



World Sikh Council



America Region Newsletter

Volume 2, Number 11/12, November/December 1998

Monthly Newsletter of World Sikh Council, America Region

A Representative Body of Sikh Institutions of America under the Patronage of Siri Akal Takhat Sahib
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RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

Member Institutions

Gurdwara Sahib Fremont, Fremont, CA
Guru Nanak Sikh Mission, Livingston, CA
Sikh Gurdwara of LA, North Hollywood, CA
Sri Guru Granth Sahib Foundation, Anaheim, 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
Sikh Society of South, New Orleans, LA
Sikh Gurdwara of Michigan, Rochester Hills, MI
Sikh Gurdwara of North Carolina, Durham, NC
Siri Guru Singh Sabha, Glenrock, NJ
Sikh Cultural Society Inc., Richmond Hills, NY
Sikh Cultural & Educational Society of Western
New York, Williamsville, 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 Nanak Foundation of Greater Cleveland,
Richfield, OH
Tristate Sikh Cultural Society, Monroeville, PA
Academy of Guru Granth Studies, Arlington, TX
Sikh Center of Gulf Coast, Houston, TX
Gurdwara Singh Sabha of North Texas, Balch
Springs, TX

The title for this newsletter has been changed from *Vishav (World) Sikh News* to *World Sikh Council America Region Newsletter*. This change has been done for the sake of uniformity because the *Vishav Sikh Council-USA* has been renamed as *World Sikh Council America Region*.

The first meeting of the Regional Committee and General Body of the World Sikh Council, America Region (WSC-AR) met at the Richmond Hill Gurdwara Sahib in New York on November 14, 1998. All the members of the Regional Committee were present. They gave an overwhelming response by participating actively in developing the future program of World Sikh Council, America Region. In his presidential address, Sardar Kuldeep Singh told the members to make World Sikh Council a premier organization of Khalsa Panth by impressing upon all the Sikh Institutions to become its members. He emphasized the need to support Sri Akal Takhat Sahib. Only a stronger World Sikh Council can ensure the independent working of Sri Akal Takhat Sahib, he said. At the meeting, the following decisions were made by WSC-AR:

1. Any efforts by any Sikh institution in organizing any kind of special functions to celebrate the *Sirjana Divas of the Khalsa* must be encouraged and supported.
2. Regional Committee of the World Sikh Council was authorized to set up special committees to organize a Sikh Convention in New York City to commemorate the 300th anniversary of the Khalsa in 1999.
3. To pay our tribute to all the Sikh martyrs on the eve of the 300th anniversary of the Khalsa, it was unanimously decided to build a suitable memorial in Washington, D.C. area in a park like setting.
4. To hold or co-operate with local Gurdwaras in holding Amrit Parchar Samagams. To hold seminars and workshops not only to emphasize the importance of Amrit but also to propagate various aspects of Sikhism at least on a monthly basis next year.
5. To recognize those Sikhs, who have made significant contributions in various Panthic and professional fields while following the tenets of Sikhism.

Sardar Kuldeep Singh, Chairman of WSC-AR issued a press release on November 24 about the November 14 meeting. More information on the meeting can be obtained by calling Sardar Kuldeep Singh at (419) 841-7178 or by e-mailing vsc-usa@unforgettable.com



Amrit Parachar

The World Sikh Council – America Region (WSC-AR) Amrit Parachar Team has issued an appeal to all Sikh Gurdwaras and institutions to organize Amrit Parachar Samagams to celebrate the 300th Anniversary of the Khalsa. The team has asked for one representative from each institution to be a member of the Amrit Parachar team. Interested organizations should contact Sardar Surinderpal Singh at (847) 882-5930 or e-mail *PanthDaDas@aol.com*

President Clinton Salutes Sikhs across US on Gurburab

President Bill Clinton issued a written statement on November 3, from The White House, congratulating Sikhs across the US on occasion of the Parkash Divas of Siri Guru Nanak Sahib. The statement released by President Clinton is as follows:

Warm greetings to Sikhs across America as you observe the birth of Guru Nanak.

This year, in keeping with the goals of my Initiative on Race, we have strived to acknowledge and overcome the barriers that sometimes divide Americans. Our religious institutions have played an important role in that endeavor, but there is still much work to be done as we look ahead to a new millennium. For that reason, we are grateful for the teachings of Guru Nanak, which celebrate equality of all in the eyes of God - a message that strengthens our efforts to build one America.

Religious pluralism in our nation is bringing us together in new and powerful ways. I hope that, as the teachings of Guru Nanak become better known - particularly his compassion for the poor and recognition of the equality of all the women and men - all Americans will more fully appreciate the contributions of Sikhs to our national life.

Hillary joins me in extending best wishes for a memorable observance.

Sikh Gurdwaras and institutions may like to send a note of thanks to President Clinton. Sikhs all over the US are reported to have celebrated Gurburab in a big way. The San Diego Tribune (11/13/98) published an article about the President's message to Sikhs.

Gurburab & 25th Anniversary Celebrations by Sikh Center of Gulf Coast

The Sikh community of Houston celebrated the Parkash Divas of Siri Guru Nanak Sahib and the 25th anniversary of the Sikh Center of Gulf Coast. The festivities included Gurburab celebrations on November 8 at the Gurdwara Sahib, a rally at downtown Houston on November 4, a reception for Houston Mayor Lee Brown on November 2, a blood drive on November 8, feeding a homeless shelter, and inauguration of the center's web site. The Houston Chronicle (10/31/98, 11/7/98, 11/29/98) highlighted the events. In 1973, when the Gurdwara Sahib was dedicated, only 20 Sikh families lived in Houston. Now more than 1,000 Sikh families live in Houston, the largest community of Sikhs in Texas. Currently there are three Gurdwara Sahibs in Houston, while a fourth one is under consideration. The Sikh Center of Gulf Coast is a member of World Sikh Council – America Region.

Sikh Gurdwara of Cincinnati Celebrates Gurburab

The Guru Nanak Society of Greater Cincinnati, Ohio celebrated the Parkash Divas of Siri Guru Nanak Sahib on 11/8/98. The Cincinnati Enquirer (11/12/98) published an article on the local celebrations. The local Sikh community was organized 24 years ago by five Sikh families. Today more than 100 Sikh families live in or around Cincinnati. The Sikh Gurdwara is located in West Chester, Ohio.

City Council Approves Gurdwara Sahib near San Diego

The City Council of the city of

Escondido, near San Diego, California, voted 4-1 to approve the building of a Gurdwara Sahib by the Sikh Society of San Diego (San Diego Tribune, 9/24/98, 9/25/98). The city council approval overturned an earlier negative recommendation of the Planning Commission. More than 70 Sikhs attended the council meeting. Neighbors, who argued that the gold colored domed design did not match the landscape and architecture of the neighborhood, had opposed the construction of the project. Local Sikhs had accused the project opponents of curtailing religious freedom. The San Diego Tribune (10/1/98) published a letter to the editor from Marinell Darmody, an area resident, who alleged that the opposition to the Sikh Gurdwara was "clearly a case of religious discrimination ... I'm sure if the church were to have three huge crosses, no one would complain." The council vote was covered by the KFMB-TV (9/23/98), KNSD-TV (9/23/98), and PKBS-FM Radio Station (9/25/98).

The Gurdwara Sahib will be built by the Sikh Society of San Diego along the West Valley Parkway in Escondido, California on an area of 1.3 acres. The construction involves three golden domes and the project will cost approximately \$ ½ to 1 million.

Barbara Crossette's Article on Augusto Pinochet

In response to Britain's House of Lords ruling that General Augusto Pinochet, who killed many Chilean for several years, was not entitled to immunity from arrest under British law protecting former heads of state, the New York Times published an article written by Barbara Crossette on 11/29/98, in which the journalist discussed the General Pinochet case as a new era in the practice of international human rights laws. The article said, "And Sikhs in Britain, Canada, and the United States have been waiting for the chance to hold India's Congress Party leaders

responsible for the massacres of several thousand Sikhs in New Delhi and other cities in a few days following the 1984 assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by Sikh body guards. More people died in that pogrom, Sikh leaders have been saying, than all those killed in Chile in the 17 years under General Pinochet." Barbara Crossette had served earlier as the New Delhi correspondent for the New York Times.

Conference on Future of Sikhism

A conference on the future of Sikhism in North America was organized on 11/7/98 at the Multicultural Center Theater at University of California, Santa Barbara. A reception and dinner followed the event in honor of the Sikh Foundation and Sardar and Sardarni Narinder Singh Kapanay, who have established an endowed chair at the university for Sikh studies. (Los Angeles Times, 11/7/98)

Decade of Siri Guru Granth Sahib

The Academy of Guru Granth Studies, Texas is soliciting project solicitations from scholars, historians, social and political leaders of the community to celebrate the 300th anniversary of the Gur Gaddi Divas of Siri Guru Granth Sahib in October 2008. The Decade project will launch a number of projects to be completed towards worldwide celebration of the year 2008. More information on this project can be obtained by calling (817) 654-0844 or e-mailing hlal@usa.net. The Academy of Guru Granth Studies, Texas is a member of World Sikh Council – America Region.

Fire Destroys Connecticut Worship Center

A massive blaze burnt down several buildings in downtown Ansonia on 10/20/98 including the rented worship center of the Connecticut Sikh Association. The association had rented the second floor of the building. While most of the building was gutted in the fire, a copy of Siri Guru Granth Sahib present inside the building was undamaged. The Hartford Courant (10/22/98) published an article on this sad event.

The fire was also covered by the WTNH-TV News channel 8.

Sikh Working to Save Rare Falcons Interviewed on NPR

National Public Radio aired an interview on November 24 in its All Things Considered program about the activities of Alan Parrot Singh, a Sikh living in the US, who is on a crusade to save the rare Mongolian falcon from extinction. The efforts of Alan Singh to save these rare birds were earlier highlighted by Wall Street Journal (7/27/98), Greenwire (7/27/98), and New York Times (7/27/98).

Mohinder Singh, SDO Excommunicated

Singh Sahib Bhai Ranjit Singh Ji, Jathedar of Siri Akal Takhat Sahib issued a Hukamnaama on 11/28/98 excommunicating Mohinder Singh SDO, an alleged active preacher in North America, from the Panth. The Hukamnaama called on Sikhs for his social boycott. (Tribune, 11/29/98)

Earlier, Mohinder Singh had been summoned to appear before Siri Akal Takhat Sahib for an explanation for distorting Gurbani and giving different definitions of Sikh symbols. Mohinder Singh ignored these summons and was declared "tankhiaya" on 10/24/98 (Tribune, 10/25/98).

Washington Post Highlights DC Sikh Community

The Washington Post (10/31/98) published an article titled "The Growing Presence of Sikhs: As More Families Immigrate to Region, Faith and Its Adherents Gain Prominence."

California Governor Vetoes Religious Freedom Bill

The San Francisco Chronicle (9/29/98) reported that Governor Pete Wilson of California has vetoed the Religious Freedom Protection Act (Bill AB1617), which had earlier cleared the state legislature with bipartisan support. According to the bill's supporters, without such a law, a school with a no-hats dress code could ban a Jew from wearing a yarmulke or a Sikh from wearing a

turban in class. The Sikh Media Action & Resource Task (SMART) Force had worked actively for the passage of the bill along with a broad religious based coalition in California. The Daily Californian, the newspaper of University of California at Berkley, published an article on October 1 outlining the efforts of the university's Sikh Student Association in supporting the bill. We need to continue our efforts to get proper legislation passed to protect our right to have and publicly wear the symbols of our faith.

