



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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Justice Kuldip Singh Declared President of World Sikh Council

Singh Sahib Bhai Ranjit Singh, in his capacity as a patron of the World Sikh Council (WSC), appointed Justice Kuldip Singh – a former Judge of the Supreme Court of India as the President of WSC. The announcement was made by Jathedar Sahib on December 21, 1997 at Siri Akal Takhat Sahib, during a massive religious meeting attended by Sikh scholars, intellectuals, religious and social leaders from all over the world. Addressing the congregation, Jathedar Sahib said that three duties had been given to Justice Kuldip Singh: celebration of 300th anniversary of the Khalsa in April of 1999, publication of daily newspaper which reflects the Sikh faith, and the establishment of a structure to infuse Sikhi spirit among the coming younger generation. Other office-bearers including the executive, will be announced by the Honorable Jathedar of Siri Akal Takhat Sahib in consultation with the new President.

Jathedar Sahib brought to the notice of the press some of the salient features of the newly revised constitution of WSC. They aimed at promoting international brotherhood among Sikhs and working vigorously for the abiding glory of the Khalsa Panth and the well-being of mankind.

Future Presidents will be appointed by the Jathedar of Siri Akal Takhat Sahib upon the unanimous recommendation by the Executive Committee of WSC. The head office of the council will be based in Amritsar and regional offices will be developed in Chandigarh, Delhi, Calcutta, Mumbai, USA, Canada, Europe, West Asia and South-East Asia.

We believe that the World Sikh Council is formed to represent all the Sikh Institutions of the World, who accept the supremacy of Siri Akal Takhat Sahib and are committed not only to preach but also to practice a Sikh way of life. As such, we are of the opinion that all the representatives of the Sikh Institutions of the World must be Amritdhari Sikhs and that the President of such a supreme body of the Sikhs should not only be a committed Amritdhari Sikh, but also be very well versed in all aspects of the Sikh way of life. Vishav Sikh Council – USA conveyed these feelings to Singh Sahib Bhai Ranjit Singh Ji through Dr. Ranbir Singh of Columbus, Ohio in a meeting with him in Chandigarh on December 14, 1997. Sardar Kuldeep Singh of Toledo, Ohio, Coordinator of VSC-USA, called Justice Kuldip Singh in Chandigarh on December 22, 1997 to congratulate him on his appointment, to appreciate his decision to take Amrit before taking charge of the office of the President of WSC, and to request him to put into practice the decision that he has so wisely taken. Justice Kuldip Singh was also informed of the structure and activities of VSC-USA.



North Carolina Gurdwara Joins VSC-USA

The Sikh Gurdwara of North Carolina, Durham, NC, has formally joined the Vishav (World) Sikh Council - USA. The VSC-USA now has 26 Gurdwaras and Sikh institutions as its members. Other Gurdwaras and Sikh organizations are encouraged to join the Council.

Publicity for Sava Likh Sikh March

A press release was issued by VSC-USA on the proposed Sava Likh Sikh March planned for April of 1999 in Washington, DC to celebrate the 300th anniversary of the Khalsa. News articles about the proposed march were published by Chardi Kala dated 12/3/97 and Des Pardes dated 12/19/97.

Didar Singh Bains Visits India

Didar Singh Bains, former President of World Sikh Organization and a prominent member of the North American Akali Dal, recently visited India as a state guest of the Punjab Government. On his arrival at New Delhi airport on December 9, he was detained at the immigration desk despite carrying a valid visa. The issue was resolved when Prakash Singh Badal, Chief Minister of Punjab, called Naresh Chandra, Indian Ambassador in Washington, who in turn spoke to the Union Home Secretary. The Home Secretary called the airport authorities and Bains was released after three hours of detention. An immigration officer said that "his name figures on a ministry list of people who are not to be allowed into the country before a government approval comes."

In an article published in Indian Express dated 12/11/97, Sardar Bains is reported to have said "I was always for a negotiated settlement with more autonomy to states" and further said that it was a sense of fear and hurt which resulted in some Sikhs adopting a tough posture against the Government of India.

