



Vishav(World) Sikh News



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Monthly Newsletter of Vishav (World) Sikh Council - USA

A Representative Body of Sikh Institutions of America Under the Patronage of Siri Akal Takhat Sahib
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*Celebrate the 300th Anniversary of the Khalsa by Joining the Sava Lukh Sikh March
in Washington, DC in April 1999*



A Message on the Anniversary of the Khalsa

Member Institutions

*Sikh Missionary Center, Phoenix, AZ
Gurdwara Sahib Fremont, Fremont, CA
Guru Nanak Sikh Mission, Livingston, CA
Sikh Gurdwara of LA, North Hollywood, CA
Center of Sikh Studies, Santa Anna, CA
Colorado Singh Sabha, Englewood, CO
Guru Singh Sabha of Augusta, Augusta, GA
Sikh Religious Society of Chicago, Palatine, IL
Sikhs Serving America, Topeka, KS
New England Sikh Study Circle, Boston, MA
Guru Gobind Singh Foundation, Rockville, MD
Sikh Gurdwara of Michigan, Rochester Hills, MI
Sikh Research and Educational Center,
Chesterfield, MO
Sikh Gurdwara of North Carolina, Durham, NC
Garden State Sikh Association, Warren, NJ
Siri Guru Singh Sabha, Glenrock, NJ
Sikh Cultural Society Inc., Richmond Hills, NY
Sikh Cultural & Educational Society of Western
New York, Williamsville, NY
Sikh Forum of Long Island, Long Island, NY
Sikh Youth Federation of North America, White
Plains, NY
Sikh Educational & Religious Foundation,
Dublin, OH
Sikh Youth Federation of USA, Toledo, OH
Sikh Religious Society of Dayton, Dayton, OH
Guru Gobind Singh Society, Bedford, OH
Guru Nanak Foundation of Greater Cleveland,
Richfield, OH
Tristate Sikh Cultural Society, Monroeville, PA
Sikh Center of Gulf Coast, Houston, TX*

The 299th anniversary of the Khalsa is fast approaching when the great day will be celebrated throughout the World on the blessed day of Vaisaakhi, the 13th of April, 1998. This day reminds us of the times, when the Siri Guru Gobind Singh Sahib asked his Sikhs to give practical form to the following words of Siri Guru Nanak Sahib:

“ j uVVuUpph kll N clA uU isirUyir VI l gl l mrl aUu|
ieVUmrig p#Uyrlj> isrUdj>c#N n clj>| 20 | ”

Siri Guru Gobind Singh Sahib bestowed upon the five persons, who volunteered, the title of Punj Pyaras – the five dearest ones. He, then asked them to collectively be his Guru and he became their ‘Chela’, thus transferring the decision making authority into their hands. He accepted their decisions throughout his life. He accepted their verdict, when the Five ordered him to leave the Garhi of Chamkaur and also when he was fined Rs. 125.00 for saluting the Samadh of Faquir Dadu with his arrow, although he did this act to make sure that his Khalsa is well aware of the rules of the Sikhi. This is the day when the Guru infused in them a sense of belonging to the Guru and the Khalsa brotherhood and blessed them with the five Kakkars as witness to this. Another important aspect of this day is because on this day, as the British historian J. D. Cunningham states: “Gobind Singh bestowed them with the desire of being socially free and nationally independent.”

The torch of Human rights was kept burning by the Sikhs ever since the times of the Gurus. Following on the footsteps of their Gurus, Sikhs risked their lives to protect and save the honor of all the depressed communities of the Indian sub-continent. Today, Sikhs are, not only facing extinction at the hands of the rulers of India, but also every effort is being made to shake the very foundations on which this great institution of Human right – Sikhism is standing. The need of the time calls for unity and solidarity among the Sikhs and to start, without any further delay, a movement to free themselves from the clutches of slavery.

Next year we propose to celebrate the 300th anniversary of the Khalsa by taking out a “ Sava Lukh Sikh March” in the capital of USA – Washington, D.C. We would like to present to the world the true image of the Sikh Nation – their peaceful nature, their love for humanity, their determination to fight injustice, their love for freedom and their desire to gain independence. We look forward to the participation of all the Sikhs of North America and the Sikh Institutions of USA and Canada in this great march in April, 1999.

**Vaheguru ji ka Khalsa, Vaheguru ji ki Fateh!
In the Service of Guru Panth: Kuldeep Singh**



VSC-USA Board of Directors

Member organizations of Vishav (World) Sikh Council - USA have selected the following individuals as members of the Board of Directors:

- Sardarni Gurbilash Kaur, Pittsburgh Gurdwara, Monroeville, PA
- Sardar Amarjit Singh, Buffalo Gurdwara, Buffalo, NY
- Sardar Harinderjit Singh, Guru Singh Sabha of Augusta, GA
- Sardar Ranbir Singh, Sikh Educational & Religious Foundation, Dublin, OH
- Sardar Daljit Singh, Sikhs Serving America, Topeka, KS
- Sardar Kuldeep Singh, Sikh Youth Federation of USA, Toledo, OH
- Sardar Bhupinder Singh, Sikh Center of Gulf Coast, Houston, TX
- Sardar Surinderpal Singh, Sikh Religious Society of Chicago, Palatine, IL
- Sardar Surjit Singh, Guru Nanak Foundation of Greater Cleveland, Richfield, OH
- Sardar Avtar Singh, Sri Guru Singh Sabha, Glenrock, NJ
- Sardar Ujagar Singh, Sikh Youth Federation of North America, White Plains, NY
- Sardar Avtar Singh, Gurdwara Sahib, Fremont, CA
- Sardar Mohinder Singh, Sikh Cultural Society of New York, Richmond Hills, NY
- Sardar Jasbir Singh, Sikh Gurdwara of Los Angeles, Los Angeles, LA
- Sardarni Parminder Kaur, Sikh Gurdwara of North Carolina, Durham, NC
- Sardar Amarjit Singh, Vernon, CT

The Council is currently in the process of selecting its Executive Committee.