Bay Area Community Service Project

The Sikh community of Bay Area in California organized a community service project for homeless shelters. The project involved collection of donations and distribution to homeless shelters. This year the project personnel supplied 1000 kits each consisting of a soap, toothbrush, toothpaste, comb, and washcloth to the Georgia Travis Center in San Jose and 100 kits and towels to Santa Clara County Children Shelter. The project was organized by San Jose Gurdwara Sahib and the Chardikalaa Sikh Community Center.

Interfaith Calendars

The National Conference for Community and Justice has printed interfaith calendars for 1999. The full size colorful calendar runs from December 1998 to January 2000. The calendar lists hundreds of religious holidays from 14 faith traditions including the Sikh religion. It highlights one religious community each month. For each community there is a summary of their basic tenets and their major religious writings, as well as pictures, photographs, and graphics from their tradition. All the information for each community featured in the calendar has been prepared by representatives from that community. The Interfaith Association of Central Ohio is selling the calendars for \$15 each (including mailing costs within US and Canada). Individuals interested in obtaining a copy of the calendar should call Sardar Tarunjit Singh Butalia at (614) 688-3408 or e-mail

Interfaith Activities

The following inter-religious activities and events with Sikh participation were reported recently:

- ◆ Health and Human Services Secretary Donna Shalala announced a partnership between major national faith and interfaith organizations and the organ and tissue transplant community. The partnership will encourage Americans to discuss organ and tissue donations. (U.S. Newswire, 11/5/98)
- ◆ An Interfaith - Intercultural Thanksgiving Prayer Service was held in Buffalo, NY on 11/24/98. The event was co-sponsored by the National Conference for Community and Justice and the Network of Religious Communities. The program included a Circle of Thanks in which young and old participants from more than 10 world religions, including the Sikh faith, shared a prayer of thanks. (Buffalo News, 11/21/98)
- ◆ Almost 900 people attended the 16th annual ecumenical celebration of thanksgiving in Greensboro, NC on 11/22/98. The event included tributes to over dozen world religions. The Piedmont Interfaith Council sponsored the event. (News & Record, 11/23/98)
- ◆ The Sikh community of Glen Rock, NJ participated in an interfaith thanksgiving service at the Glen Rock Jewish Center on 11/25/98 by opening the prayer service with a Sabad. Sardar Harkashan Singh Jassal represented the Sikh community at the event. (The Record, 11/25/98)
- ◆ Members of over 14 faith traditions in Chicago took part in the 16th Annual Interfaith Thanksgiving Observance on 11/25/98. An offering was collected for Thanksgiving food baskets for families and senior citizens living in Chicago public housing. (Chicago Tribune, 11/26/98)
- ◆ The Dallas Morning News (11/26/98) published a photograph showing a Jew lighting candle from a Sikh and a Hindu during the annual interfaith service at Dallas's Thanks-Giving Square on 11/25/98.
- ◆ The fourth annual Thanksgiving Interfaith Choir Festival was held on 11/15/98 in Los Angeles. A choir of over 200 people presented the festival titled "With Grateful Hearts." The event was sponsored by the Newport Mesa Irving Interfaith Council. (Los Angeles Times, 11/14/98)
- ◆ "A Celebration of the Sacred in Song, Dance, and Chant", the 19th annual Interfaith concert featuring members of 8 faith traditions was organized at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, DC on 11/17/98. (Washington Post, 11/14/98)
- ◆ The National Conference for Community and Justice of Las Vegas organized a forum titled "Interfaith Marriage and Family Life" on 11/15/98. Panelists from Jewish, Catholic, Latter-Day Saints, Islam, Baha'i, and Sikh faith participated. (Las Vegas Review-Journal, 11/12/98)
- ◆ A two week program titled "Religions of the World" was organized by St. Alphonsus Education Commission in Chicago. The event included speakers from 8 different faith traditions. (Chicago Daily Herald, 10/12/98).
- ◆ Two major interfaith organizations of Buffalo, NY, the Buffalo Area Council of Churches and the Buffalo Area Metropolitan Ministries, have merged together to form a new organizations called the Network of Religious Communities. In recent years, both organizations struggled financially, competing for a limited pot of ecumenical and interfaith money. (Buffalo News, 11/6/98)
- ◆ More than 500 people attended a Religious Diversity Fair at University of California, Irvine on 10/25/98. More than 40 interfaith workshops were held during the event. (Orange County Register, 10/24/98, 10/26/98).
- ◆ The Arizona Republic (10/10/98) published an article titled "Reflections of Faith" in response to the Starr report and President Clinton's apology. The article highlighted the response of members of several faith traditions. The Sikh perspective was given by Sardarni Sahiba Gurukiran Kaur Khalsa. She elaborated on the story of Sajjan Thug, who asked for forgiveness from Siri Guru Nanak Sahib and later became a faithful Sikh of the Guru.
- ◆ The Chicago Sun-Times (10/4/98) published an interfaith perspective on life after death in response to Robin William's new movie titled "What Dreams May Come." The Sikh perspective was presented by Sardar Balwant Singh Hansra.
- ◆ A dinner and interfaith panel discussion titled "Why I Love to Be a" was organized in Washington, DC on 10/6/98. Representatives of 8 faith traditions participated. (Washington Post, 10/3/98)

President Clinton Cancels Visit to South Asia

Reuters (9/30/98) reported that President Bill Clinton's visit to South Asia later this year has been canceled due to India and Pakistan's tit-for-tat nuclear tests. Instead US officials said that the President would travel to South Korea and Japan. The Press Trust of India (9/30/98) reported that the visit had been postponed as "talks with India and Pakistan on non-proliferation have not reached a point where a visit to the region would be productive."

Columbia University Highlights Human Rights Symposium

The October 2, 1998 issue of The Columbia University Record, official newspaper of the university, published a synopsis of the "Human Rights Abuses in Punjab: Unanswered Questions" seminar held in summer

of 1998 at the Law School. The symposium offered political context of large-scale killings in Punjab, India and presented evidence of systematic extra-judicial killing of thousands of Sikhs. A picture of the conference speakers was also published. They included Cynthia K. Mahmood, University of Maine; Inderjit S. Jaijee, Movement Against State Repression; Ami Laws, Stanford University; Gurcharan Singh, Mary Mount College,; Amar Singh Chahal, human rights lawyer; Ram N. Kumar, a well-known human rights activist; Mary B. Pike, a lawyer, and Baljit Singh, a Columbia University Fellow.

Judge Reinstates Extradition Proceedings Against Sikh Asylum Seeker

U.S. District Judge Oliver Wanger has reinstated extradition proceedings against Sardar Kulvir Singh Barapind. Wanger's ruling has overturned a magistrate judge's decision that had postponed extradition proceedings against Kulvir until his appeal for asylum could be decided. (Fresno Bee, 10/17/98) The magistrate judge's decision had been appealed by Assistant US Attorney Stanley Boone. The ruling by Wanger said that an extradition treaty first approved in 1931 between United States and Great Britain still applied to India today, even though the country is no longer a British colony. The Indian Government accuses Kulvir of killing 52 people in India and has asked the United States Government to extradite him to India. Kulvir has fought extradition charges, contending that the charges against him were false and concocted by the Government of India, and that returning him to India would subject him to persecution for his political beliefs. Kulvir has received overwhelming support from the Sikh community in California and is currently lodged at the Lerdo detention facility near Bakersfield, California. (Fresno Bee, 10/17/98)

Sikh Seeks Literature in Braille

A Sikh person who is blind is seeking Sikh religious materials and other Sikh literature in Braille. If you are aware of any such resources, please

send an e-mail to cedisabl@sprynet.com

Sikh Boy Paralyzed in Accident

Amarinder Singh Johal, an 8-year old Sikh boy, is reported to have been hit by a drunk driver on September 23 in Concord, California. The boy and his mother had moved from India to California less than 3 months before the accident to be with the boy's father, Sardar Daljeet Singh Johal. The crash damaged the spinal cord impairing the nerves that control his diaphragm as a result he is unlikely to breathe without the aid of a ventilator. Amarinder is likely to be paralyzed from neck down for the rest of his life.

Amarinder is reported to be a Sikh youth with religious convictions. He had endured teasing from schoolmates who did not understand why he wrapped his shoulder-length hair in a turban everyday. He bristled at any jesting suggestion that he should cut off his hair to fit better into American society. His father said that Amarinder would say, "I'm a pure Sikh, I won't let anyone touch my hair."

The Wren Elementary School has set up a Trust Fund for Amarinder. Donations can be made payable to FBO Amarinder Singh Johal, Account # 179-2370834, Washington Mutual Bank, 1900 Grant Street, Concord, CA 94520.

University of Wisconsin Branch Proposed in Punjab

The Punjab Government is considering a proposal to set up a branch of University of Wisconsin in Punjab. This was announced by Punjab Governor B.K.N. Chibber on November 6 at a gathering organized near Patiala in connection with the second death anniversary of Kartar Singh Dhaliwal. (Indian Express, 11/7/98). Sardar Darshan Singh Dhaliwal of Milwaukee is reported to be involved in the proposal.

New Jersey State to Honor Badal in April 1999

India Web Post (11/25/98) published an article in which it stated that a bill had been approved by the house of

general assembly and senate house of state of New Jersey, which would honor the Prakash Singh Badal, Chief Minister of Punjab. Badal will receive the award of honor on April 13, 1999. Hardayal Singh, a well-known organizer of community celebrations among Indians in New Jersey, lobbied for obtaining the honor for Badal. The news article can be accessed at <http://www.indiawebpost.com/community/Nov98/nov25dc.htm>

Large Protest Demonstration at UN

A large protest demonstration was organized by the major Sikh organizations of New York-New Jersey area at the United Nations (UN) on September 24 to protest the appearance of the Indian Prime Minister at the UN headquarters in New York.

Council of Khalistan

The Council of Khalistan organized a protest rally on November 7 in Washington, DC to protest the massacre of more than 20,000 Sikhs in Delhi in November of 1984. Hundreds of demonstrators gathered at Lafayette Park, across from the White House, and marched to the Indian Embassy. The demonstrators consisted of Sikhs from the East Coast.

The annual convention of the Council of Khalistan was held on October 10-11 at the Sikh Cultural Society Gurdwara Sahib in Richmond Hill, NY. Delegates from East Coast states, Canada, Texas and Florida attended. The convention passed a resolution recommending Dr. Aulakh, President of the Council, for the Nobel Peace Prize.

The Washington Times (10/11/98) published a letter to the editor from Dr. Gurmit Singh Aulakh, President of Council of Khalistan, about maintaining true democracy in South Asia. The letter stated, "Congress should declare its support for plebiscite in Khalistan, Kashmir and the other areas seeking freedom from India. Only by supporting freedom for all people of South Asia can we help make sure that the subcontinent will

live in freedom, stability, peace, and prosperity.”

At the urging of Council of Khalistan, 23 members of the US Congress wrote a joint letter to the Indian Prime Minister on October 9 condemning the rape of four nuns at Jhabua in Madhya Pradesh, India and called for strong action against the rapists.

More information on the activities of the Council is available at <http://www.khalistan.com>

Khalistan Affairs Center

The Khalistan Affairs Center issued the following press releases recently:

- ◆ September 16: UP Assembly meets on September 18 to decide future of District Udham Singh Sikhs, Badal betrays Terai Sikhs.
- ◆ September 24: Sikhs and Kashmiris protest Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee's visit to the United Nations
- ◆ October 7: BJP Minister unwittingly reveals conspiracy against Sikhs, Has the Punjab Government agreed to give voting rights to migrant workers?
- ◆ October 14: Indian manufactured

Freon smuggling racket in the United States and Canada. Are the proceeds financing Delhi's lobbying efforts in Washington and Ottawa?