The Times of India dated 12/13/97 reported Sardar Bains saying that misinformation spread abroad had made some people lend support to Punjab militants in the past. He said that Operation Bluestar conveyed an impression among some people the world over that the government was anti-Sikh and that "even I felt so till recently and that is what made me side with the separatists." He said that all his past impressions about the government were dissipated after Prakash Singh Badal took over as Chief Minister of Punjab. "As I see peace in Punjab, I realize how misinformed the Sikhs abroad are." Asked whether he would ask militant leaders based abroad to change their minds in the present dispensation, Sardar Bains said that he would certainly make an earnest appeal to them provided they met him. "I have not been in touch with them. But surely if they contact me, I will give them my advice," he said.

Bains is planning to open a Bank of Nations in Punjab with the help of NRIs. The bank is expected to have an investment of Rs 100 crores.

California May Enforce Shaving of Prisoners

New proposed grooming standards for prisoners in California are reported to have been recently introduced. The rule restricts male inmates to cut their hair to no more than 3 inches in length, eliminate beards, and trim mustaches to the corner of the lip. The proposed regulation came under fire from hundreds of outraged Sikhs, Muslims and Native Americans who attended a public hearing conducted by the Department of Corrections in Rancho Cordova on December 12. The speakers contended that the dress code would degrade religious and spiritual traditions, dehumanize inmates and stoke institutional uprisings. More than 300 Sikhs from all over California attended the meeting. Numerous Sikh speakers criticized the regulations as a particular affront to their religion and informed the hearing committee that

the ban of beards and long hair violated their right to religious freedom. It is estimated that there are about 20 Sikhs in California prisons. Hundreds of Sikhs from all over the US are reported to have signed petitions and written letters of protest to the correctional authorities. The Council of Khalistan in a letter to the California Department of Corrections stated that "To our community, this requirement to shave does not merely affect a handful of Sikhs in the correctional facilities, it reflects how we are viewed as a community and how we are treated as a community." News articles relating to this issue were published by San Francisco Chronicle dated 12/13/97, Sacramento Bee dated 12/13/97, Washington Post dated 12/21/97. National Public Radio 88.5 FM (San Francisco) held a forum on this issue on the morning of December 11.

California Supreme Court Refuses to Hear Case

The Supreme Court of California has refused to hear a case challenging a court of appeals ruling that although a private Christian school was a business but under the first amendment they had the right to discriminate against a Sikh child. Since the case was filed in a state court, not much further legal action is anticipated.

President Clinton Cancels Visit to India

President Bill Clinton is reported to have canceled his proposed visit to India due to the unstable political situation there. President Clinton had originally planned to visit India and Pakistan between February 10-20.

Religion in the Workplace

The proposed legislation in Congress requiring private companies to accommodate religious needs of workers has evoked a debate on the role of religion in the workplace. Articles on this issue were published by the Fresno Bee dated 11/29/97 and Chicago-Sun Times dated 12/7/97. Both the articles cited the case of

Sardar Prabhjot Singh, who was refused a job as a manager with Domino's Pizza, because he refused to shave his beard in accordance with Sikh religious beliefs.

Global Perspective on Holiday Season

The Columbus Dispatch dated 12/23/97 published an informative article on how various nationalities and religions celebrate the holiday season. The article quoted Dr. Tarunjit Singh Butalia of Sikh Educational and Religious Foundation of Dublin, OH, saying "Sikhs believe in the divinity of all faiths, including Christianity, and hence are not overwhelmed by the religious celebrations surrounding Christmas." Sikh Educational and Religious Foundation is a member of VSC-USA.

Arts Festival Celebrates Holiday Season

The Dublin Arts Council near Columbus, OH, organized an arts festival dealing with holiday celebrations around the world. The Sikh exhibit was prepared in consultation with the local Gurdwara Sahib and Sikh Educational and Religious Foundation. The exhibit started on December 15 and ended on January 2.

Upcoming Interfaith Events in Ohio

The Interfaith Association of Central Ohio is planning several public interfaith forums with Sikh participation. The proposed forums to be held in 1998 are as follows:

- January 18 - Importance of understanding other religions
- February 22 - How faiths deal with racism
- April 22 - Contemplative religious practices
- September 17 - Teaching religion in public schools
- October 12 - Faiths and colonialism

Sikh Student of Union City, CA Attacked

A Sikh boy attending James Logan High School in Union City, CA, is reported to have been attacked and

beaten by fellow students on his way back from school. His turban was removed and his hair were opened by other kids. The incident occurred before the Thanksgiving holidays. The boy, along with three other Sikhs kids attending the same high school, are reported to have cut their *Kes* in response to this incident. The web page of the school may be visited at <http://www.jlhs.nhusd.k12.ca.us/>. To register your protest against this incident please call the school at (510) 471-2520 or fax to (510) 471-0514.