Gurdwara of Livingston, CA Joins VSC-USA

The Guru Nanak Sikh Mission Gurdwara in Livingston, CA has formally joined the Vishav Sikh Council - USA. Other Gurdwaras and Sikh institutions are encouraged to join the Council.

Seminar Planned on Sikh Form

The Sikh Gurdwara of North Carolina, Durham is organizing a seminar titled "Significance of form in Sikhism" on April 4. The forum

will cover issues relating to the Sikh *baana*. The Sikh Gurdwara of North Carolina is a member of VSC-USA.

Seminar on Gurbani Uccharan

A three day seminar on Gurbani pronunciation was held on March 6 - 8 at the Sikh Gurdwara Sahib located in Rochester Hills, MI. Sardar Harbhajan Singh of Richmond Hill Gurdwara Sahib and Sardar Jagtar Singh of the Sikh Forum Gurdwara Sahib were the speakers at the seminar. Material published by the Sikh Missionary College, Ludhiana was distributed to the conference attendees. Gurdwaras of North America are encouraged to organize such seminars in their respective areas so that the local Sangat may benefit from these events. The Sikh Gurdwara of Michigan is a member of VSC-USA.

Sikh Youth Symposiums

The Chicago Center Sikh Youth Symposium 1998 was held on March 7 at the Gurdwara Sahib in Palatine, IL. Other symposiums were held in Cleveland (March 14), and Pittsburgh (March 21). The Detroit symposium will be held on April 9 at the Sikh Gurdwara in Rochester Hills. The winners of these symposiums will compete in the zonal competitions to be held in Toledo, Ohio on May 9, 1998. The winners of the zonal competition will participate in the international competition to be held in July at San Francisco, California where they will compete with Sikh youths from Florida, New York, Canada, UK and Kenya. The above mentioned symposiums were sponsored by Sikh Youth Federation of USA (member of VSC-USA).

Interfaith Activities

The following interfaith activities with Sikh participation have recently been reported:

- Representatives of Sikh, Jewish, Muslim and Hindu groups joined Scientologists in Washington, DC on February 25, in criticizing Germany's treatment of religious minorities.

- An interfaith lecture on "Eternal life: Non-Christian Traditions" was presented in St. Louis, MO on February 29. The talk explored the beliefs of reincarnation in religions that developed in South Asia.
- The Cleveland Conference of Religions held its spring convocation on "Civility, Courtesy and Tolerance in American Society" on March 8 in Cleveland, OH.

Sikh Pre-School Opened in CA

The Guru Ram Das Khalsa School, a pre-school with a focus on Sikh values and education, was recently opened in Yuba City, CA. The school serves the Sutter County and the Sacramento region. The pre-school will be attended by children ages 3 to 5 and will eventually be expanded through the third grade. The Sacramento Bee (dated 3/9/98) published an article on the opening of the Sikh pre-school.

Sikh Doctor Devises Novel Anti-Cancer Treatment

Dr. Harinder Singh Garewal, a physician at the Arizona Cancer Center in Tucson, is reported to have developed a new treatment for treating tumors in the throat and mouth. The treatment may also work for liver and breast cancer. Dr. Garewal presented the results of his study at a conference sponsored by American Cancer Society on March 23. Another Sikh physician, Sardar Daljit Singh, an ophthalmologist in Punjab is reported to have contributed in a research effort for localizing and identifying the gene for congenital eye cataract.

Congressman Towns Denounces Arrest of 2 Sikhs

Representative Edolphus Towns, a New York Democrat, has placed a statement in the Congressional Record denouncing the arrest of two young Sikhs outside Gurdwara Guru Nanak Mission, Jalandhar in Punjab as they rode past it on their bicycles on February 10.

Congressman Burton Exposes CBI Conspiracy

Congressman Dan Burton, an Indiana Republican, is reported to have placed a statement in the Congressional Record on March 19 detailing India's Central Bureau of Investigation's conspiracy to falsely label a young Sikh man, Navjot Singh, a "terrorist" and force him to sign false papers in the Beant Singh case. The victim's father is reported to have brought the matter to the attention of India's National Human Rights Commission in December of 1997 but the Commission has ignored the case of the Sikh youth.

Congressman Pallone Downplays Atrocities on Sikhs

Congressman Frank Pallone, a New Jersey Democrat and the chairman of the Congressional India Caucus, spoke in the House on 2/26/98 opposing the possible formation of a new mechanism in Punjab to investigate acts of murder, torture and rape of member of the Sikh community by Punjab police personnel. Congressman Pallone said that "let us look past the problems that formerly plagued Punjab. It is time for us to focus on different issues such as the major economic reforms initiated by the Punjab Government. Punjab is currently trying to attract numerous American companies to invest in the State's infrastructure, information technology, and agricultural projects.... Let us recognize Punjab's success and look to the future instead of the past." Congressmen Pallone and Sherrod Brown have also written to India's National Human Rights Commission highlighting the concerns of the Kashmiri Hindu Pandit community.