- ◆ October 29: What is the State of Indian Occupied Punjab State? Government Sleeps as Consumers Weep.
- ◆ November 4: Sikh Victims of the 1984 November pogrom protest march in Delhi seeking justice.
- ◆ November 10: People's Commission Summons 124 policemen to the November 28 meeting.
- ◆ November 18: Badal plans to betray the Sikhs of District Udham Singh Nagar. Is the Bathinda refinery project a hoax?

American Newspapers Highlight Persecution of Christians in India

The Christian Science Monitor (10/5/98) published an article in which it elaborated on the recent cases of attacks on Christian clergy and converts by militant Hindu groups all over India. A leading scholar of communal violence at Jawaharlal Nehru University remarked, "The heat is off the Muslims, it is now on

the Christian." Mr. Bhurat Amin, the second highest RSS official in the state of Gujrat was quoted saying, "Christians are the worst. They are more subtle than the Muslims. They go underground in order to convert." In his view, any person born in India is Hindu. Amin further argued, "No one, Muslim or Christian, may choose a loyalty before India. If a Muslim says his first loyalty is to his religion, then he will be crushed."

The Houston Chronicle (11/24/98) quoted John Dayal, the National Convenor of the recently formed United Christian Forum for Human Rights as saying, "This year has seen more violence against the Christian community in India than perhaps the cumulatively since the first 50 years of independence." The article also quoted Mr. A.J. Philips, the senior editor of The Indian Express as, "So self-obsessed has it (Christian community in India) been that it did not bestir itself when Muslims, Sikhs, and low-caste Hindus were targeted by the agents of hatred in the past."

NEWS FROM PUNJAB (HOMELAND OF THE SIKHS)

Khalsa March on December 4

A Khalsa march under the patronage of Siri Akal Takhat Sahib, will be organized from Anandpur Sahib to Fatehgarh Sahib from December 4 to 6. The march will commence from Qila Anandgarh, stop on the way at Gurdwara Parivar Vichora Sahib, Gurdwara Bhatha Sahib, Chamkaur Sahib, and end at Jyoti Swaroop Gurdwara Sahib at Fatehgarh Sahib. The SGPC and the Sant Samaj will organize the Khalsa march (Tribune, 11/18/198,11/29/98).

The Indian Express (11/18/98) also reported that Singh Sahib Bhai Ranjit Singh Ji is organizing Gurmat Samaagams at Amritsar, Jalandhar, Ludhiana, Patiala and Bathinda from January 1 to April 13. He also said that a procession from Siri Akal Takhat Sahib to Anandpur Sahib will be organized on April 11.

Jathedar of Siri Akal Takhat Sahib Not to Take Part in Government Sponsored Khalsa Tri-Centenary Celebrations

Singh Sahib Bhai Ranjit Singh Ji, Jathedar of Siri Akal Takhat Sahib, has declared that he will not take part in any of the government sponsored celebrations on the 300th anniversary of the Khalsa. He instead asked the government to release all TADA detainees on the tri-centenary celebration of the Khalsa to prove its sincerity towards the feeling of Sikhs. Singh Sahib pointed out that the celebration function proposed by the government was violative of many Sikh maryadas and hence was unacceptable to the Sikh Sangat. He also expressed concern that how could a person who himself was not an Amrtidhari, lead the government sponsored 300th year anniversary celebration of the Khalsa. (Indian

Express, 11/18/98; The Statesman, 11/18/98)

Singh Sahib announced that a parallel tri-centenary function would be organized under the aegis of Siri Akal Takhat Sahib, which would be purely religious in nature, and bereft of pomp and show. The event would be celebrated in collaboration with various Sikh organizations including the Gurmati Prachar Sidhant Sant Sabha and SGPC.

The Jathedar of Siri Akal Takhat Sahib did not attend the Government of Punjab sponsored Khalsa celebrations which were held on November 22 at Anandpur Sahib.

The Hindu (9/30/98) reported that the Punjab government has "indulged in gross irregularities and committed procedural lapses in proposing

unauthorized expenditure to the tune of Rs. 90 crore on different projects” to observe the tri-centenary anniversary. The Statesman (10/1/98) published an article in which it detailed the misery being faced by residents of Anandpur Sahib due to the massive plans being implemented by the Punjab government. The Hindu (1/1/98) reported that the land mafia had recently increased its clandestine activities in and around Anandpur Sahib after the celebration announcements by Punjab government. India Today (11/16/98) reported that the Anandpur Sahib Foundation, the main body overseeing the Punjab Government sponsored celebrations, has given the advertising contract worth Rs. 5.25 crore to Rediffusion, the same company that executed the anti-Sikh Congress party election campaign of 1984 shortly after the Delhi massacre of Sikhs.

Meanwhile, the BJP government at the Center has also formed a 70-member National Committee under the chairmanship of Prime Minister A.V.Vajpayee, a Hindu, to observe the occasion. (M2 Presswire, 10/2/98)

SGPC Plans to Celebrate Khalsa Anniversary

SGPC is planning several activities to celebrate the tri-centenary anniversary of the formation of the Khalsa. These include:

- Establishment of a mini-varsity at Anandpur Sahib. (Indian Express, 11/6/98)
- Five processions from the native places of the original Panj Payaras (Lahore, Bidar, Dawarka, Hastinapur, and Jaganath Puri). (Indian Express, 11/4/98)
- A Souvenir section in the Sikh Reference Library at Amritsar (Indian Express, 11/6/98)

The SGPC President has invited the Prime Minister of Pakistan, descendants of Rai Bular, and Bhai Mardaana to participate in the celebrations. (Indian Express, 11/6/98)

Khalsa Seminar in Chandigarh

The Chandigarh based Institute of

Sikh Studied organized a Khalsa Tercentenary seminar titled “Khalsa – Fulfillment of Guru Nanak’s Mission” on October 24 at Gurdwara Kanthla Sahib near Chandigarh. The speakers emphasized that there is no difference between the teachings of Siri Guru Nanak Sahib and Siri Guru Gobind Singh Sahib and that all the 10 Gurus were the manifestation of the same divine light. Books on Sikh personal law and Gurdwara legislation were released by Justice Harbans Singh. (Tribune, 10/25/98)

Jathedar Ranjit Singh Ji: Bluestar was Biggest Tragedy of Sikhs

Singh Sahib Bhai Ranjit Singh Ji, Jathedar of Siri Akal Takhat Sahib, has observed that Operation Bluestar was the biggest tragedy for Sikhs in their 529-year old history, which had hurt their psyche. In an interview with the BBC documentary on the 300th anniversary of the Khalsa, Singh Sahib said that Sikhs suffered colossal losses in terms of life and property during the Mogul regime and the 18th century, but their religious sentiments were grievously hurt for the first time by Operation Bluestar. He charged that Indira Gandhi had ordered the “storming of the Golden Temple” with a view to “suppressing” the Sikhs and winning an election. (Indian Express, 11/8/98)

Update on People’s Commission

The People’s Commission on Human Rights Violations in Punjab has asked 124 Punjab police officials to appear before its November 28 meeting in Amritsar for alleged human right violations against Sikhs in Punjab (Tribune, 11/9/98). Those asked to appear before the commission include two DIGs and at least 14 SSP’s and SP’s. Many of the accused police officials have been promoted to higher ranks or have retired. The Secretary of the Commission issued a complete list of police officials summoned by the commission.

The commission had postponed its October 23 hearing at Ludhiana to November 28 at Amritsar. Due to a case filed in the Punjab and Haryana High Court against the commission, the Amritsar sitting of the

commission has also been postponed. (Tribune, 11/10/98, 11/19/98)

Mr. Sudarshan Goel, a Chandigarh based lawyer filed a writ petition on September 4 against the commission before the Punjab and Haryana High Court. The petitioner stated that the People’s Commission sat in judgment passed by courts of competent jurisdiction in cases of alleged atrocities during militancy. It also alleged that the commission was an attempt to set up a parallel judicial system, which might subvert the judicial process as well as cause a serious threat to the country’s survival (Tribune, 9/30/98). On September 29, the court allowed Mr. S.S. Sood, a Jalandhar based advocate, and Justice (retired) Ajit Singh Bains and Mr. Ram Narayan Kumar, Chairman and Convenor of the Committee for Coordination on Disappearances in Punjab, as interveners in the PIL case. The case was adjourned till October 28. The Union Government of India filed a reply in the High Court on 10/28/98 through the Under-Secretary (Home) in which it contended that the notices issued by the Punjab People’s Commission to public servants were “illegal” and had no force of law. The Union Government also asked the court to take cognizance of the “extra-judicial nature of the functions and activities of the Commission and restrain it from doing anything which may encroach upon the judicial functions of the state.” It also advised the state government of Punjab to ignore the notices sent by the Commission (Indian Express, 10/30/98, Tribune, 10/28/98). The case came up for hearing on November 11. The Punjab Government argued that “in view of the Fundamental Rights guaranteed under the Constitution, particularly those under Article 19(1), the State cannot interfere with such private initiatives as the People’s Commission, unless its functioning infringed on any law or otherwise gives rise to a law and order problem.” The court directed the counsel for various parties to come prepared for arguments on November 18. On November 18, Ms. Indira Jai Singh, the lawyer for the

Commission, gave an oral undertaking to the court that the commission would not hold its proposed November 28 sitting in Amritsar. On November 18, the Punjab Government submitted an affidavit to the court stating that it proposed to take up the question of amending Section 36(2) of the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993, which prohibited the state commission from inquiring into any matter after the expiry of one year from the date on which the action, constituting human rights, was alleged to have been committed. The affidavit stated, "the state government is of the opinion that this period needs to be extended up to 10 years." Counsel for the Punjab government told the court that the proposed amendment to the Act would be sent to the Union Government of India within 15 days. The case was adjourned to December 17. A Division bench of Punjab and Haryana High Court consisting of Justice G.S. Singhvi and Justice Iqbal Singh are hearing the case. (Tribune, 11/12/98, 11/19/98)

Several non-Sikhs have recently declared their opposition to the People's Commission. The President of All India Hindu Shiv Sena, Mr. Surinder Kumar Billa, has asked the Chief Justice of India to intervene and ban the commission (Tribune, 10/8/98). The Punjab Bajrang Dal has sought the immediate intervention of the President of India to issue an ordinance banning the commission and has written to the Supreme Court to ban the commission (Tribune, 10/7/98). Punjab Local Bodies Minister Mr. Balramji Das Tandon said on September 21 that the commission had no relevance or legal validity (Tribune, 9/22/98). BJP MLA of Punjab Mrs. Laxmi Kant Chawla has urged the Chief Minister of Punjab to ban the organization. She threatened to lead a protest march if the commission held a meeting. (Tribune, 10/4/98) and vowed not to let the commission hold its hearing in Amritsar on November 28. She said that a number of other organizations, including the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and Congress Party, had extended

support to her to prevent the commission from holding any hearing. According to a published report in Tribune (11/28/98), rival political parties, BJP and Congress, have joined hands in demanding an immediate check on the activities of the commission. This announcement was made at a function organized jointly by the Shaheed Parivar Sangarsh Samiti, Bajrang Dal, Vihsaw Hindu Parishad, BJP, and Congress party on November 27 in Amritsar.

The People's Commission, set up by the Committee for Coordination on Disappearances in Punjab in cooperation the World Sikh Council and several human rights and civil liberties organizations, is examining complaints of human right violations, including illegal abductions, custodial deaths and illegal cremations from 1979 to 1997 and whether state agencies or individuals have prima facie committed any offense under the law of the land or international law. The three person commission comprises of Justice D.S. Tewatia (former Chief Justice of Calcutta High Court) – Chairman, Justice Suresh Singh (retired Judge of Maharashtra High Court) – member, and Justice Jaspal Singh (former judge of Delhi High Court) – member.