Two similar situations are alleged to have happened some time ago in Atlanta, GA. Fortunately, the family of the Sikh student reacted appropriately with the help of law to stop the harassment.

Lawsuit Against Proposed Gurdwara Building

The Evergreen Citizens Coalition has filed a lawsuit against the city for having approved a plan to construct a Gurdwara near San Jose, CA. The citizens group contends that the city ignored the environmental effects of the project. The building plans were approved through the city's permit process, despite objections raised during three contentious public hearings. Some supporters of the proposed Gurdwara believe that opposition to the project is motivated by racism, an allegation that has infuriated the opponents. The San Francisco Chronicle dated 12/25/97 published an article on the situation.

Sikh Gurdwara Burglarized

The Sikh Center of New York Gurdwara in Queens, NY was burglarized on the morning of November 27. The thieves stole the collection box. No one has been arrested and the police are investigating the burglary.

Chicago Gurdwara Management Board Dissolved

It has been learnt that a court has dissolved all nine members of the management board of Sikh Religious Society of Chicago, Palatine, IL. The judge had offered to accept a neutral member of the Sikh community as the receiver but the two parties could not

come up with any mutually acceptable person at that time. The court may appoint a non-Sikh as the receiver if the two warring parties cannot agree on a mutually acceptable person.

High School Begins Panjabi Classes

The Virgil I. Grissom School, a junior high school in South Ozone Park, NY, is reported to have started Panjabi classes to help several immigrant students from Punjab attending the school. The school system now offers classes in 12 different foreign languages. The principal is reported to have pointed that the Panjabi class is not intended to segregate the students. He envisions it as a transition where students gain competency in English and can be phased back into regular classes. Newsday dated 11/26/97 published an article on this issue.

Helping the Homeless in California

The Chardi Kalaa Sikh Community Center of San Jose, CA, held a food drive for homeless shelters in December. On December 17, the center fed over 200 people at a homeless shelter. The center also successfully completed its first warm clothes drive for the homeless on December 23. Over 1500 used and 150 new items of warm clothing contributed by the local Sangat were donated to the George Travis Center in San Jose, which serves nine homeless shelters. These generous gestures were carried out as a part of the center's community services program. The center hopes to organize similar programs on a regular basis. More details on the activities of the center may be obtained from their web page at www.chardikalaa.com

Writers of the Sikh Future

The Sikh Foundation USA and Chardi Kalaa Community Center have organized an international short-story writing contest titled "Writers of the Sikh Future." The only stipulation for the entries is that they must portray Sikhs as central figures. The contest is open to all not just Sikhs. Stories from children and young people are specially welcome. Entries must be postmarked or e-mailed by

3/31/98. More information on the contest can be obtained from the web page www.chardikalaa.com/~sikhwriters

Gurbani Video Cassettes Available
The Gurbani Foundation has made available for public purchase more than twenty video tapes on Gurbani. The cost of the tapes is \$10.00 each. The foundation in cooperation with Sikh Religious Society of Chicago has been broadcasting Gurbani programs on Chicagoland Cable Network for the last four years. The Chicago Society is a member of VSC-USA. More information on the video tapes can be obtained by calling (630) 830-7695.

Sikh Features in Advertisement
A recent issue of Sales and Field Force Automation Magazine, carried an advertisement for UniverSell from MEI which shows a picture of 5 sales persons from all over the world. One person featured in the picture is a Sikh with full turban and beard.

Punjab Police Cats Suspected of Killing US Sikh Family

On December 2, Punjab police “black cats” are alleged to have attacked the house of US legal residents Harbans Singh (age 64) and his wife Binder Kaur (age 57) in Dhira Kote, near Jandiala Guru. The police cats are alleged to have broken into the house and using heavy iron bars beaten Harbans Singh and their servant Madan Lal (age 50) to death. Binder Kaur, although beaten, was apparently strangled to death. Then the attackers looted the house.

