Courts and Tribunals Judiciary

SUMMARY

R -v- Vickrum Singh Digwa
The Lady Carr of Walton-on-the-Hill, The Lady Chief Justice of England and Wales, Mr Justice Nicklin and Mr Justice Wall
[2026] EWCA Crim 1429
5 November 2026

NOTE: This summary is provided to help in understanding the Court's decision. It does not form part of the judgment. The full judgment of the Court is the only authoritative document. Judgments are public documents and are available at: www.judiciary.uk, https://caselaw.nationalarchives.gov.uk and www.bailii.org

[*References in square brackets are to paragraphs in the judgment of the Court.*]

Background

1. On 3 December 2025, Vickrum Singh Digwa, then aged 22, fatally stabbed 18-year-old Henry Nowak during a chance encounter in Southampton. He used a large Kirpan which he was carrying on a belt outside his clothing [1], [6]–[9].

2. Digwa was convicted of murder and possessing a bladed article in public. He was sentenced to life imprisonment with a minimum term of 21 years, less time spent on remand [2], [19]–[23].

3. Digwa argued that the minimum term was manifestly excessive. The Attorney General argued that it was unduly lenient and should be increased [4]–[5].

The murder

4. The encounter began when Henry Nowak asked Digwa whether Digwa was a "bad man". The judge found that his tone was neither aggressive nor threatening. Digwa approached him and took his mobile telephone [6]–[8].

5. During the confrontation, Digwa drew the large Kirpan and stabbed Henry Nowak in the chest. The wound was unsurvivable. He also inflicted two substantial wounds to the upper leg, together with further injuries [9].

6. After the stabbing, Digwa falsely claimed that Henry Nowak was the aggressor and falsely denied that he had stabbed him. Digwa filmed Henry while he lay seriously injured on the ground, and Digwa and his brother taunted him. Digwa also arranged for his mother to remove the murder weapon before the police arrived [10]–[13].

7. The police initially acted on the false account that they were given. Henry Nowak was arrested and handcuffed before the officers understood the seriousness of his condition and began emergency treatment. He could not be saved [14]–[16].

The Court's decision

8. The Court agreed that the judge had been entitled to select the statutory starting point of 15 years. The judge had found that Digwa had not taken the large Kirpan to the scene intending to commit an offence or to have it available for use as a weapon, and that finding was properly open to him on the evidence [19], [24]–[29], [39].

9. The Court explained that the 15-year starting point did not prevent a substantial increase to reflect the actual seriousness of the murder. The religious reason for Digwa's initial carriage of the Kirpan was not an aggravating factor. The material features were that it was a large and highly dangerous weapon, that Digwa knowingly carried it in public and had immediate access to it, and that he deliberately drew and repeatedly used it to kill an unarmed and otherwise defenceless man [27]–[29], [40]–[44].

10. There were serious additional aggravating features. There were multiple stab wounds, demonstrating that this was not a single impulsive movement. Henry Nowak also suffered while conscious and gravely injured. Digwa filmed him, falsely denied that he had been stabbed, blamed him for the incident and caused him to be arrested and handcuffed. Digwa also arranged for the murder weapon to be removed and retained Henry's telephone [45]–[50].

11. The Court did not increase the sentence because of publicity, wider community reaction or any suggestion that Digwa had dishonoured his religion. Although the Court understood why the sentencing judge had found that Henry had not racially abused Digwa, it placed no reliance on that particular finding when assessing the appropriate minimum term: [51]-[52].

12. The Court concluded that the appropriate minimum term before mitigation was at least 27 years. Taking account of Digwa's relative youth, previous good character and the absence of premeditation, the resulting minimum term would have been no less than 25 years [53]–[54].

Outcome

13. The Court refused Digwa leave to appeal against sentence. His sentence was not manifestly excessive [56].

14. The Court granted leave to the Attorney General and allowed the Reference. It concluded that the 21-year minimum term materially understated both the circumstances in which the large and immediately available dagger was repeatedly used with an intention to kill an unarmed man, and the deliberate cruelty, additional suffering and obstruction which followed the stabbing. The sentence was not only lenient, but unduly so [57]–[59].

15. The minimum term was increased to 25 years. After deducting the 175 days spent on remand, the operative minimum term is 24 years and 190 days. All other parts of the sentence remain unchanged [60]–[63].

16. The minimum term is the period which Digwa must serve before the Parole Board may consider whether it is safe to release him. It does not mean that he will automatically be released at the end of that period.