10 Year Extension of State HR Commission Investigation Period Suggested, CCDP Responds

The Tribune (11/10/98) reported that the Prakash Singh Badal, Chief Minister of Punjab, said that the state government was ready to empower the state human rights commission to listen to old complaints of human rights violations and that there was no need for independent initiatives like the "People's Commission." Badal told Press Trust of India, "The state government is ready to amend the Punjab State Human Rights Commission Act, which in its current form does not take cognizance of more than one-year old rights violation complaints."

Following Badal's statement, the Tribune published an editorial on 11/11/98. The editorial titled "Human

Rights and Wrongs" exhorted the winding up of the commission on the plea that the Chief Minister's promise removes whatever justification there may have been in initiating private investigations.

The Committee for Coordination on Disappearances in Punjab issued press release on November 13 in which it pointed out that the benevolent pledge of the Punjab Chief Minister and the genial plea of the Tribune newspaper lacked conceptual deftness and comprehension of the intricacies involved with the proposal. The press release pointed out that the 1-year limitation clause was a principal clause in a Central Government Act not a state act, and hence can be amended only by the Parliament of India. Otherwise, the state government of Punjab would have to do three things to satisfy the Chief Minister's proposal: (1) bring the subject matter of the Act within the Concurrent List, (2) ensure that the Union of India does not re-amend the law, and (3) obtain assent of the President of India. The CCDP press release pointed out that the Chief Minister's proposal would be an insuperable task unless the proposal is already endorsed by the Union government.

Human Rights Seminar Held

Human rights activists from all over India converged for a meeting in Jalandhar on November 15 and resolved to fight any governmental attempts to suppress the People's Commission or its functioning. More than 300 delegates attended the seminar organized by Mr. Ram Narayan Kumar of the Committee for Coordination on Disappearances in Punjab.

The seminar attendees rejected Badal's offer of making changes to the inquiry time limitation of the state human rights commission and demanded that the state government appoint an inquiry commission under the Commission of Inquiry Act. According to the Tribune (11/16/98), the seminar put to rest the apprehension that the functioning of the People's Commission to probe

human rights violations in Punjab would lead to the revival of terrorism and communalism and demoralize the police force. The seminar participants expressed the view that public initiatives like the People's commission had become necessary in a country like India where the state and central governments and their institutions were losing credibility. They said that if such initiatives, aimed at exposing the weakness of various state instruments, were prevented and facts and truth suppressed, it could lead to growth of fascist mindset, which would derail the Indian democracy.

Those who addressed the seminar included (Indian Express, 11/16/98, Tribune, 11/16/98):

- Justice Rambhushan Malhotra (retired from Allahabad High Court)
- Dr. Anoop Saraya (People's Union for Civil Liberties)
- Mr. N.D. Pancholi (Citizens for Democracy)
- Professor Satish Jain (Jawaharlal Nehru University)
- Dr. Aurobindo Gosh (Delhi University)
- Mr. Anil Kumar (Journalist)
- Mr. Anand Sarup Verma (human rights activist who probed violations in South Africa)
- Mr. Colin Gonsalvez (Indian People Tribunal)
- Mr. Shamsul Islam (Dishan Natya Manch)
- Mr. Darshan Singh Jidda (Samjwadi Janata Party)
- Sardar Jagmohan Singh (General Secretary, Akali Dal-Amritsar).

People's Convention Held on October 17 in Amritsar

More than 200 families of Sikhs killed by the police made a collective appearance at the People's Convention held on October 17 in Amritsar. The widows, orphans, and parents of the slain Sikhs gave startling accounts about the cold blood murders of their relatives. The convention passed a resolution demanding immediate release of detainees languishing in jails for long time and appealed to the state government not to interfere with the working of the People's Commission. The convention was organized by

Punjab Human Rights Organization, Dal Khalsa International, Shromani Akali Dal (Amritsar), and Akal Federation. (Tribune, 10/18/98, 10/21/98)

Police to Monitor Activities of Sikh and Human Rights Organizations

According to a news story published in The Tribune (10/28/98), the Punjab police has sounded intelligence agencies to keep vigil on the activities of militant (Sikh) and human rights organizations. The police feared that the November 8 Khalsa death anniversary would be used to embarrass the state government.

Khalra Death Anniversary Observed on November 8

A Shaheedi conference was held at village Khalra, near Amritsar, in memory of Sardar Jaswant Singh Khalra on November 8. The conference demanded that former DGP K.P.S. Gill be arrested for killing Sardar Khalra and throwing his body into a canal. The conference also honored SPO Kuldip Singh, the only eyewitness of the killing of Khalra. The conference also passed resolutions demanding the state government's approval of the People's Commission and the release of all detained Sikhs on eve of the 300th anniversary of the Khalsa. The speakers blamed the Badal government for betraying the Sikhs and toeing the political ideology of the BJP. The conference vowed to expose this betrayal by forming a five member Khalra Mission Committee. The members of the committee are Justice (retired) Ajit Singh Bains, former MLA Prem Singh Lalpura, Sardarni Paramjit Kaur Khalra, former journalist Dalbir Singh, Surinder Singh Ghariaal (Chairman of Human Rights Wing of Akali Dal). Families of many Sikh martyrs attended the event, including those of Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, Harjinder Singh Jinda, and Satwant Singh. (Indian Express, 11/9/98, The Hindu, 11/9/98)

Sardar Jaswant Singh Khalra had investigated the disappearance of Sikh youths and mass cremations of unidentified bodies by police in

Punjab. He found that in three cremation grounds - Durgiana Mandir, Patti and Tarn Taran - at least 2,200 such unidentified youths were cremated. Punjab police picked up Sardar Khalra in the end of 1995. He was tortured by the police and shot to death under alleged orders of then Punjab police chief K.P.S. Gill.

A case against several Punjab police officials, including DSP Ashok Kumar, is pending in the Patiala District Court. The case was recently adjourned till Dec 18. (Indian Express, 11/13/98)

Census of State Sponsored Killings Demanded

A group of about 100 eminent scholars and representatives of Sikh organizations have demanded that the Punjab government conduct a census of state sponsored killings and institute an official investigation into the recent turbulent period of the state. Copies of the letter were released to media by Movement Against State Repression, a human rights organization. The letter pointed out the enormity of killings by agencies of the state of Punjab and provided figures on the number of Sikhs killed. The figures ranged between 30,357 as claimed by the police officially to 183,000 by human rights organizations. (The Hindu, 10/27/98)

Convention for Justice Held on November 28

A "Convention for Justice" was held on November 28 in Amritsar due to the cancellation of a scheduled sitting of the People's Commission that day. Sardarni Paramjit Kaur Khalra, the wife of late human rights activist Sardar Jaswant Singh Khalra who was killed by Punjab police, chaired the convention. The convention mobilized people to counter the propaganda against the People's Commission and adopted resolutions in favor of the working of the commission. The convention also condemned the cases registered against human rights activist Sardar Jaspal Singh Dhillon. (Tribune, 11/22/98, 11/29/98)

Mass Cremation Probe by NHRC
 India's National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has begun analyzing details of the CBI report relating to the alleged mass cremation of over 2,000 Sikhs in Punjab by the security forces. The petitioner's counsel has appealed to the Commission to inquire into all cases of faked encounters in Punjab and not only the 585 identified bodies, 237 partially identified, and 1,238 unidentified bodies allegedly cremated by Punjab police officials in a crematorium of Amritsar district. However, the Union Government and Punjab Government counsels argued that the reference to the Commission by the Supreme Court was specific and precise and not an inquiry but was limited to the specific cases which were brought up after the preliminary inquiry by CBI officials. (Tribune, 11/13/98)

Earlier, the Supreme Court of India had referred the alleged unidentified cremation case of Sikhs in Punjab to the NHRC terming the unceremonious cremation scheme by Punjab police as "horrifying." On September 13 the court also ruled that the probe by the NHRC could not be barred under the limitation Act prohibiting any human right violation inquiry after one year of the incident. The Court held that the NHRC, in the present mass cremation case, would function pursuant to the directions issued by the Supreme Court and not under the Act by which it was constituted. The Union Government of India as well the state Government of Punjab had challenged the NHRC's investigations into the mass cremation case before the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court ruling added, "we also do not approve of the conduct of the parties in approaching this court for clarification by way of a petition which has been pending for the last 10 months, during which the commission could have disposed of the whole matter." (Tribune, 9/14/98)

Protest March by Victims of November 1984 Sikh Massacres
 Fourteen years after the November 1984 genocide of Sikhs, many victims and the families of those butchered

and burnt to death, marched through the streets of New Delhi, the capital of India where the massacres were the deadliest, to demand that the guilty be brought to book and justice served to the victims and their families. (Tribune, 11/2/98)

The Statesman (10/30/98) reported that even 14 years after the killings, many families of the victims still await justice and compensation ordered by the Delhi High Court in July 1996.

A new book based on the Sikh massacres titled "Mangat Mein Khush Hun Kamli" has recently been published. The book deals with the problems being faced by Sikh children who watched their parents being killed before their eyes during the massacres by marauding Hindu gangs. The author, Mrs. Sharma remarked, "Their suffering is something that cannot ever be mitigated." (The Hindu, 10/4/98)

The Delhi High Court on October 16 upheld the death sentence of three persons found guilty of murder of Sikhs during the 1984 massacres but acquitted two others due to lack of evidence. The death sentences of Kishori Lal, Jagdish alias Jaggu, and Manohar Lal were upheld, while the acquitted persons included Dr. Budh Prakash and Mohammad Abbas. (Tribune, 10/17/98)

Kishore Lal, the infamous butcher of Sikhs during the Delhi massacres, who had earlier been convicted to death thrice for killing seven Sikhs, had two of his death sentences commuted to life imprisonment by the Supreme Court of India on December 1. (The Statesman, 12/1/98)

More than 20,000 Sikhs are reported to have been butchered by Hindu mobs in Delhi during the first two weeks of November 1984. The government of India official figures put the death toll at 2,733.

2 Sikh Children Murdered after Receiving Compensation for 1984 Delhi Massacres
 A few days after receiving a Rs.

320,000 compensation for the murder of their father, Sardar Puran Singh in the 1984 Sikh massacres, 17-year old Rachpal Singh and his 15-year old sister Paramjit Kaur were found stabbed to death at their home in Tilak Vihar in New Delhi on 7/23/98. (Times of India, 7/24/98)

SGPC for Sikh Personal Law, Elects Tohra as President for 25th Term

The SGPC has passed a resolution calling for a separate personal law for Sikhs in India, "just like other minorities like Muslims." This and other resolutions were passed by SGPC's 76th annual general body during the election session in which Sardar Gurcharan Singh Tohra was elected as the President for the 25th term. The meeting was held inside the Darbar Sahib Complex at Amritsar. Other resolutions adopted at the meeting included (Tribune, 10/24/98, The Statesman, 10/24/98, The Hindu, 10/24/98):

- Appeal to the government to make necessary amendments to the Gurdwara Act of 1925 giving legal sanction to Damdama Sahib, the fourth Takhat
- Appeal to the central government to hand over the library records which were seized by the Army during Operation Blue Star and confiscated
- Urged the government to allow Sikhs to travel on international flights with their Kripaans
- Appeal to set up a new commission to book culprits of 1984 Sikh massacres
- Strongly condemned the attempt of the central BJP government to "saffronize" the educational system in India
- Requested the central government to take steps to ensure dual citizenship for non-resident Indians

Several non-Sikh individuals and organizations have declared their opposition to the Sikh personal law demand. These include the Vishav Hindu Parishad (Indian Express, 11/26/98), Congress Party (Indian Express, 11/5/98), BJP Minister

Balramji Das Tandon (Indian Express, 11/9/98), Communist Party of India (Indian Express, 11/4/98), and Punjabi Istri Sabha (Tribune, 10/29/98).

