

Murderer refused appeal hearing of race attack claim

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Vikram Dodd

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An Asian man who claims he was wrongly convicted of murder after defending himself against a racist attack suffered a severe blow to his chances of freedom yesterday when the criminal cases review commission refused to send his case back to the court of appeal.

The commission, which investigates alleged miscarriages of justice, has decided that the conviction of Satpal Ram is safe.

Ram, whose case has become one of the most controversial alleged miscarriages of justice, was jailed for life for murder in 1987 after stabbing a man in a Birmingham restaurant.

He says that Clarke Pearce attacked him first, slashing him with broken glass after first racially abusing him and others.

The commission investigated and deliberated for nearly a year before reaching its provisional conclusion late last week.

Ram and his solicitor, Gareth Peirce, now have 28 days to respond, but the commission rarely reverses its provisional decisions.

Ms Peirce said yesterday the commission's 42 pages of reasons contained "serious errors".

Ram's family and supporters say that he was wrongly convicted because his original lawyers failed to properly prepare his case and made basic errors during his trial. A crucial witness who could have supported Ram's account of the fight with Pearce was not called at his trial. No translator was provided for another who spoke Bengali.

A commission spokeswoman said that Ram now had 28 days to convince it that the provisional decision should be reversed.

On conviction Ram was recommended to serve 11 years imprisonment, but has now served almost 15 years.

Last week he was moved from a category D "open" prison to a higher security category B prison, Blakenhurst.

His brother, Mohinder Ram, 45, said: "They've treated us like second class citizens. There's no justice in this country."

Ms Peirce said that they remained hopeful of reversing the commission's decision and taking the case to appeal. "It's very clear to very many informed people that Satpal Ram should not have been convicted of murder," she said.

"I remain confident that the material submitted by us is capable of achieving the quashing of the conviction and therefore further representations to the CCRC should be capable of reversing their provisional decision."

The parole board recommended that Ram should be released, but its decision was overturned by the then home secretary Jack Straw.