Activities of Council of Khalistan

The Washington Post dated March 6 published a letter from The Council of

Khalistan which elaborated on the recent elections in India and contended that unstable coalition governments will eventually lead to India's breakup. The Council has also written a letter on March 20 to India's newly elected Prime Minister Vajpayee urging him to appoint a commission to expose and punish the genocide against Sikhs and asked him for giving freedom to Khalistan and other minority nations of South Asia. Dr. Gurmit Singh Aulakh, President of Council of Khalistan, attended the initial press conference of the Religious Prisoners Task Force on Capitol Hill. Dr. Aulakh pointed out that India is one of the worst violators of human rights in the world, including religious beliefs. The Council is organizing its annual demonstration, in memory of the desecration of Darbar Sahib Complex in Amritsar in June of 1984, on June 6, 1998 in Washington, DC. Over 20,000 Sikhs are said to have been murdered by Indian forces in this brutal attack on more than 38 Sikh Gurdwaras throughout Punjab. The Council of Khalistan is leading the peaceful democratic and non-violent struggle to liberate Khalistan from Indian occupation. More information on the Council can be obtained from <http://www.khalistan.com>

Badal in US

Prakash Singh Badal, Akali leader and Chief Minister of Punjab, is reported to be in USA for a liver operation and talks with Punjabi NRIs. Badal met with NRIs at a meeting organized in New York by the India-America Chamber of Commerce and the Indian consulate. He is also reported to have met India's ambassador Naresh Chandra to explore avenues for investment in Punjab. Badal is said to have been operated for a liver ailment in a private hospital in New York. He is

expected to return to Punjab in the first week of April.

Jewish Museum Planner Visits Punjab

Jeshajahu Weinberg, the well known museum planner and Founding Director of the Holocaust Museum in Washington, visited Punjab in connection with the proposed Khalsa Memorial Theme Park at Anandpur Sahib. Weinberg is reported to have said that "Sikhs are both a nation and a religion and so are the Jews. Sikhs were persecuted, so were Jews. It is a challenging project."

Collection of Poems

California poet Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni recently published the third volume of her poems titled "Leaving Yuba City." The poems focus on the emigrant experience in Yuba City, particularly Sikh farmers who settled there around 1910. Individual lives are brought out against a backdrop of old and new cultures. She imagines the arrival by train of Sikh brides, delayed after 30 years of US immigrations restrictions as: "The platform is endless-wide. The men walk and walk without advancing. Their lined, wavering mouths, their eyes like drowning lights. We cannot recognize a single face." The collection poems is published by Anchor.

Two Indian Boxers Defect to US

Two of India's army top boxers, Lakha Singh and Devinder Thapa, are reported to have defected to the US. Both boxers were a part of a 12 member team that visited San Anotonia, TX to participate in World Army Boxing in January of 1998. The whereabouts of the army boxers are still not known.

NEWS FROM PUNJAB (HOMELAND OF THE SIKHS)

Hukamnaama Bans Marriages in Hotels

A Hukamnaama was issued by Siri Akal Takhat Sahib, Amritsar on March 16, 1998 prohibiting Sikhs all

over the world from conducting Anand Karaaj (Sikh marriage ceremony) in hotels and wedding places due to the lack of religious respect accorded to Siri Guru Granth

Sahib at these locations. The directive also asked all Sikhs to maintain the sanctity of Siri Guru Granth Sahib during any ceremony organized in their respective homes or other places.

With this directive, Sikh families can now conduct wedding ceremonies only at a Gurdwara Sahib or at home in accordance with Sikh tenants without any disrespect to Siri Guru Granth Sahib. In response to the directive, The Le Meridien, a New Delhi luxury hotel owned by a Sikh family, has decided not to accept any reservations for Sikh weddings.

Problem Resolution Tribunal to be Appointed

Singh Sahib Bhai Ranjit Singh, Jathedar of Siri Akal Takhat Sahib has announced that a special tribunal will be set up by World Sikh Council (WSC) to deal with legal cases connected with Gurdwaras. The tribunal would operate under the command and advice of Siri Akal Takhat Sahib. The tribunal is expected to save time and money on expensive litigation among contesting parties and prevent the misuse of funds offered to Sikh Gurdwaras. Singh Sahib is reported to have remarked in an article published in The Hindustan Times dated 3/26/98 that the World Sikh Council was the only solution to the myriad problems facing the community. Singh Sahib also expressed an interest in looking into issues of Sikh awareness and promotion. He said that with regard to dowry and lavish wedding arrangements "we will first start an awareness campaign in this regard and then take strong measures."

SGPC Passes Resolution Banning Tobacco

The Shromani Gurdwara Prabhandak Committee (SGPC) is reported to have unanimously approved a resolution banning Sikhs from trading, growing or using tobacco in any form. The SGPC also passed budget proposals for 1998-99 totaling approximately Rs. 8.5 crore, with Rs. one crore earmarked for maintenance and reconstruction of Gurdwara buildings in Pakistan.

WSC President Takes Amrit

Sardar Kuldip Singh, President of the World Sikh Council, was formally initiated into the Sikh faith on March 17 when he took Khande-da-Pahul. Many Sikhs had earlier objected to the

WSC President not having been formally initiated into the Sikh faith.

Congress Party Routed in Punjab

The Congress Party was unsuccessful in winning even one of the 13 electoral seats in Punjab during the recent Lok Sabha elections. The Congress party secured its lowest ever vote percentage in electoral history of Punjab. The BJP-Akali alliance won 11 seats. The Congress Party has been held largely responsible for the 1984 June desecration of Siri Darbar Sahib Complex and 38 other Gurdwaras, organizing the November 1984 genocide of Sikhs, and the murder, torture and rape of innumerable number of Sikhs men, women and children in the last 15 years.

3 Sikhs in Central Government

India's newly elected Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee of BJP has appointed three Sikhs to be a part of the central government in India. They include former Punjab Minister and Akali leader Surjit Singh Barnala (Cabinet Minister of Chemicals and Fertilizers with additional responsibility of Food), former Congress Party member Buta Singh (Cabinet Minister of Communications) and Sukhbir Singh Badal, son of Punjab Chief Minister Prakash Singh Badal (Minister of State for Industries). Punjab MLA Prem Singh Lalpura of Shromani Akali Dal (Badal) is reported to have refused to resign from his seat in the Punjab assembly to take oath as a member of the federal Lok Sabha. Lalpura won the Lok Sabha seat from Tarn Taran constituency with margin of about 140,000 votes, the highest in Punjab.