DSGMC Poll Made Mandatory

The Delhi Assembly passed an amendment to the Sikh Gurdwara Act, 1971 requiring the Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee (DSGMC) to hold annual elections of the executive board. Following the amendment to the Act, the elections will take place at a regular interval and cannot be postponed on "frivolous" grounds. The last elections for the body took place in 1995 after a gap of 16 years. (Tribune, 9/30/98)

Mayor of Asansol: Sikhs Worshipping Goddess Kali are Example of Communal Harmony

Mr. Bampada Mukherjee, the Mayor of city of Asansol, was quoted in the Statesman (10/18/98) saying that the Balak Sangha Puja was an example of communal harmony. The Balak Sangha Puja consists of 17 members of Balak Sangha, all alleged Sikh youths between 18 and 28 years of age, who boast of worshipping Goddess Kali, fasting, offering Anjali to the Goddess's statue, and wearing new clothes. In recent years Sikhs in India who worship the idols of Hindu Gods and Goddesses and do not follow the Sikh way of life are accepted by society at large as being secular, while Sikhs who refuse to participate in such Manmat practices and follow the path shown by the Sikh Gurus are dubbed as "communal, separatists, terrorists, militants, or fundamentalists."

Sikh Preacher Accused of Black Magic Summoned

Singh Sahib Bhai Ranjit Singh, Jathedar of Siri Akal Takhat Sahib, has declared a preacher Sardar Sewa Singh of Pehowa (Haryana) as "tankhaiya" (guilty of religious misconduct) and asked him to appear before Siri Akal Takhat Sahib within one month to explain charges against him about "anti-Sikh acts like black magic." (Tribune, 11/29/98)

Book Publisher Summoned by Siri Akal Takhat Sahib

The Jathedar of Siri Akal Takhat Sahib, Singh Sahib Bhai Ranjit Singh Ji, has directed Bhai Chattar Singh, a publisher of Mai Sewan Bazaar in Amritsar, to appear at Siri Akal Takhat Sahib on December 18 to explain their conduct since they were warned earlier against publishing Siri Guru Granth Sahib and other Sikh religious literature and asked them not to print them. Despite the warning, there were reports that the publisher continued to publish Siri Guru Granth Sahib and other Sikh religious books. (Tribune, 11/29/98)

Earlier, a Hukamnaama had been issued by Siri Akal Takhat Sahib on May 9, 1998 directing a ban on the publication of Siri Guru Granth Sahib by anybody other than the Shromani Gurdwara Prabhandak Committee (SGPC). The Hukamnaama was issued after taking exception to the manner in which Messrs Chattar Singh and Jiwan Singh, a private publishing house for over 70 years, had been showing disrespect to Siri Guru Granth Sahib by disposing of its copies as *raddi* (waste paper) and setting them on fire. The Times of India (5/10/98) said that according to the Hukamnaama, no other Sikh organization or person would henceforth be entitled to publish Siri Guru Granth Sahib anywhere in the world.

Hindi Movie Offends Sikhs

The Sikh community has expressed concerns over several scenes in the Hindi movie "Kuch Kuch Hota Hai." Sikh youths across Punjab are reported to have protested the derogatory remarks against Sikhs that were contained in the movie. The SGPC President has asked the producer to delete certain sections from the movie. The SGPC has also raised objections to some parts of another movie titled "Pardesi Babu" in which a Sikh character has been depicted in a degrading fashion. The committee also expressed concern over a text book of the Haryana Government which distorted Sikh history. The SGPC has demanded that the Punjab state government grant a

representation for SGPC's nominee on the film censor board to ensure that the Sikh way of life was not distorted in Indian movies. (Tribune, October 26 & 30, November 4 & 20; Indian Express, November 20)

Indian Court Declares

"Bhindranwale" is a Dirty Word

A first Additional Sub-Judge in Thrissur district of Kerala has declared that the word "Bhindranwale" is a dirty word. This ruling was given by the judge in a defamation case filed by Mr. K.P. Mohammad against Mr. Krishnan Kutty of Mullurakka. The judge rejected Mr. Kutty's contention that Bhindranwale was a revered Sikh leader but instead ruled that "Bhindranwale was a terrorist who camped in the Golden Temple and waged a war against the Indian Army ... Calling the plaintiff by that name will certainly amount to defamation." The defendant has been ordered to pay Rs. 1.6 lakh as compensation to the plaintiff. (Statesman, 9/30/98, Deutsche Presse-Agentur, 9/30/98)

Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale led the Sikh opposition to the government sponsored terrorism unleashed by the Government of India and its agencies during the early 1980's. Sant Bhindranwale achieved martyrdom while defending the Darbar Sahib Complex at Amritsar in June of 1984 during Operation Blue Star. Thousands of innocent Sikhs were killed by the Indian army in that Operation. It is a matter of utmost shame for the entire Indian nation that the name of one of its foremost religious leaders and a great martyr is considered a "dirty word."

Sharp Rise in Suicides in Punjab

A study conducted by Institute for Development and Communications at the behest of the Punjab Government found that suicides are taking an alarming proportion in Punjab. The study revealed 418 suicides in Punjab in 1997 compared to 95 in 1988. The increase in the state's suicide rate was found to be nominal between 1988 and 1991, moderate between 1991 and 1992, and rose sharply from 1993 onwards. The study found that

suicides in 1992-93 increased by a whopping 52% as against the national average of just 6%. For 1993-94, Punjab's suicide rate increased 14 percent against the national average of 5.88%. The Malwa region was found to be more prone to suicides than the Doaba region of Punjab. The district of Sangrur led the state in number of suicides, with 22% of all suicides in Punjab being committed in the district. Farmers accounted for 23 percent of all suicides for 1991-97 period. Most of the suicides were from the Malwa districts – Sangrur, Bathinda, Ferozepore, Mansa, and Faridkot – and other border districts of Amritsar. These districts excluding Faridkot accounted for 72% of all suicides reported in Punjab between 1988 and 1997. Most peasant suicides were from Sangrur and Bathinda. The leading causes of suicides was found to be indebtedness, domestic discord, alcohol and drug abuse. (Tribune, 10/11/98, 11/1/98; The Statesman, 10/11/98, 10/12/98)

More Sikh Farmers Commit Suicide

According to published media reports, more than 20 Sikh farmers committed suicide recently due to bad paddy, rice, and cotton crops and heavy agricultural debts in Punjab. These include:

- ◆ Three Sikh farmers of Mansa and Bathinda district committed suicide recently. They include Bikar Singh (died October 19), Baldev Singh (died October 16), and Teja Singh (died October 23) of village Bir Khurd and Kotshamir. Earlier, two farmers committed suicide due to non-payment of debt in Nat Bhager and Siriwala villages in the few preceding days. (Tribune, 10/25/98)
- ◆ Balwinder Singh, a young Sikh farmer of Siriawala, Bathinda, committed suicide for failure to repay debt to a commission agent due to failure of his paddy crop. Family sources said that Baldev was forced to sell his paddy crop at throwaway price and he committed suicide on the

morning of October 14. (Tribune, 10/19/98)

- ◆ Baldev Singh Deba of Chethewala village near Bathinda ended his life on 10/18/98 when he found his paddy crop was not enough to offset his debt. This was the sixth suicide in this region by a farmer in the preceding one month. Earlier, five Sikh farmers of Mansa and Bathinda district committed suicide as their paddy and cotton crops were damaged by untimely rains. (Tribune, 10/29/98)
- ◆ At least three Sikh of Raipur village near Mansa have burnt themselves to death recently according to a news report published in the Tribune dated 10/12/98. Those who committed suicide included a young Sikh farmer, Balbir Kaur, and Sukhpal Kaur.

Sikh Student Ragged

Ajaypal Singh, a first year Civil Engineering student at Thapar Institute of Technology in Patiala, is reported to have been attacked by senior students on October 7 and 8. He was ragged by the seniors who disrobed him and made him jump off a building. The Institute Director, M.P. Kapoor said that Ajaypal was of religious bent of mind and had for the first time come to stay away from his parents. Four students have been rusticated in response to this incident. The victim was released from Rajendra Hospital on October 13. (Tribune, 10/14/98; Indian Express, 10/14/98, 10/15/98, 11/6/98)

Sikh Reported Killed by Police in 1994 Arrested by Police

The Indian Express (10/12/98) reported that the Punjab police have arrested a Sikh man named Gurnam Singh Bandala, whom the police records show was killed in July of 1994 by Punjab police in an encounter. The Ropar had claimed to have killed Gurnam Singh by labeling him a "terrorist" and had already been paid reward money for killing a "deadly terrorist." The Indian Express article remarked that the Punjab police chief, Mr. P.C. Dogra refused

to divulge the names of police officers who had received the reward money.

The Tribune (10/31/98) reported that this incident has opened a Pandora's box with human rights organizations criticizing the Punjab police for getting promotions and cash awards worth crores by killing of "innocents" in "faked encounters" as in the case of Gurnam Singh Bandala.

Police Lawlessness Against Sikhs Continues in Punjab

- Bhola Singh, a resident of village Matti near Mansa who had been picked up by police on 10/24/98, is reported to have been killed in police custody on 10/26/98. After his death, the police are alleged to have registered a case against him to show that he was arrested only a few hours before his death. The National Human Rights Commission and the Punjab State Human Rights Commission have been informed of this incident. (Indian Express, 10/28/98)
- Bhagwant Singh, a 38-year old resident of village Jhuge Lal Singh, is reported to have been arrested by police officials of Fazilka Sadar Station on October 23 and tortured in police custody. On October 24 he was admitted to the local Civil hospital where he died within half hour of being admitted. The cause of the death was determined to be neurogenic shocks on the scrotum and testicles of the deceased. (Tribune, 10/26/98)
- A 20-year old youth who was on his way to visit to partake Langar at Takhat Siri Anandpur Sahib, was arrested by police on September 14 and taken to the railway police station at Kiratpur Sahib. There the victim was tortured and sodomized by police officials. Medical examination of the victim has confirmed the torture and sexual abuse. The victim is a resident of Araipura village in Karnal district of Haryana. (Tribune, 9/24/98)
- Nirmal Kaur, a Sikh lady who was coming out of the Sector 34 Gurdwara Sahib in Chandigarh on 10/25/98 is reported to have

been had her purse snatched by a Punjab police officer. The officer snatched the purse and escaped on a motorcycle. The lady's husband Major Surjit Singh, a serving officer in the Army, chased the cop and caught up with him in Sector 35. The Army officer found that the police officer was drunk and handed him over to the local police. (Indian Express, 10/26/98)

- The police have arrested two Punjab police cops who had gone on a looting spree on a scooter in Hallomajra near Chandigarh on November 7. One of the officers, Kartar Chand, who was driving the scooter was wearing a police uniform when the crimes were committed. (Indian Express, 10/9/98)
- Rajinder Kaur (32), a resident of Sector 55 in Chandigarh, has alleged that she was beaten by Mohali police on the night of 10/14/98. The lady alleged that four Punjab police officials who were drunk visited her house for conducting a search. When she refused, they are alleged to have dragged her by her hair to the Mohali Police Station. The Sikh lady's husband informed the Indian Express (10/16/98) that he had brought the incident to the notice of the Sector 39 police station but no action had been taken.
- A 26-year old widow residing in Sector 40 of Chandigarh has accused the local police officials of ransacking her house and stealing gold jewelry. The victim alleged that 8-10 uniformed police officials stormed into her house on 11/2/98, searched it unlawfully, ransacked her belongings, stole some gold jewelry and left the house without telling why they were there. (Indian Express, 11/5/98)
- A Punjab police official of Faridkot district is reported to have been suspended for the illegal confinement of a Sikh couple at the Bajakhana police station on 9/27/98. Charanjit Singh Kaur and Balbir Singh were detained illegally for a night

at the police station. (Tribune, 10/10/98)

