

British Sikh man held in India granted bail after nine years

Patrick Wintour
Diplomatic editor

Jagtar Singh Johal, a British Sikh man arrested in India in 2017 in connection with alleged terrorism offences, has been granted bail by a Delhi court.

Johal, from Dumbarton, was arrested over his alleged role in funding the Khalistan Liberation Force, which had carried out targeted killings in India's Punjab region.



▲ Jagtar Singh Johal, now 39, says he was tortured after being detained

His full trial has been repeatedly deferred, with prosecutors failing to produce verifiable evidence, and last year a court dismissed a number of charges against him.

Johal, now 39, travelled to India for his wedding in late 2017. Three weeks later, on 4 November, he was shopping with his wife and a relative in the Punjab city of Jalandhar when a group of men took him from his car, placed a hood over his head and drove him away in an unmarked vehicle.

He claims he was then denied access to a lawyer and tortured in an attempt to extract a confession. A question remains over whether he was arrested following a tip-off from British intelligence services.

Johal's brother Gurpreet Singh Johal also lives in Dumbarton and has lobbied a succession of UK foreign secretaries, who have admitted the case has dragged on too long, but have been reluctant to call for his release.

He said yesterday: "The past two years has been an expensive roller-coaster, contesting bails at the supreme court and back to the high court. I had a long, sleepless night knowing that the decision would be made this morning. Now, all I can think about is Jagtar walking out of prison. We have waited so long and fought so hard for this moment."

Chris Esdaile, a senior legal adviser to Redress, one of several

organisations fighting for Johal's release, said granting bail could not "undo the intolerable suffering caused by nine years of arbitrary detention", and called for accountability over "allegations of torture and the deeply flawed proceedings".

Dan Dolan, the deputy executive director of Reprieve, also representing Johal, said: "We must now watch closely to ensure this order is actually implemented and not obstructed in any way. The conditions attached are likely to be onerous."

"We must also remember Jagtar will still be facing the death penalty in eight cases ... essentially duplicating trumped-up charges on which he has already been fully acquitted."