4 Sikhs Elected to Rajya Sabha

Gurcharan Singh Tohra (President of SGPC), Barjinder Singh Hamdard (Managing Editor of Punjabi newspaper Ajit), Sukhdev Singh Dhindsa (Akali Dal General Secretary) and Balwinder Singh Bhunder (Akali Dal General Secretary) are reported to have been elected unopposed to the Rajya Sabha from Punjab on March 20.

Large Scale Irregularities in Faridkot Voting

The Indian Express published a comprehensive article on March 1, 1998 about alleged irregularities by members of the Akali Dal (Badal) party during the elections in Faridkot. The article reports on the following alleged incidents:

- On February 16 over 400 voters mainly Dalits of Ward # 1 in Muktsar were herded to a cotton mill on Jalalabad road by Akali Dal (Badal) activists. They were promised an advance payment if they voted for Sukhbir Singh Badal, son of Punjab Chief Minister. Two of the victims, Mohinder Kaur and Ravinder Kumar told the newspaper that the voters were forced at gunpoint to sit in a huge room which was then locked from outside.
- Manoj Kumar of Ward 12 and Charanjit Singh of Ward 1 in Mukatsar admitted being paid Rs. 200 to cast votes in favor of the Akali nominee. Reports of allegations that money was paid to buy votes in favor of the Akali candidate were also made by residents of Jeevan Nagar and Dashmesh Nagar.
- The Indian Express spoke to people in 20 villages who alleged blatant malpractices on election day.
- The newspaper has at least 20 persons on tape admitting that they were either paid to vote for the Akali candidate or paid to stay away from the polling booth.
- A police constable who had gone to the residence of the village Sarpanch at Panjarayian to arrest him, was beaten by Akali activists.
- Sarpanch Nihan Sing (70 years), and his brother Gurbax Singh of village Thamanwala were attacked by Akali activists inside the village polling booth. They received injuries during the attack and were admitted to CMC Ludhiana hospital.

Book on November 1984 Massacres Banned

The central Government of India and the state government of Delhi informed the Delhi High Court on March 21 that they have decided to ban from further publication and distribution, a book titled Sarkari-Qatl-e-Aam (Government Organized Carnage). The book written by Gurcharan Singh Babbar based on eye-witness accounts, accuses the

Indian government and the judiciary of being a part of the November 1984 Sikh massacres. The book had been published in several languages including English, Hindi and Panjabi. The author said that the aim of the book was to remind the people, the socio-political leadership and the intelligentsia about the bloodiest chapter in the free India's history. He alleges that even after 14 years, the victim's families were still going from pillar to post for justice while the organizers of the genocide were still roaming free. The move by the government is another reminder to the Sikh community that the Sikh perspective on the 1984 massacres shall not be allowed by the Indian government to be disseminated in India. More than 20,000 Sikhs are reported to have been butchered by mobs in Delhi during the first few weeks of November 1984. The Indian Express dated 3/22/98 published an article this development.

Justice Dhingra Demoted

Justice S.N. Dhingra, a judge of the Delhi High Court, is reported to have been demoted because he is alleged to have played an active role in hearing the cases relating to the November 1984 Sikh massacres and initiated judicial proceedings against the accused. Justice Dhingra has appealed to the Supreme Court of India through a written communication. He alleges that due to the negative remarks made in his secret personal evaluations from 1994 -1998, he has been demoted. Justice Dhingra is reported to have said that he feels that he is not a judge and it seems like he is being accused and punished for the 1984 massacres. Justice Dhingra had been one of the few judges in the judicial system who had shown enough courage to initiate judicial proceedings against persons accused of massacring a large number of Sikhs during the first few weeks of November 1984 in India's capital Delhi.

Witnesses in November 1984 Case Being Threatened

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) special prosecutor R.M. Tewari told a Delhi Court on March 24 that

two prosecution witnesses, who testified on March 23 in the Sikh murder case against Sajjan Kumar and 10 others, were being threatened and that he himself had been approached by one of the accused to "settle" the case. The formal trial of 11 accused in the November 1984 murder of Sultanpuri Sikh resident Sardar Navin Singh began on March 23 after more than 13 years of inaction and delay by the government, police and judiciary. On March 23 two Sikh witnesses, Salwati Kaur and Phota Singh, identified the 11 accused and described in detail how Sardar Navin Singh was dragged out of his house and killed mercilessly. Additional witnesses, Wazir Singh, Sumer Singh, Prem Kaur and Banto Kaur will also testify at the trial. Those accused of brutally killing the Sikh man include Sajjan Kumar (former Member of Parliament and a senior Congress(I) party official), Jai Kishan (MLA from Sultanpur Majra and a Congress(I) party official), Nathu Ram, Brahamanand Gupta, Udal Singh, Sis Ram, Jai Bhagwant Gupta, Peerea Ram, Hanuman Prasad, Mahinder Singh Yadav and Satvir Singh. Two accused, Rajendar Kumar and Islam have already died.

Punchhi Takes Over as Chief Justice of Supreme Court

Justice Madan Mohan Punchhi, the senior most judge on the Supreme Court has been appointed the next Chief Justice of India. Justice Punchhi, during his tenure as a judge in the Punjab and Haryana High Court, had refused bail to several Sikhs accused of promoting the cause of an independent Sikh state of Khalistan.

UP Police Blames Sikh Militants

The Uttar Pradesh police is reported to have accused alleged Sikh militants of attacking and killing three members of a Sikh family and injuring 10 others. The incident occurred in the Gangoh area near Saharanpur on March 2. Those killed include Harbhajan Singh, Gurdeep Singh and Sandeep Kaur. The police has not presented any evidence to support their claim but instead continue to say that the crime was

committed by Sikhs. Police squads are reported to have been sent to the Terai region. It is expected that the police may begin a search campaign of illegal detention, torture and harassment of local Sikhs.