- The Punjab police is reported to have charged human rights lawyer Sardar D.S. Rajput and human rights activist Sardar Jaspal Singh Dhillon with unlawfully and maliciously conspiring to cause an explosion at the high security Burail jail. Eight others, mostly Sikhs, were also charged. (Indian Express, 10/17/98)
- The Punjab police is reported to have arrested Dilbagh Singh Bagha and 15 other persons, including his wife (Sardarni Baljinder Kaur) and mother-in-law (Sardarni Balbir Kaur), on October 8 at village Situ, near Gurdaspur. (Indian Express, 10/10/98)
- The police is reported to have arrested Gurcharan Singh Billa, a native of Sidhpur village near Fatehgarh Sahib, on 10/9/98, from Jamshedpur in Bihar. (Indian Express, 10/16/98, Tribune, 10/16/98)
- The Punjab police is reported to have arrested three Sikhs belonging to different villages in the Nurmahal area of Jalandhar district on 10/19/98. Those arrested included Amarjit Singh Maula, Kulwant Singh, and Avtar Singh Tari. (Indian Express, 10/21/98, Tribune, 10/21/98)
- The Statesman (11/4/98) reported that four Sikhs were arrested by the Punjab police at Kutbe Wala village in Firozapore district on November 3.
- The Punjab police is reported to have arrested two Sikhs, Gurwinder Singh Kala and Manjit Singh. Both of them are members of the Sikh Student Federation and were arrested on 11/4/98. Manjit belongs to village Samrawa under Noormahal police station in Jalandhar District. Gurwinder Singh Kala hails from Dadumal village in Jalandhar district.
- Gurmukh Singh, a resident of village Jhal village under Amargarh police station near Malerkotla, is reported to have

been arrested by Sangrur police. (11/3/98)

- The Moga police is reported to have arrested Narinder Singh Nindi, a resident of Jalandhar who had returned from Germany two years ago, on September 24. (Tribune, 9/25/98)
- Jagtar Singh, a resident of Moga district, was reported to have been arrested in September by the local police. (Tribune, 9/22/98)
- The Jammu and Kashmir police are reported to have arrested two Sikhs in the Ramgarh area of Jammu. Jagdev Singh Romi and Tejinder Singh Shunti were arrested on September 18. (Tribune, 9/20/98)
- In order to defame Sikhs, the Punjab police is reported to have declared that they have arrested a Pakistani boy disguised as a Sikh on November 8 (Tribune, 11/9/98). Earlier the Tribune (9/27/98) published a similar news report about the BSF having arrested a boy in Jammu region in September. The report indicated that 16 such "Sikh" militants were being pushed into the Jammu region.

Police Chief Asks for Enactment of Law to Protect Police Officials

Mr. P.C. Dogra, Punjab police chief, has demanded that a law be enacted to protect the rights of policemen who perform duties during troubled times in the states. He made these remarks while delivering the Presidential address of a seminar titled "Terrorism or Undeclared War of Attrition" organized by Sankritik Gaurav Sansthan on September 27 in Chandigarh. The police chief said that while there was a lot of support to wipe out terrorism in Punjab, the policemen were now being "hounded by all and sundry." He added that nearly 150 police officials were facing trials. As many as 20 were lodged in jails and there were 40 judicial inquiries pending. He added that condemning the police in peoples commissions could prove to be counter-productive in case terrorism returned to the state. (Tribune, 9/28/98)

PUCL Doubts Effectiveness of NHRC

The People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL), a national human rights organization, has expressed concern over the working style of the government-sponsored National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and state human rights commissions. The Union members said that four year ago they had submitted a list of 41 persons killed by the Punjab police in faked encounters in Bathinda district during 1991-92. Due to the 1-year time statute limitation, the Commission only took up two cases of out of the 41 received. The two cases involved the alleged killing of Darshan Singh and Balwinder Singh in faked encounter by Punjab police officials in 1993. The NHRC informed PUCL in October 1997, after nearly 4 years, that the two cases had been sent untracked after investigation and the courts had accepted the reports (prepared by Punjab police officials). The PUCL alleged that the NHRC had closed all cases on the basis of faked reports submitted by the police, the very agency accused on committing these human rights violations. PUCL has advocated the idea of a non-governmental independent commission to expose and curb the ever-increasing cases of human rights violations in India. (Indian Express, 11/20/98; Tribune, 11/19/98,11/20/98)

Murder Case Registered Against 2 Police Officials for 1993 Faked Encounter Death of Gurmail Singh

The Sadar police station at Mansa registered a murder case against two Punjab police officials on November 7 for the faked encounter death of Sardar Gurmail Singh, a resident of village Akkawali in Mansa. The case was registered on the direction of the Punjab and Haryana High Court which ordered that a case be filed against the accused officers for subjecting Gurmail Singh to an encounter on 1/29/93 after kidnapping him. The victims father, Sardar Bachhan Singh, has filed a writ petition in the High court alleging the faked encounter death of his son by police officials. Neither of the two

accused officers has been arrested. Instead one of the officer is reported to have been given additional charge of Jhaunir police station after the registration of the case against him on November 7. This is the second incident of its kind in the Mansa district in the recent past. Earlier, Inspector Budh Singh was arrested by police when a criminal case was registered against him on direction of the High Court for allegedly keeping Army jawans in illegal police custody. (Tribune, 11/29/98)

Lawyer Kulwant Singh Disappearance Case Set to Begin

The case concerning the disappearance of a Ropar Advocate, Sardar Kulwant Singh, and his wife and minor son will come up for hearing before a special UT judge for CBI cases on November 11. The incident dates back to January 1993 when Kulwant and his family are alleged to have been abducted by Punjab police, tortured and liquidated in illegal custody. To cover up the crime, the police initiated a fake case against Sardar Harpreet Singh. A CBI inquiry found that Harpreet Singh had been falsely implicated in the case and it held three police officials responsible for fabrication of evidence. (Indian Express, 6/9/98, 10/24/98)

KPS Gill Appointed to NSC

Ex-Punjab police chief, Mr. Kanwar Pal Singh Gill, who is alleged to have been responsible for the killing of thousands of Sikhs by Punjab police in faked encounters, has been appointed by the Union Government of India as one of the members of the National Security Council Advisory Board. Mr. Gill will represent the area of internal security on the Board. (The Hindu, 11/29/98)

Panel on Udham Singh Nagar

A three-members committee has been formed to resolve the dispute over the inclusion of Udham Singh Nagar, a Sikh populated area of Uttar Pradesh, into the proposed state of Uttranchal. The panel will be headed by Indian Defense Minister George Fernandes, Punjab Chief Minister Prakash Singh Badal, and UP Chief Minister Kalyan

Singh. The committee will prepare a report and is expected to submit it to the Prime Minister before the winter session of the Indian parliament. (Tribune, 10/8/98)

Taping of Government Sponsored Documentary "Khalsa" Begins

The inauguration of the shooting of a documentary titled "Khalsa" began on November 4 at Siri Akal Takhat Sahib. The film is being produced by Mangal Dhillon and is being financed by the state government of Punjab. The movie will cover the life and teachings of all the Guru Sahibs, the establishment of the Khalsa, battles of the 10th Nanak, his sacrifices, and other Sikh warriors and martyrs. The film is intended to be screened in April 1999. (Tribune, 11/5/98, Indian Express, 11/5/98)

Train Accident Kills 205 Passengers, Villagers Help Rescue Many

A deadly train accident near Khanna, Punjab on the night of November 26 at 3:15 AM between the Sealdah Express and Frontier Mail train caused the death of over 205 passengers. The Hindu (11/27/98) and Times of India (11/28/98) reported that the residents of the village Kauri, which was the village nearest to the accident site, were woken up in the middle of the night by the local Granthi of the Gurdwara Sahib who informed the villagers of the accident over the public address system and requisitioned help. Hundreds of villagers rushed to the site of the accident and began rescue operations even before any governmental help arrived. People rushed on tractor trailers, cars, vans, trucks, and scooters to the site. They used their crude agricultural equipment to cut through the mass of mangled metal to rescue survivors and pull out the dead. The villagers worked till 6 AM in morning before any formal help arrived from the local rescue agencies. A Sikh Jawan, Naik Kirpal Singh of the 15 Sikh Light Infantry Unit was rescued by the villagers before the official help arrived. On the arrival of the rescue teams, the teams chased away the villagers with lathis and did not allow them to assist in rescue

operations. Villagers in large numbers are also reported to have turned up to donate blood at hospitals where the injured passengers have been admitted. Foul play or arson, which may have caused the accident, has been ruled out.

Singh Sahib Bhai Ranjit Singh Ji, Jathedar of Siri Akal Takhat Sahib expressed his sympathy with the bereaved families of the victims of the train accident. (Tribune, 11/28/98)

Gujral Inaugurates Sikh Conference

The three-day 60th All India Sikh Educational Conference began at village Dhahan Kaleran near Nawanshahar on November 27. The former Prime Minister of India, Mr. I.K. Gujral inaugurated the conference. The conference was organized by the Chief Khalsa Diwan of Amritsar. (Indian Express, 11/28/98)

Inderjit Singh & Umranangal Pass Away

Sardar Inderjit Singh, the founder of Bank of Punjab and Punjab and Sind Bank, passed away on October 4 (Tribune, 10/5/98). Sardar Inderjit Singh founded and supported

numerous Sikh institutions, He will be missed by many.

Sardar Jiwan Singh Umranangal, veteran Akali leader, passed away on November 7 and was cremated according to Sikh rites the next day at his village Umranangal in Amritsar district (Tribune, 11/9/98). Jiwan Singh Umranangal was a minister in the Punjab Government and refused to intervene when Sikhs objected to the Nirankari Samagam being held in Amritsar on Vaisaakhi day in 1978. Innocent unarmed Sikhs were set upon by the Nirankaris resulting in 13 of them killed. In 1980, he opposed Bhai Amrik Singh in the SGPC elections. Sant Bhindranwale accused him of going to the Nirankari Baba to ask for Nirankaris to register as Sikhs and vote for him in the election ignoring the Hukamnaama issued from Siri Akal Takhat Sahib.

Nuns Raped and Attacked in India, Christians Protest Rising Atrocities

On September 23, over 20 armed persons are reported to have broken into a convent in Nawapada village of Jhabua district in Madhya Pradesh, dragged four Christian nuns to farm fields nearby and raped them (AP News, 9/26/98). Mr. Baikunth Lal

Sharma, a senior official of the Vishav Hindu Parishad is reported to have described the rapes as a consequence of Hindu anger over conversions. (Reuters, 9/30/98)

On day later, armed gangsters are also reported to have attacked a convent in Baghpat, just outside the Indian capital of New Delhi, and beat up a group of Christian nuns on September 24. The attackers slapped the nuns and desecrated the chapel at the Clarist Catholic Convent. More than 30 residents of the convent were terrorized for over 3 hours. (AP News, 9/26/98)

Hundreds of Christians wearing black bands marched through New Delhi on October 3 to protest rising "atrocities" against the Christian community. A signed statement was issued by the Archbishop of Delhi and three other bishops, which read, "In face of such permeating and unrelenting violence patently designed to coerce Christians and hinder profession of their faith and social outreach programme, the Christians in India are beginning, for the first time since independence (in 1947), to feel threatened." (Reuters, 10/3/98)

NEWS FROM OTHER PARTS OF THE WORLD

World Conference on Crimes Against Humanity

The World Forum will hold a conference titled "Should Great Crimes Against Humanity be Forgiven? The Challenge of Preventing Genocide in the 21st Century". The conference will be held in partnership with the Anti-Defamation League and will take place at the Imperial Palace (the Hofburg) in Vienna, Austria on March 21-25, 1999. Sikh organizations are encouraged to get involved with the conference, highlight the genocide and crimes against humanity committed by various agencies of the State of India against members of the Sikh community, and work to prevent the reoccurrence of such tragedies.

