

Smuggling gang sentenced after locking migrants into wardrobe 'hides'

Five men who smuggled 35 people to the UK, including children as young as two years old and an individual with physical disabilities, have been sentenced to a total of 24 years and two months.

Following a trial at Reading Crown Court yesterday, Monday 9 May, the court heard that between August and October 2019, Paramjeet Singh Baweja, 50, and Viljit Singh Khurana, 45, organised the smuggling of 35 Afghan migrants into the country through six separate events. Individuals were screwed into purpose-built hides made from wardrobes, which were surrounded by furniture items in the rear of the vans. The vans were driven through Europe to Southern UK ports, including Dover and Portsmouth.

The coffin-like hides, from which the migrants had no way of escaping without the assistance of the organised crime group, were used to conceal up to seven people each journey. Many were only discovered after they had endured travel from Belgium and France, through the ports and across the Channel. One group were discovered while shouting for their lives at the point of being loaded onto a recovery vehicle.

Following a two-year investigation by Home Office's Criminal Financial Investigations (CFI) unit, Baweja and Khurana pleaded guilty to the purchasing of vans and furniture, communicating between the 'minders', the migrants and Romanian drivers and paying money to the 'minders'. Baweja was sentenced to six years and nine months' imprisonment. Khurana received a six-year sentence.

The 'minders' were found to be Harmohan Singh, 41, and Manmohan Singh Wadhwa, 57. Both admitted to escorting the vans and drivers during the facilitation events and providing progress updates to other members of the crime group and drivers. Both Singh and Wadhwa were sentenced to three years and four months in jail.

Forensic evidence indicated that Harmohan Singh was also involved in the screwing of the migrants into the hides in the wardrobes.

The final individual sentenced was Dumitru Bacelan, 29, a Romanian national, believed to be of higher 'rank' than the minders and drivers. Bacelan pleaded guilty to his part of the recruitment and the organising of drivers. This included booking hotels and travel around the UK and Europe with other gang members.

He also pleaded guilty to fraud by false representation in relation to an EUSS application he submitted to the Home Office. He has been sentenced to three years and nine months' imprisonment for immigration offences, and 12 months for fraud offences to run concurrently.

Minister for Justice and Tackling Illegal Migration, Tom Pursglove MP said:

These life-threatening attempts to smuggle people, including very young children, into the UK in the back of vehicles with room to barely move or breathe, is quite frankly, horrific.

I would like to praise the officers on the case in their efforts working round the clock to prevent this illegal activity which put people's lives in extreme danger.

The Nationality and Borders Act will support our criminal investigations teams by making it easier to prosecute people smugglers and introducing a maximum sentence of life imprisonment for those who facilitate illegal entry into our country.

Deputy Director for Immigration Enforcement's Criminal Financial Investigations, Ben Thomas said:

Criminal gangs should be in no doubt of our determination to investigate, catch and pursue anyone attempting to bring people here unlawfully and in such atrocious conditions.

The operation run by this criminal group put children and vulnerable people's lives in danger for the sake of making a profit. I hope these sentencings send a powerful message that breaking the law and putting individuals' lives at risk will not go unpunished.

Our CFI teams along with wider Immigration Enforcement, Border Force officials and key partners including the police, NCA and European counterparts, work 24/7 to catch those putting people lives at risk through people smuggling.

Since 2020, CFI have secured over 140 convictions relating to people smuggling cases involving vehicles such as vans, lorries, cars and yachts, as well as 49 small boats-related prosecutions. This equates to a combined total of nearly 400 years in prosecutions since 2020.

To anonymously report suspicious or suspect people smuggling activity contact CrimeStoppers on 0800 555 111, or in an emergency, by dialling 999. [Find out more on the Crimestoppers website.](#)

Encouraging nature recovery at DVLA

As Senior Sustainability and Travel Services Manager, my role involves ensuring DVLA meets its legislative responsibilities for the natural environment across the estate. Additionally, I encourage and recommend ways to increase biodiversity in line with our [Greening Government Commitments \(GGC\)](#). We have created a biodiversity steering group and meet every quarter to talk about the opportunities available to progress towards targets and ensure we keep on track to meet our [Biodiversity Action Plan \(BAP\)](#) measures and the GGCs, which are inextricably linked.

In our commitment towards a more sustainable future, I'm pleased to report that last December we successfully completed a business plan measure. This was to enhance habitats which are designed to increase biodiversity on our estate. So, what did we do to achieve this milestone?