Harassment of Members of Human Rights Group

Members of the Committee for Coordination on Disappearances in Punjab, which is collecting data on the illegal killing of Sikhs by the Punjab police, are reported to have been attacked by a group of Punjab police officials on March 13 at Anandpur Sahib during the Hola Mohalla observances. The committee had set up a booth there to distribute copies of the Incident-Report Form and to talk to people on how to fill them out. The booth was manned by lawyers and other volunteers of the Committee. At least three volunteers of the Committee, who were handing out handbills explaining the ongoing documentation project, were attacked and their handbills snatched by Punjab police personnel in civil clothes. When the police officials attacked Lawyer Navkiran Singh, other Committee volunteers and several people in the crowd surrounded them and asked the police officials to identify themselves. While one of the officials took out his identity card, the others ran away. The police official was surrounded by the crowd and brought to the information booth of the Committee where he identified himself as a Head Constable in the Commando Battalion of Punjab police. Meanwhile another group of police officers led by ASP Ram Singh arrived at the scene and refusing to register a complaint took the Head Constable with them. The constable forgot to take the two identity cards that he had been carrying with him. Eye-witnesses included former Justice Ajit Singh Bains, Major General (retired) Narinder Singh, lawyer Rajwinder Singh Bains, Amrik Singh, Harshinder Singh and Jaspal Singh Dhillon. Ram Narayan Kumar, the Convenor of the Committee wrote a letter to the Director General of Punjab police on March 14 about the intimidation incident and returned the

two identity cards along with the letter. The Superintendent of Police (Operations) is reported to have responded by saying that the literature being distributed by the committee activists was highly objectionable and he was seeking a legal opinion on this for the registration of a case against the Committee. He added that under no circumstances the police would file a case against the constable, instead a criminal case would be registered against the activists for illegally detaining the policeman.

The Committee recently accused the state police of threatening the families of Sikh victims with action if they associated with the work of the human rights group. The families of the victims are now fearful of reprisals from the police if they fill and submit the survey forms being distributed by the committee.

The Committee also recently issued a press statement in which it stated that inquiries made by them at the site of the February 10th arrest of two Sikh youths near Gurdwara Guru Nanak Mission has shown that the whole episode was a drama enacted by the police to defame Sikh Gurdwaras and Sikhs in general.

Akalis Ask for Revamping of Constitution

The Shromani Akali Dal (Badal) has demanded the total restructuring of the Indian Constitution so as to recast the political and historical set-up and establish a federal system of governance in the country. A resolution to this effect was passed at the party's conference organized on March 13 on the occasion of Hola Mohalla at Anandpur Sahib.

Punjab's Loan Never Waived Off

The Punjab Government is reported to have admitted for the first time that the entire Rs. 8,500 crore central loan to Punjab was not waived. Punjab Governor, B.K.N. Chibber, while addressing the Punjab Vidhan Sabha on March 24, admitted that the central government led by I.K. Gujral had only waived approximately Rs. 2115 crore and that the issue of waiving the rest of the debt had been

referred to the 11th Financial Commission.

Punjab Farmers Reeling Under Debt

A study conducted by the Institute of Development and Communication for Punjab's Department of Cooperation titled "Rural Credit and Indebtedness in Punjab (1997)" has found that Punjab farmers are under heavy debt taken at very high interest rates. This can result in slowing down of the agricultural growth in Punjab and even result in a stagnation in farm production. The study revealed that approximately 90 percent of farmers in Punjab had taken short-term loans to carry out agricultural operations, totaling a debt of Rs. 5,700 crore. The outstanding loans came to Rs. 2809 per operated acre in the state. These loans were taken by farmers at interest rates ranging from 24 to 36 percent. The farmers were found to have preferred short term loans from commission agents rather than commercial banks. Of the 91 percent farmers who had never gone to a commercial bank, 26 percent did not even know of their existence, while 40 percent feared the paperwork and other formalities at these banks. In Punjab for the last three decades, the agricultural production has increased at a rate of 5% while income has increased at a slower rate of 1.5%.

Laws to Prevent Killing of Female Fetuses

Keeping in mind that the ratio of boys to girls in Punjab is 1000:882 and the gap is increasing, the Punjab Government is reported to have started implementing an existing law to prevent the killing of female fetuses. The law has been on the books since January 1, 1996 but is now being enforced to some extent. The law prohibits 1) physicians from telling the sex of the fetus while conducting an ultrasound and 2) husbands from forcing their wives to get to know the sex of the fetus before the child is born. Violations of the law carry imprisonment sentences ranging from 6 months to 3 years.

Punjab Government Imposes Education Tax on Alcohol

The Akali Dal (Badal)-BJP coalition government in Punjab announced on March 27 at least a one-rupee per liter of alcohol tax which would be used for education. The Council of Khalistan has written a letter to Jathedar of Siri Akal Takhat urging Singh Sahib to issue a Hukamnaama prohibiting Sikhs from drinking alcohol, smoking or partaking of any other intoxicants.