Commemoration of World War I Veterans

A commemoration service was held on November 11 at Flanders, Belgium in remembrance of the 55,000 Commonwealth soldiers slain in the mud of Flanders Fields during World War I. The remains of these soldiers (including Sikhs) were not found, and a vast arch bearing their names has been constructed. The ceremony was attended by Queen Elizabeth II. A scarlet shower of 55,000 poppy petals, one for each missing soldier whose name is carved into the arch, fell from the 30-meter tall stone structure during a minute's silence. Thousands of people attended the ceremony including Sikhs. Sardar Jatinder Singh, a Sikh who brought his daughter from Netherlands with him attended the observance and said,

"It's important that we let our children know that our forefathers also fought in the First World War." The first world war killed 13 million civilians and 8.5 million soldiers including many Sikhs. (AP Worldstream, 11/11/98)

European Sikhs for Review of Hard Hat Laws

British Sikhs have been successful in convincing the European Union that the European safety law, which insists that they wear hard hats instead of turbans on building construction sites, should be reviewed. The British Sikh Federation had collected a 12,110 signature petition and sent it to the European Union demanding the exemption, similar to the one for motorcycle crash helmets. (The People, 10/18/98)

BBC Film on Sikh Faith

The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) will produce three documentary films on Sikhs, and the Sikh faith. These documentaries will cover Operation Bluestar and the November Sikh massacres in which thousands of innocent Sikhs were killed by Indian defense forces and Hindu mobs in 1984. The films will be half-an-hour duration each, and are being produced as part of the tercentenary celebration of the Khalsa. Mr. Tommy Nagra, producer of BBC, has visited Amritsar along with a team for shooting the documentary. (Tribune, 11/1/98)

Canadian Sikhs Aid Victims of Hurricane Mitch

The Edmonton Sun (11/23/98) reported that the Sikh Gurdwara of Siri Guru Singh Sabha in Mill Woods near Edmonton, Canada had raised \$3,000 to aid the Honduran victims of Hurricane Mitch.

British Sikh Youth Help Needy Children

More than 200 Midland Sikh youngsters organized car washes, hymn-singing services, and a trail walk of Gurdwaras in Birmingham to raise funds for BBC's Children in Need and the Forgotten Children of Punjab (Orphans) Fund. The walk was held on November 15 and was organized by the International Sikh Youth Federation and Sikh Youth of Walsall. (Birmingham Evening Mail, 11/13/98)

Tables and Chairs Returned to Abbotsford Gurdwara Sahib

According to The Vancouver Sun (12/3/98), the recently elected leaders of the Khalsa Diwan Society of Abbotsford Gurdwara Sahib re-introduced tables and chairs to the langar hall of the Gurdwara Sahib on the morning of December 2. The Granthi of the Gurdwara Sahib has refused to perform his duties due to this change. It is to be noted that the use of chairs and tables in Langar has been banned by a Hukamnaama issued from Siri Akal Takhat Sahib.

Sikh Lawyer Elaborates Experience with Indian Diplomats in Canada

Sardar T. Sher Singh, a lawyer and a journalist for The Toronto Star who has lived in Canada for 27 years, published an article on November 10 in the Toronto Star in which he elaborated on two recent incidents that occurred in Canada in which the Indian Government intervened to try to disrupt his activities.

The first incident occurred when the Sikh lawyer was invited to speak at a symposium at the Simon Fraser University's Institute for Humanities on the recent nuclear tests by India and Pakistan. Three days before the event, Sher Singh received a call from Dr. Hari Sharma, a faculty member of SFU, who informed him that the Indian consulate in Vancouver had not only expressed its displeasure but suggested that he be replaced as a speaker. Further Dr. Sharma told Sher Singh, (1) the Indian government is not happy that he was one of the speakers, (2) that it has the power to, and does often revoke passports of and deny visas to those that it is displeased with, and (3) that it would like to know in advance what he was going to say at the symposium. Being a lawyer, Sher Singh replied back in quick, clear and precise terms of his rights which made the officials retreat.

The second incident occurred after Sher Singh criticized the BJP Indian government on CFMT-TV of rewriting Indian history in accordance with the Hindu perspective. In response, the Indian High Commission in Ottawa immediately sent off a missive to CFMT-TV denouncing the "mischievous and malicious propaganda" and "virulent attacks" against the government of India, all by "one T. Sher Singh."

In closing, Sher Singh remarked that "while all of these incidents make great stories, what makes them truly scandalous is the fact that, in each case, a foreign government has been interfering in the internal affairs of Canada. The Indians needs to be reminded by our government that the right of free expression in this country

is sacrosanct. After all, if this is happening to me, what are they doing to others?" T. Sher Singh writes for the Toronto Star every third Tuesday.

Indian Diplomat Irritated with Canadian Sikh Journalist

Mr. Chandra Bhandari, Consul General of India in Toronto, has written a letter of protest to the Toronto Star in which he described as "fanciful" the opinion column written by T. Sher Singh (Toronto Star, 9/15/98) that the Indian government was behind the criminal violence perpetrated against innocent Sikhs at the Gurdwara Sahib in Surrey, Canada. The letter of the diplomat was published by the Toronto Star on 9/28/98

Editor of Punjabi Newspaper Shot Dead in Canada

The editor of Indo-Canadian Times, Tara Singh Hayer, was shot dead on November 18 in Surrey near Vancouver by unknown assailants while he was shifting from his car to his wheelchair on the driveway of his house.

The Buffalo News (11/20/98) reported that the "police said they had no suspects." The Toronto Star (11/29/98) reported that RCMP has no proof linking Hayer's death to the tables-and-chairs fight, terrorism or the downing of Air India Flight 182. The Inter Press Service (11/30/98) published a news story in which it quoted T. Sher Singh, a Toronto Star journalist, who alleged that the Indian Government may be responsible for the killing of Hayer. The Canadian Association of Journalists and Canadian Committee to Protect Journalists has demanded a federal probe into the assassination (Vancouver Sun, 11/20/98).

Earlier this year, on July 25, Hayer along with 5 other Canadians had been excommunicated from the Panth for their refusal to follow the April 20, 1998 Hukamnaama issued by Siri Akal Takhat Sahib prohibiting langar on tables or chairs.

Refugee Wins Approval Despite Being a Security Threat; Canadian

Government Appeals

The Canadian Immigration and Ruling Board granted refugee status to Sardar Harjinder Singh Nagra although the Canadian government considered him to be security risk. However, in a rare move by the Canadian government the Canadian Immigration Minister has appealed the decision of the Immigration Board. The government wants the decision of the Board overturned according to documents filed in the Federal Court of Canada. (Vancouver Sun, 11/17/98)

Nagra has argued that he will be killed if he is deported to India because of his religious and political beliefs supporting an independent Sikh state of Khalistan. (Vancouver Sun, October 19, 1998)

Update on Iqbal Singh

The Toronto Sun (11/12/98) reported that the Federal Court of Canada has turned down the request of Sardar Iqbal Singh not to deport him to India. The Canadian Security Intelligence Service had accused him of being a security threat to Canada.

A protest rally was held on September 15 in Montreal, Canada to protest the deportation of Sardar Iqbal Singh. A memorandum was submitted to the Executive Assistant of the Minister of Immigration. The CFTO-TV covered the case in its news cast of September 27.

Sardar Iqbal Singh, a Sikh refugee from India had applied for immigration to Canada but instead was arrested by an RCMP Immigration Task Force on April 2 in Toronto under national security legislation that prevents him from knowing the evidence against him. Iqbal Singh's case was reviewed in a closed hearing at the Federal Court of Canada where the judge could have examined the government's evidence and any other evidence without the accused or his lawyer being present. Iqbal Singh had left India to avoid persecution by police and made his way to Canada in 1991 via Nepal, Thailand and Korea. More information on the Save Iqbal Singh

Campaign can be accessed at http://members.tripod.com/~Iqbal_Singh/

Canadian Newspaper Highlights Sikh Refugee Case

The Gazette (Montreal) published an article on 10/12/98 about the uphill battles faced by refugees wanting to stay in Canada. The article highlighted the case of Sardar Bhupinder Singh Shahi, who had escaped deportation to India only two weeks earlier. In 1991, Shahi had been accused by the Punjab police in India of providing shelter to sympathizers of the Sikh freedom movement. He was tortured by police and let off. Five months later he was again arrested following the murder of a police inspector's family and was tortured severely. Upon release, Shahi went into hiding, and finally fled India after the police came looking for him again. Shahi arranged for papers and a plane ticket to the United States and eventually made it into Canada.

Article on Caste System Among Sikhs in Canada

The Vancouver Sun published an article on November 28 in which it elaborated on the practice of Canadian Sikhs marrying among persons of their own caste. The Sikh Gurus forbade the practice of castes among Sikhs.

Sikh Suspects to be Provided Head Covering in Canada

The Vancouver Sun (10/5/98) reported that the Abbotsford police department has ordered that Sikh suspects be provided with a head covering meeting the religious requirements of the Sikh faith. The police board had inquired into the issue when an elderly Sikh man arrested for theft had his turban removed in a search.

Former Granthi Pleads Guilty to Sexual Assault

Beant Singh Sekhon, a former Granthi of a Sikh school in Surrey, Canada is reported to have pleaded guilty in a Surrey provincial court on 10/19/98 to two counts of sexual assault on young girls who were students at the school at the time.

The accused remained free on bail pending a sentencing hearing on December 2. The December hearing was postponed because a judge was not available. This has angered the parents of the victims. The Vancouver Sun (10/20/98, 12/3/98) reported on the incident.

Air India Bombing Report

The Canadian police have sent a long-awaited report on bombing of Air India Flight 182 to government prosecutors so they can assess whether charges will be filed for the 1985 bombing. The RCMP said that criminal charges would be approved only if prosecutors determine that there is "substantial likelihood of a conviction and it is in the public interest to proceed." (AP World Stream, 10/15/98; Vancouver Sun, 10/16/98; Reuters, 10/15/98)

Trial of White Supremacists for Murder of Sikh Granthi in Canada

The Vancouver Sun (10/6/98, 12/3/98) reported that the trial of five young men linked to a White supremacist group called White Power, begun on 10/5/98 among tight security at Surrey provincial court. The men are accused of murdering Sardar Nirmal Singh, a Granthi of the local Gurdwara on the morning of January 4, 1998.

According to Vancouver Sun (10/3/98), the tip for the arrests of the accused came in a phone tip received by RCMP saying that five white supremacist skinheads had boasted at a party that "they had beaten an East Indian male in the area of the Surrey Sikh temple." The police then determined that Sardar Nirmal Singh, the 65-year old Granthi of Guru Nanak Gurdwara Sahib in the Vancouver suburb of Surrey, Canada, was beaten to death in the parking lot by the five skinheads (aged 17-25 years) after an all-night party organized by White Power for its supporters in neighborhood of the Gurdwara Sahib. White Power is reported to be aligned with a number of other racist groups including the Northern Hammerskins, Aryan Nations and Heritage Front. The arrests have put to rest the earlier

police claims that the Granthi may have been killed due to disagreements between groups trying to wrestle control of the management of the Gurdwara Sahib. The Granthi's son, had earlier been paralyzed after police in India wrongfully arrested him as a suspected Sikh terrorist and tortured him.