Encyclopedia on World Religions
Barnes and Noble has recently published a book titled “Illustrated Encyclopedia of World Religions.” The editor of the book is Chris Richards, a member of the Religious Education Council for England and Wales. The section on Sikh religion is edited by Dr. Gurharpal Singh, a senior lecturer at the De Monfort University and editor of International Journal on Punjabi Studies.

Popularity of Web Page of Council of Khalistan
The Council of Khalistan’s Internet web site (www.khalistan.com) is

reported to have had an enormous increase in computer users accessing it. It has been reported that over 500,000 hits have been received at the site since October of 1997. Many of these hits were from overseas. The Council of Khalistan is leading the peaceful, democratic and non-violent struggle to liberate Khalistan from Indian occupation.

Death of Charitable Sikh Doctor
A Sikh physician, Dr. Jasbir M. Singh of Atlanta, is reported to have died of a stroke on December 5. He used to transform his Doraville medical clinic into a free clinic one Saturday each month, during which he offered free medical care to patients who could not afford to pay. He is also reported to have helped many recent Sikh immigrants who could not afford medical care, and helped establish the Gurdwara in Tucker, GA. His obituary was published in the Atlanta Journal and Constitution dated 12/8/97.

NEWS FROM PUNJAB (HOMELAND OF THE SIKHS)

Demand for Judicial Commission
Sardar Kuldip Singh, retired judge of Supreme Court of India, has warned Prakash Singh Badal, Chief Minister of Punjab, that if the state government does not appoint a judicial commission, he would set up a “people’s commission” to investigate the genocide of Sikhs in Punjab. During elections, the Akali-BJP combine had promised to set up a judicial commission into the genesis of killings in Punjab but on being successfully elected into power, the state government abandoned the formation of such a commission. Addressing the first convention of the Committee for Coordination of Disappearance in Punjab on December 10, Sardar Kuldip Singh said that “We request the Akalis to wake up to their commitment. We will hold a massive rally within a month to demand the immediate appointment of a judicial commission. And if by Vaisaakhi (4/13/98), there

is no response to our demand, we will go ahead and constitute a people’s commission.” The meeting was organized to coincide with International Human Rights Day and was dedicated to the memory of Sardar Jaswant Singh Khalra, who has been missing since September 6, 1995. Khalra was the President of the human rights wing of the Akali Dal and the first person to gather documentary evidence proving the mass cremation of unidentified Sikh corpses by Punjab police.

On December 21, the Punjab Human Rights Organization also demanded the setting up of a judicial commission.

Two Sentenced for 1984 Massacres
The additional session judge of a Delhi court has sentenced to death two persons, Manohar Lal and Jagdish Jagga, for burning alive four Sikh brothers during the November

1984 Sikh massacres. The victims, Laxman Singh, Hoshiar Singh, Shaman Singh and Darshan Singh, were aged between 15 and 35 years. They were attacked on November 2, 1984 in Kalyanpuri area of east Delhi. The court order confirmed that the victims were attacked with iron rods by the accused, poured with petrol and then set on fire by a Hindu mob in front of their mother. Castigating the police, the judge said in his order, “this genocide could not have been possible but for the inaction/connivance of the police.” The judge further said that “I think the case falls in the category of rarest of the rare cases as four young boys were burnt alive in front of their mother without any provocation.” More than 20,000 Sikhs are reported to have been butchered by mobs during the first week of November, 1984 in Delhi.

Charges Upheld Against Another 2 Accused of 1984 Massacres

The Delhi High Court has upheld charges framed against two accused, along with Member of Parliament Sajjan Kumar, for allegedly inciting a mob to kill innocent Sikhs and burn their properties on November 1, 1984. Justifying the framing of the charges, the judge wrote in the order that "statements of witnesses lend support to the prosecution version as to how anti-Sikh feelings were inflamed and how innocent Sikhs were butchered and their property was looted and burnt down with active connivance of the local police." "They, thus, unfold a sordid tale of arson, loot and murders by a few, a tale that puts the entire nation to shame," the judge said. The order written by the judge further said that the mob which comprised the petitioners also burnt a Gurdwara, looted and burnt down houses, dragged Sikhs out of their houses and brutally killed them.