Plans to Develop Harike Sanctuary

A Japanese eco-company is planning to restore the ecological environment at Harike lake wetlands in Punjab while the state government is reported to be promoting a plan to develop eco-tourism at Harike. Water hyacinth, an exotic weed introduced in the various wetlands of Punjab, is now threatening the existence of the internationally recognized bird sanctuary housed in the Harike wetland. About 15 percent of the wetlands are now under a thick cover of hyacinth and the problem continues to grow. Nine major industries located on the banks of Sutlej and Beas have been dumping their effluents in the rivers along with 21 cities and towns. The sanctuary is spread over 86 square kilometers area at the confluence of Sutlej and Beas rivers. The sanctuary and its supporting wetlands reach into Amritsar, Ferozepore and Kapurthala districts. The wetlands were created in 1952 with the construction of an irrigation barrage and was accorded the status of the Indian Ramsar site by the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources in 1990. It is one of the largest man made wetlands in Punjab and is strategically placed in the migratory routes of many birds from Siberia along Central Asia and Western Ranges of the Himalayas and is seated in the basin of the Indus-Sutlej river system with proximity to the Himalayan ranges. The sanctuary is known as the "Paradise of the Bird Watcher" with as many as 363 species of birds making it home permanently or seasonally. Estimates made by the State's Wildlife Department claim that 40 percent of the recorded species

of birds in India have homes in Harike. More information on the Harike wetland ecological preservation project can be obtained from the newspaper The Hindu dated 3/14/98 and 3/16/98.

Inquiry into Suicides in Sangrur

Following reports of suicides by farmers in Andhra Pradesh, a Non-Governmental Organization has demanded that an inquiry also be conducted into the high rate of suicides in the Sangrur district of Punjab. Over the last seven years, in one village of population of 3000, twenty-three young men have been reported to have committed suicide.

Punjab Leads in Disappearances in India During 1996

The United Nations Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances released a report for 1996 in which it claims that it received 28 new cases of disappearances in India. Majority of these cases have been reported from the Sikh majority state of Punjab.

Punjab Police to Prepare List of Sikh Militants Again

P.C. Dogra, Director General of Punjab police is reported to have announced (The Times of India dated 3/13/98) that he has directed police chiefs in Punjab to prepare a comprehensive list of former militants acquitted by courts or released on bail recently and intensify surveillance on them as well as those militants who had surrendered to the police. In the past, Punjab police is known to have prepared lists of Amritdhari Sikhs and targeted them for harassment and eventual liquidation.

Surveillance of Sikh Youth Visiting From Abroad

The Punjab police is reported to have stepped up its surveillance of Sikh youths visiting Punjab from abroad, under the pretext that many of them had gone abroad on fake passports and they need to be tracked. The police is reported to have stressed the necessity of preparing lists of Sikh youth living outside India who may have fled on fake passports. Such a step by the Indian intelligence could

cover a large number of Sikhs who left Punjab using legal passports. It seems that the aim of this move is to keep track of Sikhs living abroad as well as closely monitor their activities when they visit Punjab.

Sikh Killed in Illegal Police Custody

Malkiat Singh (28 years old) son of Didar Singh, of village Bisgawa near Mandi Ahmedgarh near Raikot, is reported to have been tortured to death in custody of the Ahmedgarh police between February 5 and 8. The victim's dead body was discovered on February 8 and it had several blue marks indicating severe beatings, ribs broken and many bodily injuries with blood coming out of it. The Patiala range DIG is alleged to have been responsible for this death.

Police Tortures Sikh Youth to Death

Police officials of Dhadwal village police station near Gurdaspur are reported to have allegedly tortured and killed Gurmukh Singh, a 22 year old Sikh youth, on March 22. The victim's mother, Charan Kaur, met with media persons at the local Civil Hospital where the post-mortem of Gurmukh Singh was being conducted.

Sikh Lady Raped by Policemen

Harnek Kaur, a resident of Basti Mandi Wali in village Kasu Baegu near Ferozepore, is reported to have been raped by four Punjab police officials in the early hours of February 9. Four uniformed police officials traveling in a gypsy visited the victim's house around 3 AM in the morning. They broke open the door of the house and all four are alleged to have raped Harnek Kaur. A case has been registered at the Ferozepore Sadar police station.

Sikh Tortured by Police

Jagjitpal Singh, a resident of Batala, is reported to have been forcibly taken to the Urban Estate police station under the Civil Line police station at Batala on February 10 where he was tortured by incharge of the police station Darshan Lal. The victim is reported to have been severely beaten by Punjab police officials. He was admitted to the local Civil hospital

where he was treated for injuries for two days. Jagjitpal Singh met with reporters and showed them pictures of marks of torture on his body.

Sikh Illegally Detained & Beaten by Punjab Police

Harpreet Singh son of Hari Singh, a resident of village Phul Khurd near Ropar, is reported to have been allegedly picked up by Ropar police officials on February 11. He is alleged to have been beaten while in illegal custody of the police.

Sikh Family Beaten in Public in Haryana

A Sikh family of Tohana, Haryana is reported to have been publicly beaten by members and supporters of BJP party on February 15. Those injured include Harnek Singh, his wife Surjit Kaur and his nephew Balwinder Singh. The victims have been admitted to the local government hospital. Surjit Kaur is still in comma while the others have gained consciousness. Harnek Singh met with reporters at the hospital and told the reporters of the vicious attack on his family. On February 15, a group of BJP supporters came to Harnek Singh's house in Bhatia Nagar of Tohana. Apart from distributing leaflets for the BJP, they are also alleged to have misbehaved with young girls in the neighborhood. Harnek Singh objected to this behavior and asked the group to leave. That evening around 10 PM a group of boys came back to his house and pelted stones on his home. When Harnek Singh, his wife and nephew came out of the house to see what was going on, the mob dragged them to the road in front of their house and publicly beat them with hockey sticks and iron rods. The victims received deep injuries and they were left on the road for a few hours before being taken to the local hospital. The suspects include Rakesh Kumar, Naresh Kumar, Nannu Ram, Mohinderpal, Mahesh Kumar and Vijay Kumar. The police has not registered a case against any of the suspects who are locally well known. The suspects are now reported to be taunting the Sikh family by driving past their house and threatening them.