Sikhs Targeted For British Army

Territorial Army (TA) officials in Britain launched a drive to recruit Sikhs in England on occasion of the Gurburab celebrations on November 4, 1998. Posters promoting Sikh recruitment into the Army were distributed at Leicester and will be sent to other Gurdwaras. The poster shows a Leicestershire TA Sikh soldier, Sergeant Balbir Singh Nagra, who has served in the TA for 18 years and played a key role in forging links between the Asian community and the Armed Forces. (Leicester Mercury, 11/3/98, 11/6/98)

Anglo-Sikh Festival

On August 30, 1998 the Maharaja Duleep Singh Centenary Trust organized an Anglo-Sikh festival. At this event, a life size statue of Maharajah Duleep Singh on horseback was unveiled. Representatives of the British army, Sikh Regiments, and Sikh Brigade Association were expected to attend.

Dietary Restrictions of Recruits will be respected by the British Army

The Times (9/24/98) stated that special field rations packs catering for the dietary needs of Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus, Buddhists, and Jews are to be introduced by the British Armed Forces. Service caterers are devising the meals in consultation with a team of five religious advisers representing each of the five faith traditions. Other changes introduced include permission for Sikh women to wear trousers, not skirts, and for Sikh men to wear turbans and "short, neatly trimmed" beards. Sikhs in the UK army are not allowed to keep an uncut beard or wear a turban under combat helmets but they can wear a "patka" under the helmet.

UK Ministers Speak at HR Meeting on India

Two ministers of UK, Derek Fatchett (Member of Parliament & Foreign Minister responsible for Britain's relations with India) and John Spellar (Member of Parliament & Defence Minister), spoke in support of the international campaign for human rights in India at the September 28 reception at the Labour Party conference organized by the Parliamentary Committee for Human Rights in Punjab. Several other legislators attended the meeting. Information was provided to the ministers by the Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights in Punjab, Sikh Human Rights Group, Panjabi Human Rights Internet, and Khalsa Human Rights.

ISYF Annual Convention

The International Sikh Youth Federation held its annual convention on September 14, 1998 in UK. Several members of the British parliament spoke at the meeting. The thousands of Sikhs present at the convention urged the British government to:

- ◆ Act upon concerns of the British Sikh community with regard to employment legislation that discriminate against Sikhs and their faith
- ◆ Recommend the long-term presence of international human rights monitors in Punjab
- ◆ Urge the Indian government to allow internationally monitored investigation of public crematoriums throughout Punjab
- ◆ Recognize the People's Commission and its findings in Punjab
- ◆ Urge India to dismiss all pending cases under TADA against Sikhs
- ◆ Recommend that Indian authorities cease abducting, harassing, and murdering human rights activists and other Sikhs.
- ◆ Take measured and appropriate sanctions against India until India complies with all International treaties and covenants regarding human rights to which they are signatories.

UK Sikh Gurdwara Attacked Repeatedly

The Northern Echo (9/25/98), one of England's largest provincial newspaper of Yorkshire, reported that the local Sikh community has asked the Middleborough town leaders to help them find a safer location due to repeated racist attacks on the Gurdwara Sahib. Four years ago, miscreants broke into the Gurdwara and desecrated the Diwan Hall. A year ago the Granthi was threatened by masked men armed with knife and screwdriver. A few weeks ago, the President of the Gurdwara was opening a top window and saw three or four men kicking the door. When the alarm sounded, the men ran away. The President claimed that the incidents were a combination of racially motivated acts and wanton vandalism.

Three Sikh Youths Attacked in Racially Motivated Case in England

Three Sikh teenagers were punched and attacked by a gang of youths in Patchway, Bristol, England on the night of 11/28/98. A 19-year old student from London needed hospital treatment for a fractured hand, while the other two Sikh youths suffered cuts and bruises. Four white males carried out the attack on the Sikh teenagers. One man has been charged in the racist attack. The incident was reported by Bristol Evening Post (12/1/98, 12/2/98), and Western Daily Press (12/2/98, 12/3/98).

Chahal Loses Compensation Bid

Sardar Karamjit Singh Chahal, who earlier had been freed from detention after six years in Britain by the European Court of Human Rights, was refused compensation by an English court. The High Court judge ruled that the administrative detention of Chahal had been lawful because he was held pending the resolution of his case. The British government had unsuccessfully argued that Chahal had to be deported to India for reasons of national security. In 1996 the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg ruled that the British government had violated Chahal's rights and that he would be subjected to inhuman and degrading treatment

if he was sent back to India. (Deutsche Press-Agentur, 11/6/98; Press Association Newsfile, 10/19/98; Times Newspaper Limited, 10/20/98; The Guardian, 11/7/98)

UK Government Plans for Religious Identification in 2001 census

The Sunday Telegraph (11/15/98) published an article in which it describes a plan by the British government to ask people their religion in the year 2001 census. However, the proposal has aroused fierce opposition from critics who claim that gathering such statistics will erode personal liberty. The critics point out that if a census of households had been held in Germany in 1880, the statistics could have been misused by Nazi only 50 years later.

Elixir Conference on Sikh Diaspora

In order to celebrate the decade of the Living Guru, 1998-2008, Elixir organized its first conference on September 19, 1998 in England. The conference theme was "A Diaspora Melody: Sikh Voices on the Eve of the 21st Century" and was held at Selly Oaks Colleges in Birmingham. Elixir is new organization that was set up in England recently to promote Sikh spirituality. (Sikh Spirit, October 1998)

Gurmat Camp to be held in UK

A Gurmat Sikh Camp for youths will be held December 23-26 at the Hounslow Gurdwara Sahib in London. The camp is for all ages over 7 years old and is free.

UK Sikhs Protest Visit by Indian High Commissioner

The Leicester Mercury (11/28/98) reported that the Sikhs of Leicester and members of the International Sikh Youth Federation protested the three-day visit to Leicester by Mr. Lalit Mansingh, the Indian High Commissioner to UK, by a holding protest demonstration on November 27. The protestors claimed that India was responsible for human rights violations against Sikhs, Kashmiris, and other minorities.

SINGH Auto Plate Fetches 108,000 Pounds

The Birmingham Post (10/31/98) reported that an anonymous Sikh businessman paid more than 108,000 pounds for a car registration plate titled SINGH.

Interfaith Activities

The following inter-religious activities and events with Sikh participation were reported recently:

- ◆ November 15-21 was celebrated by major religious and faith communities in Canada and many other countries as the Restorative Justice Week: Community, Victims, Prisoners. In Canada, the theme was "Is there a better way?" The Interfaith Committee on Chaplancy in the Correctional Service of Canada organized an interfaith event designed to sensitize the public and faith communities around the world, about the realities of crime, criminal justice, and corrections from a restorative justice perspective. More than 1,000 faith communities were involved in Canada for the Justice Week observance. (Canadian Corporate Newswire, 11/16/98)
- ◆ A diverse coalition of more than 100 prominent religious leaders of Canada have expressed full support of the first treaty to be signed with Native Americans in modern Canadian History. The treaty, which gives the Nisga'a 800 square miles of land in north-coastal British Columbia and \$100 million in cash, was endorsed at a celebration on November 19 that included Catholics, Anglicans, Buddhists, Lutherans, Mennonites, Muslims, Seventh-Day Adventists, Sikhs, Unitarians, United Christ members, and Zoroastrians. (Dallas Morning News, 11/28/98)
- ◆ The Ontario Funeral Service Association and The Lung Association of Canada recently published a brochure titled Multicultural Funeral Practices: A Guide to Funeral Customs in Canada. The brochure includes

information about more than dozen faith traditions. (Canada News Wire, 10/14/98)

- ◆ One World Week was celebrated by faith communities in Gloucester, UK by organizing a unique exhibition that brought together Sikhs, Muslims, Christians, and Hindus. The event was organized by the Gloucestershire Interfaith Action. (Gloucester Citizen, 10/24/98)
- ◆ A "One World Festival" was organized in Grimsby, UK on October 24. Several faith traditions participated in the event. (Grimsby Evening Telegraph, 10/26/98)
- ◆ The Edinburgh Interfaith Association organized an interfaith pilgrimage on October 4 to places of worship in Leith, UK. The pilgrimage included visits to a Sikh Gurdwara, Christian Church, and a Baha'i center. (Evening News Edinburgh, 10/1/98)
- ◆ The Loughborough Council of Faiths staged a week-long celebration of the British town's religious diversity with an exhibition at the central library. Seven faith traditions participated in the event. (Leicester Mercury, 9/29/98)

Sikh Celebrate Gurburab at Gurdwara Nankana Sahib

Thousands of Sikhs from all over the world converged at Gurdwara Nankana Sahib in Pakistan in the first week of November to celebrate the 529th Prakash Divas of Siri Guru Nanak Sahib.

SGPC Seeks to Access Manuscripts in Pakistan

The Shromani Gurdwara Prabhandak Committee (SGPC) has urged the Pakistan Government to allow Sikh scholars to study books and manuscripts in Panjabi lying in locked boxes at Lahore and several other libraries in Pakistan since 1947, and to prepare a catalogue of available manuscripts and books for research purposes. (Tribune, 11/8/98)

**Pakistan PM Invited for 1999
Khalsa Celebrations**

The SGPC President, Sardar Gurcharan Singh Tohra, has invited Mr. Nawaz Sharif, Prime Minister of Pakistan, to attend the 300th anniversary celebrations of the Khalsa in 1999. Sikhs are a minority in Pakistan and the country has over 250 historical Sikh shires which are maintained by the Pakistan

Government Evacuee Trust Property Board. (The Statesman, 11/5/98)

**Pakistan Wakf Board Disallows
SGPC to Collect Funds**

The Pakistan Wakf Board, which manages Sikh Gurdwaras in Pakistan, forbid the SGPC from collecting donations made by Sikhs at Nankana Sahib and other Sikh shrines in Pakistan recently. (Tribune, 11/8/98)

**Sikhs of Kuala Lumpur Celebrate
Gurpurab**

The New Strait Times (11/4/98,11/14/98) reported that Sikhs all over Malaysia were celebrating the Prakash Divas of Siri Guru Nanak Sahib during the weekend of November 7-8. A procession was taken out through the town of Tampin to mark the opening of the new Gurdwara Sahib Tampin.

Gurpurabs for November/December 1998

Actual Dates

- November 11** Joti Jot Divas of Siri Guru Tegh Bahaadar Sahib (1675)
- November 11** Gur Gaddi Divas of Siri Guru Gobind Singh Sahib (1675)
- November 12** Gur Gaddi Divas of Siri Guru Granth Sahib (1708)
- December 22** Parkash Divas of Siri Guru Gobind Singh Sahib (1666)

Observed Dates

- November 4** Parkash Divas of Siri Guru Nanak Sahib (1469)
- November 22** Joti Jot Divas of Siri Guru Tegh Bahaadar Sahib (1675)
- November 22** Gur Gaddi Divas of Siri Guru Gobind Singh Sahib (1675)
- December 25** Parkash Divas of Siri Guru Gobind Singh Sahib (1666)

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

World Sikh Council – America Region (WSC-AR) publishes this newsletter with assistance from Sikh Educational and Religious Foundation (SERF). Its distribution is limited to existing or potential members of WSC-AR, SERF, and to certain other interested individual Sikhs and Sikh organizations. The news items published in this newsletter, which are not directly related to the activities of WSC-AR, do not necessarily reflect the views of WSC-AR. If you would like to send a news item for possible publication in the newsletter, please e-mail it by the 15th of the preceding month to vsc-usa@unforgettable.com or send it to WSC-AR Newsletter, PO Box 1553, Dublin, Ohio 43017.

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