Help for Victims of 1984 Massacres

The Nishkam Sikh Welfare Society based in New Delhi is currently implementing a rehabilitation program to help old people, children and widows affected by the 1984 Sikh massacres. Several Sikh children and old people have already been admitted to Mata Gurji Sukh Niwas, a combined old-age home and an orphanage, located in village Khanpur near Kharar, Ropar. More information on the project can be obtained from their web site at www.rpi.edu/~anandh/NISHKAM

Former Punjab Police Official Admits Killing Beant Singh

Balwant Singh, a former police official of Punjab police, admitted to the District and Sessions Judge in Chandigarh on December 24, that he ordered the killing of Beant Singh, then Chief Minister of Punjab in August of 1995. The judge asked for a written statement from Balwant Singh. He handed over to the judge a statement which he had written earlier admitting that he carried out the killing.

Sikh Women Exempted From Helmet Rule

The Chief Minister of Delhi is reported to have announced an exemption for Sikh women pillion riders from wearing helmets in Delhi. Women organizations had been protesting against the local police for having introduced a new law forcing all pillion riders, including Sikh women, to wear helmets.

Threat to Demolish Gurdwara in Ghaziabad

The Ghaziabad Development Authority has warned that the Gurdwara Siri Guru Singh Sabha located in Sector 9 of Vaishali, may be demolished. Local Sikh leaders have condemned the demolition threat and have approached the Delhi and UP government authorities to resolve the issue. The Gurdwara is frequented by over 100 Sikh families living within 12 kilometers of it.

Possible Forum for Shrines in Pakistan

Efforts are reported to be underway to constitute a Gurdwara desk at the Office of Ministry of External Affairs, to channelise funds for the development of Sikh shrines in Pakistan. This was disclosed by Punjab's Minister of Higher Education, Manjit Singh Calcutta, while addressing a press conference.

SGPC Chief, Gurcharan Singh Tohra, is expected to lead a Jatha on Vaisaakhi of 1998 to Pakistan to pursue the issue of taking control of Sikh shrines with the government of Pakistan. The SGPC is reported to have sanctioned Rs one crore to maintain Gurdwaras in Pakistan.

India's Lok Sabha Dissolved

After three weeks of political uncertainty, the President of India formally dissolved, on December 4, the 11th Lok Sabha of India throwing the country into even greater political instability. A mid term poll is scheduled to be held in February-March of 1998 throughout India, including Punjab, to select the country's fifth government in less than two years. Federal elections are scheduled to be held in Punjab on

February 16. The national elections will be the second in just 18 months. A survey conducted by the Centre for Media Studies has revealed that no party or alliance is expected to gain a majority in the coming national elections.

Election Eve Incentives by Punjab Government

In anticipation of the upcoming national elections, the Punjab Government is reported to have decided on December 9, to give free power to 5 lakh poor families belonging to the backward classes. It also decided to give pension to about 6 lakh senior citizens with a monthly income of less than Rs 1,500 with effect from January 1, 1998. The package is expected to cost the exchequer nearly Rs 170 crore. Following this, India's national election commission on December 11, strongly advised the Punjab Government against announcing any poll-eve gifts to voters. It also directed the state government to clarify its position on the power and pension concessions it announced recently.

Tohra Elected SGPC Chief

Sardar Gurcharan Singh Tohra is reported to have been unanimously elected the chief of Shromani Gurdwara Prabhandak Committee for the 24th time. The election was held on November 28 at Teja Singh Samundari Hall during the general house session of SGPC. Other office bearers who were also re-elected are Sukhdev Singh (senior vice-president), Kewal Singh (junior vice-president) and Balbir Singh (general secretary). The eleven member executive committee was replaced with new members. The house also adopted 14 resolutions without any discussion, all of which were moved by Tohra himself. One of the resolutions adopted by the house expressed gratitude to the President and Prime Minister of India for remitting the remaining sentence of Singh Sahib Bhai Ranjit Singh, Jathedar of Siri Akal Takhat Sahib, and appreciated the tireless efforts of Badal and Tohra in presenting the case, and also thanked Sikh organizations all over the world for

extending their whole hearted support.

TADA Cases Against Sikh Youths Not Withdrawn

Although the Government of India allowed the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities Act to expire, yet hundreds of Sikh youth who had been arrested under TADA are still under detention in Punjab. The Punjab government has decided to withdraw 30 cases registered under TADA against several politicians, but the Sikh youth detained under the act continue to suffer in prison.