Federation Contests Police Claim

Narain Singh, the acting Convenor of the Akal Federation has said that the claims of Punjab police DGP, P.C. Dogra, with regard to Sikh militants killing two persons recently are false. The police chief had accused former Sikh militants of being involved in the murder of a driver and a cleaner of a Samba bound truck. Narain Singh clarified that the truck carrying 360 bags of cement was not intercepted at a police check point near Kunjar bridge on March 10 but found at Dera Baba Nanak with a cement dealer. He alleged that the cement dealer was let off after a handsome bribe to police officials and all the accused, Kewal Singh, Satwinder Singh, and Surjit Singh, were arrested from their respective houses on March 7 and 8 and not at the police check post on March 10 as claimed by the DGP.

ISYF Denies Punjab Police Claims

The International Sikh Youth Federation (Chaheru) is reported to have denied any connection with the two alleged Sikh militants that Punjab police claims to have arrested recently in Jalandhar. ISYF spokesperson Balwinder Singh has accused the Punjab police of falsifying their involvement in the case so as to defame their organization.

Three Sikhs Acquitted

Three Sikh men, Rajbir Singh, Harminder Singh, and Tarlok Singh, were acquitted by the designated TADA court on March 20 in connection with a false case registered against them for the kidnapping of the granddaughter of India's ex-Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao. The TADA court judge declared that the prosecution had failed to establish the

charges against the accused. The Sikh men had been jailed under TADA for many years under these false charges.

Sikhs Cleared on Murder Charges

The Patiala Additional Session Judge B.C. Gupta has acquitted three Sikh youths of the alleged murder of a family in village Dadoa in November of 1993. Kuldip Singh Keepa of village Chutal, Mandeep Singh of village of Muradmajra and Gurdial Singh of village Muradmajra, had been falsely accused by Punjab police of being "terrorists" and members of Bhindranwala Tiger Khalistan Force. The judge ruled that the police could not present any solid evidence against the accused and did not present any eye-witness as a result the three accused Sikh youth were acquitted of all charges pending against them.

Case Against Policeman for 1995 Torture of Sikh

The Punjab and Haryana High Court has directed the Amritsar SSP to register a criminal case against an Inspector of the police department for the alleged illegal arrest and torture of Amarjit Singh of Amritsar. The victim along with other members of his office staff were picked up by Punjab police officials on March 10, 1995. He was tortured for a week and released on payment of a bribe of Rs. 2.5 lakh.

Inquiry Ordered into Disappearance of Sikh Youth

The session judge in Chandigarh has ordered that all records pertaining to the alleged illegal detention of Paramjit Singh Jhandu be submitted to the court. Paramjit Singh along with three others was picked up by Fatehgarh police officials on December 12, 1996 and shown to

have been arrested instead on April 1, 1997 at Kasba Khamano. The victim is alleged to have been kept in the illegal custody of Punjab police for over 3 months. The victims father, Bachan Singh, has accused the police officials of taking a bribe of Rs. 7.5 lakh to free his son. He also accused the police of forcibly confiscating three of his personal cars.

DSP Accused of Torturing Sikh to Death Surrenders

Mandar Singh, a DSP of Punjab police, is reported to have recently been arrested. The accused had been absconding and was wanted for the custody death of Gurdev Singh of village Akbarpura near Bhikhiwind. The victim is reported to have been picked up by a police party led by the DSP on December 14, 1996 and tortured in police custody for 10 days before he died.

Inspector Guilty of Stripping Sikh Widow Reinstated

Inspector Budh Singh of Punjab police, who had been suspended for the 8/21/97 stripping of a Sikh widow in front of her son, is alleged to have been reinstated and posted in Mukstar district.

Fighting Between Police Officials Accused of Killing Sikhs

A free for all fight between two Punjab police officials, DSP Baldev Singh and ASI Harvinder Singh, and their supporters is reported to have broken out at the Amritsar Central Jail in the last week of February. DSP Baldev Singh has been accused of killing 7 members of a Sikh family in the well known Bagga killing case, while ASI Harvinder Singh is accused of killing Kashmir Singh of Hoshiarpur.

NEWS FROM OTHER PARTS OF THE WORLD

Worldwide Sikh Population

The recently published 1998 Information Almanac estimates the Sikh population in the world to be 19.1 million as of middle of 1995. The number of Sikhs in the world exceeds the Jewish population by approximately 5 million. The

Almanac is edited by Borgna Brunner.

Sikh Exhibition Planned for 1999

The Victoria and Albert Museum of London is organizing a Sikh exhibition to celebrate the 300th anniversary of the Khalsa. The exhibit

will be displayed in London starting March 25, 1999 for four months and will then travel to the Asian Arts Museum in San Francisco (USA), Smithsonian Institute in Washington (USA), Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto (Canada) and a few European destinations. Dr. Deborah Swallow, a

curator at the museum is currently visiting Punjab to explore the possibility of borrowing some Sikh relics from Indian museums.

Web Site on Sikh Historical Images

An outstanding collection of rare images highlighting Sikh history over nearly four centuries is now available on the Internet. The web site includes description and images dealing with The court of Lahore, Anglo-Sikh wars, Sikh women, Jaito Morcha, World Wars I and II, traditional Sikh weapons etc. The collection has been prepared through many years of research by Sardar Amandeep Singh of UK and can be accessed at:

<http://easyweb.easynet.co.uk/~amand eep/index.htm>

Meeting of World War II Veterans

Veterans of World War II met on February 11 at The Imperial War Museum in London to release a new book on WWII. The meeting was attended by several WWII Sikh veterans including Havaldar Major Rajinder Singh Dhatt (retired), Havaldar Basant Singh Bhaiyaa (retired) and Havaldar Karam Singh (retired). Approximately 500,000 persons from Commonwealth countries are said to have participated in WWII of which approximately 170,000 are known to have been killed or reported missing. Sardar Amandeep Singh of UK has initiated a project to produce a film documenting the role of Sikh soldiers during WWII. More information on the project can be obtained from the web page:

<http://easyweb.easynet.co.uk/~amand eep/HomeStuff/events.htm>

UK Sikhs Protest Shaving Rule

Members of the Sikh community in Edinburgh, United Kingdom are protesting a 100 year old rule which requires municipal transport staff to be clean shaven. The local Sikhs leaders contended that the archaic rule prevents local Sikhs from applying for jobs on the buses. The Herald (Glasgow) dated March 7 published an article on the protests by Sikhs.