Improving the biodiversity of our estate

Ecological assessments were carried out to inform the findings and conclusions of the biodiversity action plan. The rationale was to work with what we have rather than try to artificially create habitats that would be difficult to maintain. We then identified two areas at one of our sites with different habitats which would benefit from a project to enhance conditions for wildlife.

First habitat

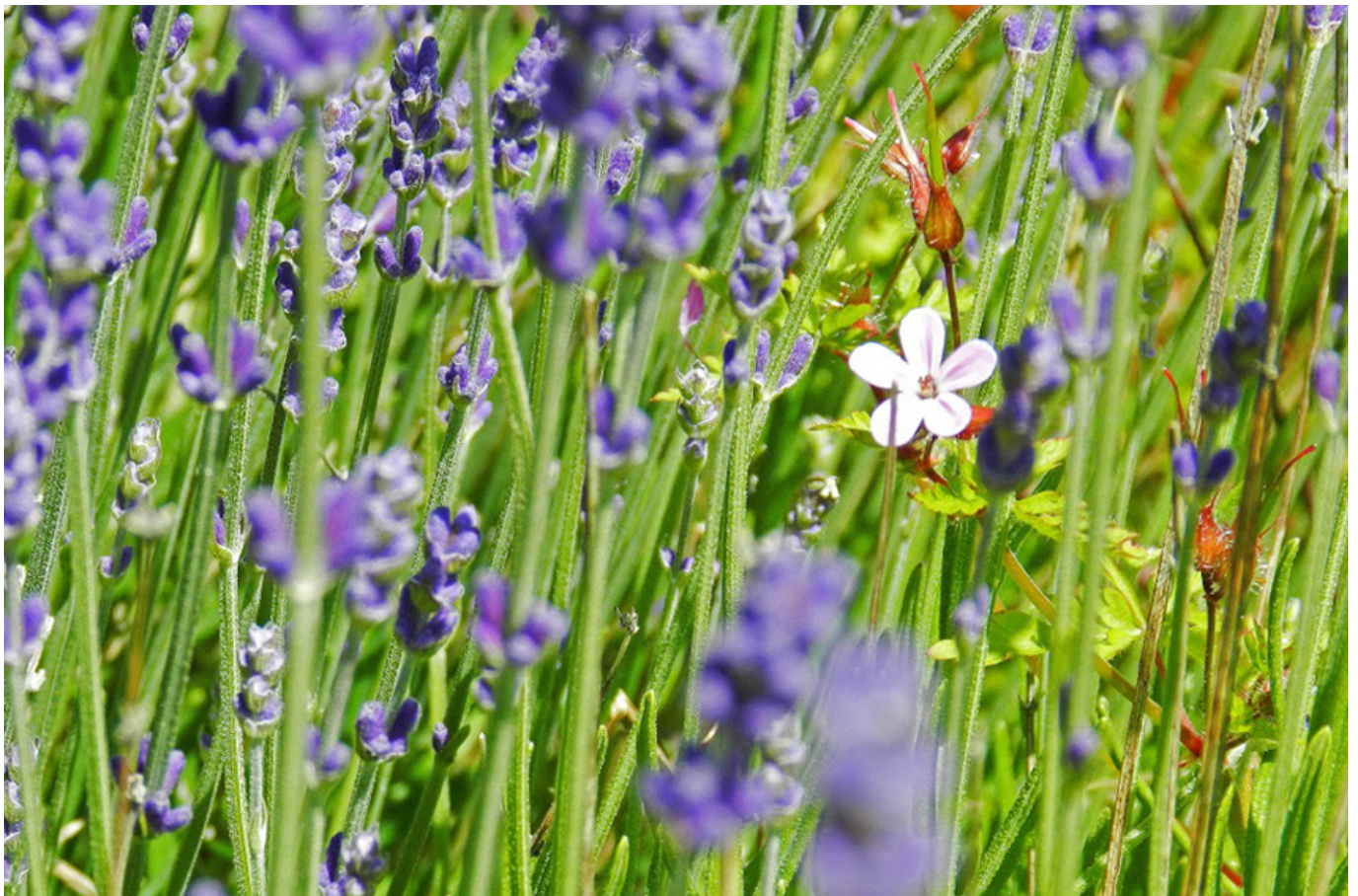
The attenuation pond was created to make sure rainwater is properly managed. If the pond becomes choked with vegetation, it can lose its ability to work properly and have a detrimental effect on some species of wildlife. There is no ideal amount of vegetation from a wildlife perspective, although more is often better. Frogs, toads and newts need both cover and a more open aspect.

Work in this area included removing a third of the vegetation. This will give ample opportunity for amphibians to use the open water. An added benefit is removing nutrients from the water to prevent algae building up to levels which do not support wildlife. The vegetation has been left around the pond, which provides natural shelter for a variety of wildlife including amphibians, reptiles and small mammals.

