some recognition of the pain caused by what you did. I make a small allowance for that.
28. A further mitigating feature is your young age. In the present case, however, your age has already been taken into account in determining the appropriate starting point. You were not at an age that might be said to be on the cusp of the relevant age for a different starting point. Accordingly no further allowance is made for age.
29. Finally, I take account of all that is said in the PSRs, and in the character references and what has been said by your counsel on your behalf by way of personal mitigation. In your case, Mr Veadhesa, I note that your father has played almost no role in your life. You are close to your mother and younger siblings. You were close to your grandfather and were deeply affected by his death a few years ago. It is said that you felt lost after his death and this may have had an effect on your behaviour thereafter. Notwithstanding that loss you continued to play a positive role in the community. You are capable of applying yourself and I note your recent academic and behavioural achievements whilst in custody. There is some potential for rehabilitation, although I also bear in mind that you had

an unhealthy fascination with knives and were willing to use a false ID to obtain them and sell them on with no thought as to the consequences for others. You were undoubtedly living two lives – one being that of the good son and community participant; the other being that of a minor arms dealer completely reckless to the consequences of passing on such dangerous items to others, including in all probability other youths and children.

30. In your case, Mr Shergill, your actions are, by all accounts totally out of character. You come from a loving stable home with hardworking parents. You were at the heart of your family's life and regularly volunteered at the Gurdwara. All those who know you speak highly of your character and kindness. Unlike Mr Veadhesa, there does not appear to have been another hidden or dark side to your conduct. You were good at school and had much potential to make a success of your life. But you have squandered that potential by taking the decision that day to use a knife to help you settle a dispute over a small amount of money. The impact on your family, whilst not comparable to the devastation caused to Ronan's family, has been severe.
31. I have borne in mind the Sentencing Guidelines on sentencing children and current conditions in prison.
32. Balancing these aggravating and mitigating factors, I have reached the following conclusions.
33. In your case Mr Veadhesa, the significant aggravating features of planning, concealment and the location of the offence are balanced out to a partial extent by your good character and the other mitigating features mentioned. This results in a partial uplift from the starting point of 1 year. I therefore consider that the minimum term in your case is 18 years. That is the appropriate minimum term in your case.
34. In your case Mr Shergill, the additional mitigating feature of the lack of an intention to kill and the other mitigating features including your good character mean that the minimum term should be reduced from the starting point by 1 year. The appropriate minimum term in your case is therefore 16 years.
35. I deal now very briefly with the sentence for the possession of a bladed article. Having regard to the relevant Guidelines, the appropriate categorisation of these offences is Category 1A, the starting point for which is 18 months with a range of 1 to 2 years detention after trial. That



starting point and range is for adult offenders over the age of 18, and an adjustment must be made to take account of your age.

36. The aggravating features of planning and concealing your identity are balanced out by your absence of convictions. Adjusting the starting point for age, leads me to a term of 12 months. Credit for your plea reduces this further to 8 months. Accordingly, the sentence in each of your cases is 8 months for the possession of a bladed article, which will run concurrently.

**Will the Defendants please stand.**

37. The sentences I pass on you are as follows:

38. **PRABJEET VEADHESA**, for the murder of Ronan Kanda, I sentence you to detention for life at His Majesty's Pleasure with a minimum term of 18 years. For the possession of a bladed article I sentence you to 8 months' detention to run concurrently. From the minimum term of 18 years there must be deducted the 375 days you have spent on remand in custody for this offence.

39. **SUKHMAN SHERGILL**, for the murder of Ronan Kanda, I sentence you to detention for life at His Majesty's Pleasure with a minimum term of 16 years. For the possession of a bladed article I sentence you also to 8 months' detention to run concurrently. From the minimum term of 15 years must be deducted the 375 days you have spent on remand in custody for this offence. The victim surcharge must also be paid in both cases.

40. It is important to emphasise, so that you and all those viewing this sentence can understand the position, that the minimum term is just that – a minimum period which cannot be reduced in any way. After your respective minimum terms are served, there is no guarantee that you will be released at that time, or at any particular time thereafter. It is only if the Parole Board decides you are no longer a danger to society and fit to be released that you will be released. That will not be before you have served every day of your minimum term. Even if you are released after serving your minimum term, you will remain subject to licence for the rest of your life. That means that you may be recalled to continue your life sentence at any time if considered appropriate. It is in these ways that a life sentence with a minimum term protects the public for the future.

41. That concludes my sentence.

42. Take them down.