Commonwealth Day Celebrations

Celebrations observing Commonwealth Day were held on March 9 in Westminster Abbey in UK. Queen Elizabeth attended the Interfaith Observance Service in which representatives of six different religions participated. The Sikh representative was Inderjit Singh of Network of Sikh Organizations in UK and he read a few verses from Siri Guru Granth Sahib.

Sikh Scout Unit Formed in UK

An all Sikh scout group which was formed in January of 1998 was formally launched on March 28 in London. The 13th Southall Sikh Scouts, which has 18 cubs and 30 scouts is a mixed sex group. Daljit Singh, the leader of the scout group is quoted in The Southall Gazette dated March 20 as "It's good for children to feel like they belong to something. The scout movement feels like an extended family and it is a good way of exposing children to a new way of learning and helping them to become good citizens, as well as being a great deal of fun." The success of the group has already inspired the formation of other Sikh scout groups, including one in Guilford. The idea of setting up Sikh scout groups came from Akal Purakh ki Fauj, a local Sikh educational and social organization.

Sikh Girls Youth Association

Sikh girls in London are setting up a Sikh Girls Youth Association to cater for and support the needs of Sikh girls. Several Sikh girls have expressed concern at the late timings and locations of Sikh related events and the dominance of Sikh men at these events. The aim of the association is not to segregate the girls, but to encourage them to participate, and instill confidence as well as unity among them. The association intends to organize regular meetings, discussions and debate groups, sports activities, and Gatka displays involving Sikh girls.

Vigil for Murdered Sikh Boy

Members of the Sikh community of London participated in a candle light vigil in front of the Home Office on March 9 to express their concern at

the inadequate police investigations into the racial attack and death of a young Sikh boy Lakvinder Singh. The victim was murdered in a racial attack on October 14, 1997 and his dead body was found in the River Thames.

Fun Run by Khalsa Human Rights

Khalsa Human Rights, a UK based human rights group, has organized a fundraising Fun Run on April 5 in Leicester, UK. More information on the event can be obtained from their web page at <http://dialspace.dial.pipex.com/town/square/ev90495/>

Sikh Organization Helps Hospital

The Yorkshire Sikh Force (UK) is reported to have responded to an appeal by the National Health Bradford Hospital, by donating a thousand pounds towards the purchase of a scanner needed by the hospital. The organization was formed in 1992 and works with social organizations.

Sikhs in New Zealand

The AAP Newsfeed dated March 19 published an article on immigrants in New Zealand. The article mentioned that Sikhs from India have been a part of New Zealand life for almost as long as European settlers. Currently, the Sikh community holds regular religious services at Siri Guru Nanak Dev Sikh Sangat Gurdwara Sahib in Otahuhu, New Zealand.

Other Faiths Join Christian Protests in New Zealand

Members of Wellington's Faith in Action group - representing Sikh, Baha'i, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, Islamic and Rintagu communities - have joined Christian representatives in protesting against an exhibit at the Museum of New Zealand. The concerned exhibit shows the statue of virgin Mary wrapped in a condom and a picture of The Last Supper using topless women. The interfaith group issued a statement that "We, members of non-Christian faiths, are extremely unhappy (that) the two displays at Te Papa Museum are not only causing a lot of mental suffering to large numbers of our community but

also denigrating two of the truly great people of our time.”

Sikh Youth Seminar in Ontario

The Ontario Khalsa Darbar, Canada held a Sikh Youth Seminar on March 1 for high school students. The seminar was organized to discuss the

opinion and knowledge of the participants about the Sikh faith.

Ontario Sikh Students Association

The Ontario Sikh Students Association and the Malton Cougars Soccer Club held a meeting on March 8 at the Malton Sikh Gurdwara Sahib.

The events was attended by many Sikh students. The meeting involved Kirtan and presentations by several youths to disseminate information about Sikhi as well as sporting activities.

Gurpurabs for April 1998

Actual Dates

April 1	Prakash Divas of Siri Guru Tegh Bahaadar Sahib (1621)
April 15	Prakash Divas of Siri Guru Nanak Sahib (1469)
April 15	Prakash Divas of Siri Guru Arjan Sahib (1563)

Observed Dates

April 1	Joti Jot Divas of Siri Guru Hargobind Sahib (1644)
April 9	Joti Jot Divas of Siri Guru Harkrishan Sahib (1664)
April 9	Gur Gaddi Divas of Siri Guru Tegh Bahaadar Sahib (1664)
April 13	Vaisaakhi - Khalsa Sajna Divas (1699)
April 17	Prakash Divas of Siri Guru Tegh Bahaadar Sahib (1621)
April 19	Prakash Divas of Siri Guru Arjan Sahib (1563)
April 27	Prakash Divas of Siri Guru Angad Sahib (1504)

(Information provided by Sardar Baldev Singh of Austin, TX)

The news items published in this newsletter which are not directly related to the activities of VSC-USA, do not necessarily reflect the views of VSC-USA. If you would like to send us a news item for possible publication in the newsletter, please e-mail it by the 15th of the month to vsc-usa@unforgettable.com or send it to VSC-USA Newsletter, PO Box 1553, Dublin, Ohio 43017.

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**Celebrate the 300th Anniversary of the Khalsa by Joining
the Sava Lukh Sikh March in Washington, DC in April 1999**