Tortured Sikh Meets Press

The Punjab Human Rights Organization and Movement Against State Repression produced before media persons on December 19, a Sikh youth, Nishan Singh of village Shahpur Goraya near Batala, who had recently been tortured by Punjab police at Beeko Interrogation Center in Batala. He is alleged to have been picked up by police on December 2. He was deprived of Rs 10,000 that he had withdrawn from the bank. He was asked to give false statements against another person which he refused. At this the police is alleged to have threatened to implicate him in false cases. He claims that he was tortured and beaten in police custody. He was released after his wife filed a habeas corpus petition in the Punjab and Haryana High Court. He said that more police raids followed, on December 13 and 16, when he returned to his village. The courts have already declared Nishan Singh innocent of 10 cases of TADA registered against him by the Punjab police.

Sikh Army Jawan Humiliated by Haryana Police

Sikander Singh Bas, a Sikh and army Jawan serving in the Kargil sector on Indo-Pakistan border, who was returning home to Rajasthan to celebrate Divaali with his family, is reported to have been arrested and humiliated by Haryana police in October. He was arrested by a police party which had set up a road block at Godpur village on the Punjab-Haryana border. His possessions

including Rs 44,000 in cash, that he had saved in pay and saving funds, were confiscated by the police. He was taken to the Baldev Nagar police station in Ambala. He was released from the central jail on November 5 but his attempts to recover his possessions and Rs 44,000 have not been successful.

Sikh Prisoner Tortured by Police

Mahinder Singh, a Sikh undergoing a 10 year prison term in Patra Jail near Patiala, who refused to pay bribes to the police, is reported to have been beaten with sticks and tortured using degrading methods by Punjab police on November 17. A local bank manager who was also in jail at that time has confirmed the incident. The victim has been admitted to the Orthopedic section of Rajendra Hospital in Patiala.

2 Policeman Guilty of Stripping Sikh Widow

An internal investigation carried out by the police has found an Inspector and Thanedar of Punjab police guilty of stripping of a Sikh widow in front of her son on 8/21/97 near Bathinda. The Sikh lady and her son were stripped in front of each other and tortured with electric shocks.

Policemen Guilty of Illegal Detention

In another case, internal investigations by the police concluded that Punjab police officials of Barnala police station were guilty of illegal detention of Dr. Balbir Singh, a member SGPC from Nabhana. He and his team were forcibly taken by the SHO of police station Barnala to the Dhanola CIA interrogation center on 4/27/97. They were held in illegal detention for most of the day and released in the evening.

Ex-AISSF Worker Pleads for Help

Surjit Singh, a former worker in the All India Sikh Students Federation, who spent almost 15 years behind bars before court set him free from all charges that Punjab police fabricated against him, has appealed for help from Singh Sahib Bhai Ranjit Singh, Jathedar of Siri Akal Takhat Sahib. In his appeal he said that he is poor and

not good for anything, therefore his survival is a major hurdle for his life. Surjit Singh had earlier been cleared by the courts of more than 6 false cases fabricated against him by the police.

Family Pleads for Investigation into 1984 Faked Encounter Death

Jagjit Singh Kutara, a resident of Chandigarh, has asked for an investigation into the 9/22/84 faked encounter death of his younger brother, Sukhdarshan Singh. The victim is alleged to have been killed by Ferozepore police while he was tied up in chains, and declared by the police to have been killed in an armed encounter. The family has written to the Punjab Government, Prime Minister and the President of India but have not received any help.

Corruption in Punjab

India Today dated 11/24/97 published the results on an opinion poll, conducted all over India, in which it found out that Punjab is the 13th most corrupt state. At the national level, the Ministers (elected representatives of people) were found to be most corrupt followed by the police. However, the survey found that in Punjab, the police corruption surpassed that of the Ministers, making it the most corrupt agency in the state of Punjab.

Former Punjab CM Brar Booked

Former Punjab Chief Minister, Harcharan Singh Brar of the Congress Party, has been booked under the Prevention of Corruption Act for allegedly accepting a bribe of Rs 25,00,000 from Yoginder Sharma, a liquor contractor of Khanna. The bribe is alleged to have been paid in March of 1996 on the assurance that Sharma would be awarded liquor vents.