Second habitat

Large grassy areas have become increasingly covered by scrub and tall ruderals. This sort of scrub is great for many species, such as birds, but does increasingly become less beneficial for others. For example, common lizards that can be found on site require open spaces to enjoy the sunshine. However, they still need cover to hide from predators.

Clearing an area of scrub opened it up to encourage wildflowers to grow as the natural seedbank permits. We left plenty of cover for birds and some small mammals, but this open aspect also provides suitable areas for the common lizard to bask.



What's next?

This year, we plan on using native meadow seed mix to encourage more pollinator friendly species and to introduce some native hedging to increase the habitat for birds and mammals. We will do our best to make sure that current species using our estate will always be present in healthy numbers for years to come.

The biodiversity on our estate is a natural asset which we need to protect and can use to enhance our quality of life. Through our [Biodiversity Action Plan](#), the Sustainability team aim to encourage staff, local communities and organisations to work with us to help conserve and enhance the rich diversity of habitats and species and ensure they are protected for the benefit and enjoyment of future generations.

If you are interested in biodiversity on the DVLA estate, you can find out more in our [Biodiversity Action Plan](#), and read more about our goals for a sustainable future in [our Sustainability Report](#).

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[Queen's Speech 2022](#)

My Lords and members of the House of Commons.

My Government's priority is to grow and strengthen the economy and help ease the cost of living for families. My Government will level up opportunity in all parts of the country and support more people into work. My Ministers will continue to support the police to make the streets safer, and fund the National Health Service to reduce the COVID backlogs. In these challenging times, my Government will play a leading role in defending democracy and freedom across the world, including continuing to support the people of Ukraine.

My Government will drive economic growth to improve living standards and fund sustainable investment in public services. This will be underpinned by a responsible approach to the public finances, reducing debt while reforming and cutting taxes. My Ministers will support the Bank of England to return inflation to its target.

A Bill will be brought forward to drive local growth, empowering local leaders to regenerate their areas, and ensuring everyone can share in the United Kingdom's success. The planning system will be reformed to give residents more involvement in local development [Levelling Up and

Regeneration Bill].

My Government will improve transport across the United Kingdom, delivering safer, cleaner services and enabling more innovations. Legislation will be introduced to modernise rail services and improve reliability for passengers [Transport Bill].

My Ministers will bring forward an Energy Bill to deliver the transition to cheaper, cleaner, and more secure energy. This will build on the success of the COP26 Summit in Glasgow last year [Energy Security Bill]. Draft legislation to promote competition, strengthen consumer rights and protect households and businesses will be published. Measures will also be published to create new competition rules for digital markets and the largest digital firms [Draft Digital Markets, Competition and Consumer Bill].

My Government will establish the UK Infrastructure Bank in legislation, with objectives to support economic growth and the delivery of net zero [UK Infrastructure Bank Bill].

Reforms to education will help every child fulfil their potential wherever they live, raising standards and improving the quality of schools and higher education [Schools Bill, Higher Education Bill]. My Ministers will publish draft legislation to reform the Mental Health Act [Draft Mental Health Act Reform Bill].

My Government will continue to seize the opportunities of the United Kingdom's departure from the European Union, to support economic growth. Regulations on businesses will be repealed and reformed. A bill will enable law inherited from the European Union to be more easily amended [Brexit Freedoms Bill]. Public sector procurement will be simplified to provide new opportunities for small businesses [Procurement Bill].

New legislation will strengthen the United Kingdom's financial services industry, ensuring that it continues to act in the interest of all people and communities [Financial Services and Markets Bill]. The United Kingdom's data protection regime will be reformed [Data Reform Bill].

My Government will continue to champion international trade, delivering jobs across the country and growing the economy. Legislation will be introduced to enable the implementation of the United Kingdom's first new Free Trade Agreements since leaving the European Union [Trade (Australia and New Zealand) Bill].

My Ministers will encourage agricultural and scientific innovation at home. Legislation will unlock the potential of new technologies to promote sustainable and efficient farming and food production [Genetic Technology (Precision Breeding) Bill].

My Government will protect the integrity of the United Kingdom's borders and ensure the safety of its people. My Ministers will take action to prevent dangerous and illegal Channel crossings and tackle the criminal gangs who profit from facilitating them. Legislation will be introduced to ensure the

police have the powers to make the streets safer [Public Order Bill].

A bill will be brought forward to further strengthen powers to tackle illicit finance, reduce economic crime and help businesses grow [Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Bill]. Measures will be introduced to support the security services and help them protect the United Kingdom [National Security Bill].

My Government will lead the way in championing security around the world. It will continue to invest in our gallant Armed Forces. My Ministers will work closely with international partners to maintain a united NATO and address the most pressing global security challenges.

The continued success and integrity of the whole of the United Kingdom is of paramount importance to my Government, including the internal economic bonds between all of its parts. My Government will prioritise support for the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement and its institutions, including through legislation to address the legacy of the past [Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Bill].

My Government will ensure the constitution is defended. My Ministers will restore the balance of power between the legislature and the courts by introducing a Bill of Rights [Bill of Rights]. Legislation will prevent public bodies engaging in boycotts that undermine community cohesion [Boycotts, Divestment and Sanctions Bill].

My Government will introduce legislation to improve the regulation of social housing to strengthen the rights of tenants and ensure better quality, safer homes [Social Housing Regulation Bill]. Legislation will also be introduced to ban conversion therapy [Conversion Therapy Bill]. Proposals will be published to establish an independent regulator of English football.

In this year of my Platinum Jubilee, I look forward to the celebrations taking place across the United Kingdom and throughout the Commonwealth, and to the Commonwealth Games in Birmingham this summer.

MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

Estimates for the public services will be laid before you.

MY LORDS AND MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

Other measures will be laid before you.

I pray that the blessing of Almighty God may rest upon your counsels.

[North Korea ballistic missile tests: FCDO statement](#)

Press release

A Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office spokesperson responds to the ballistic missile launches carried out by North Korea on 4 and 7 May.



A Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office spokesperson said:

The UK condemns North Korea's ballistic missile launches on 4 and 7 May. We remain deeply concerned by repeated testing of ballistic missile technology which is damaging regional security and stability.

The UK works closely with our partners to urge North Korea to return to dialogue and take credible steps towards denuclearisation in a complete, verifiable and irreversible manner.

Published 10 May 2022

[New law to protect access to cash announced in Queen's speech](#)

News story

New laws to protect access to cash and help victims of financial scams were announced by Her Majesty the Queen today.



- Financial Services and Markets Bill will maintain and enhance the UK's position as a global leader in financial services having left the EU.
- The Bill will protect cash by ensuring continued access to withdrawal and deposit facilities across the UK.
- Banks can be required by the regulator to reimburse victims of authorised push payment fraud.

The new Financial Services and Markets Bill, announced in today's Queen's Speech at the state opening of parliament, will support consumers by protecting access to cash. It will ensure the continued availability of withdrawal and deposit facilities across the UK, and that the country's cash infrastructure is sustainable for the long term.

Cash remains an important payment method for millions of people across the UK, particularly those in vulnerable groups, and the government is committed to preserving it.

The Bill will also enable the Payment Systems Regulator to require banks to reimburse authorised push payment (APP) scam losses, totalling hundreds of millions of pounds each year. This will ensure victims are not left paying for fraud through no fault of their own.

These measures form part of wider plans to maintain and enhance the UK's position as a global leader in financial services, cutting red tape while maintaining high regulatory standards and ensuring the sector continues to deliver for individuals and businesses.

Economic Secretary to the Treasury, John Glen said:

We are reforming our financial services sector now we have left the EU to ensure it acts in the interests of communities and citizens, creating jobs, supporting businesses, and powering growth across all of the UK. "We know that access to cash is still vital for many people, especially those in vulnerable groups. We promised we would protect it, and through this Bill we are delivering on that

promise.

We are also sticking up for victims of financial scams that can have a devastating impact, by ensuring the regulator can act to make banks reimburse people who have lost money through no fault of their own.

The Financial Services and Markets Bill delivers on the ambitious vision for the financial services sector set out by the Chancellor at Mansion House last year. It builds on the Financial Services Act 2021, which was the first step in amending the UK's regulatory regime outside of the EU.

The Bill will make the most of the opportunities of Brexit, by establishing a coherent, agile and internationally-respected approach to financial services regulation that is right for the UK.

The main elements of the Bill are:

- Revoking retained EU law on financial services and replacing it with an approach to regulation that is designed for the UK. This includes the Solvency II legislation governing the regulation of insurers, which the government has committed to reform.
- Updating the objectives of the financial services regulators to ensure a greater focus on growth and international competitiveness.
- Reforming the rules that regulate the UK's capital markets, the engine of the UK economy, to promote investment.
- Ensuring that people across the UK continue to be able to access their own cash with ease.
- Introducing additional protections for those investing or using financial products, and to make it safer and support the victims of scams.

More details will be available when the Bill is formally introduced.

Published 10 May 2022