Criminal Cases Against 8 MLAs

The Punjab Chief Minister, Prakash Singh Badal, recently informed the Punjab state vidhan sabha that criminal cases were pending against eight MLAs including three ministers in the state of Punjab.

UN: 1998 as Human Rights Year

On occasion of the 50th year anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, the United Nations has decided to celebrate 1998 as the Human Rights Year. The theme of the year will be "All Human Rights For All." It will reinforce the idea that human rights - civil, cultural, economic, political and social - should be taken in their totality and not disassociated from one another. The Sikh community worldwide is expected to participate in the international observations.

The Peace Resource Center has made available, on the Internet, a large collection of international human rights treaties, instruments, general comments, reports, recommendations, and decisions. This information is available at the their web page www.umn.edu/humanrts/bibliog/country.html

As a part of the human rights year observation, a forum on universal human rights in the next fifty years will be held on 2/14/98 at the Center for Extra-Mural Studies in Birkbeck College of the University of London.

Increase in Use of Panjabi in Toronto

The number of people reporting Panjabi as their mother tongue has increased in Toronto from about 40,000 in 1991 to over 64,000 in 1996. This and other census figures were released by Statistics Canada on December 2. It makes Panjabi the second most spoken foreign mother tongue, after Chinese. Statistics Canada defines mother tongue as the first language a person learned at home and still understands.

Canada Deports Sikh to India

Tejinder Pal Singh, who had served a 14 year prison term in Pakistan for allegedly hijacking an airplane in

1981, was deported by Canada on December 23 to India. Doubts remain as to whether Tejinder Pal Singh himself was among the hijackers or just an innocent passenger aboard the hijacked plane. The deportation was carried out by Canada despite the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva appealing that Canada should not deport him while his case is under review by the UN committee against torture. Many human rights organizations contend that he will be subjected to torture and possibly killed in a faked encounter in India. A spokesperson for World Sikh Organization (Canada) has pointed out that two other alleged hijackers who earlier had gone back to India, after serving sentences in Pakistan, were killed by Punjab police. On arrival at New Delhi airport, Tejinder Pal Singh was arrested. After a detailed interrogation, he is reported to have been allowed to go after he promised to produce documents about his conviction in Pakistan.

Sikhs Allowed to Worship in Afghanistan

The Austin American-Statesman dated 12/7/97 reported that many religious minorities including Sikhs are allowed to worship under the Taliban rule in Afghanistan. Taliban leaders say that it is their job to keep the followers of Islam on the correct path and not to worry about those of other religions. The Taliban has banned music in the country but not for the Sikhs. They understand that Sikh worship is set to musical notes. A local Sikh remarked that Taliban soldiers were not a threat to them. He said "we are not afraid of the Taliban. We are not separate people. We are from this country."

Sikh Legislator of Pakistan Abducted

Gian Singh, a legislator in the Pakistan Provincial Assembly, is reported to have been abducted and

taken to the Kabiali area near the Afghanistan - Pakistan border. He had won election to the provincial assembly in February under the Awami National Party ticket.

Head of Damdami Taksal Visits UK

Baba Thakur Singh, the Mukhi of Damdami Taksal, along with several other members of the Jatha are reported to be in England since December 15. The Taksal team is in UK to promote Sikhi Prachar and to encourage those who have not taken Amrit to do so.

British Police Apologizes for Confiscating Kripaans

The British police has apologized for removing and confiscating Kripaans of two Amritdhari Sikhs in South Hall recently. The victims were Tejinder Singh (age 23 years) and Tarlok Singh (age 25 years). The local Sikh leaders have decided to use this case as a means to educate other police officials on the Sikh faith and customs.

Swiss ISYF Holds Press Conference
The Switzerland unit of International Sikh Youth Federation held a press conference for German language press on November 24. Dr. Avtar Singh Sekhon from Canada and Sardar Harpartap Singh from UK explained the background and present state of the Khalistan movement. In the evening, a reception was hosted for 50 invited guest at the peoples hall. The reporters present at the conference expressed hope that similar meetings would be held in the future.

Gurpurabs for January 1998

Observed Dates

January 5 Prakash Divas of Siri Guru Gobind Singh Sahib (1666)

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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