



# World Sikh Council



## America Region Newsletter

Volume 3, No. 1, January – March, 2000

### Quarterly 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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### Member Institutions

*Gurdwara Sahib Fremont, Fremont, CA*  
*Guru Nanak Sikh Mission, Livingston, CA*  
*Sikh Gurdwara of LA, North Hollywood, CA*  
*Sikh Gurdwara Riverside, Riverside, CA*  
*Sri Guru Granth Sahib Found., 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 Society of Michigan, Madison Heights, MI*  
*Sikh Gurdwara of North Carolina, Durham, NC*  
*Garden State Sikh Association, Pluckemin, NJ*  
*Siri Guru Singh Sabha, Glenrock, NJ*  
*Sikh Cultural Society Inc., Richmond Hills, NY*  
*Sikh Cultural & Educational Society of Western  
New York, Williamsville, NY*  
*Sikh 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*  
*Guru Gobind Singh Sikh Society, Middleburgh  
Height, 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*  
*Sikh Gurdwara of North Texas, Garland, TX*  
*Singh Sabha Gurdwara, Fairfax, VA*

### WSC-AR Rejects the Disbanding of WSC by Giani Puran Singh & Pledges to Work for the Charhdi Kala of Panth

The Secretary General of World Sikh Council – America Region, Dr. Ranbir Singh Sandhu communicated the following clarifications to member organizations on 3/9/00:

1. This is to clear any doubts that might have been created by the news appearing in various newspapers regarding the World Sikh Council.
2. On 2/23/00 news appeared to the effect that Giani Puran Singh had issued a directive disbanding the World Sikh Council and constituting a 12-member committee, headed by himself, to run its affairs. This committee included our President, Justice (Retd.) Kuldip Singh. Later on, he was reported to have added five more members to this committee and also appointed a three-member committee to propose amendments to the Constitution by 4/13/01.
3. **The action by Giani Puran Singh was rejected by the World Sikh Council - America Region.** The Press Release issued by our Chairperson, Sardar Kuldeep Singh, on 2/24/00 is enclosed.
4. Immediately upon reading the news reports, on 2/23/00, Justice (Retd.) Kuldip Singh wrote to Giani Puran Singh expressing his inability to serve on the committee appointed by him. On 2/26/00, Giani Puran Singh called Justice (Retd.) Kuldip Singh to Amritsar. Justice (Retd.) Kuldip Singh explained to him the working of the Council and also the consequences of his directive. Justice (Retd.) Kuldip Singh stuck to his position that he could not serve on the 12-member committee. On 2/28/00, Maj. Gen. (Retd.) Narinder Singh, Working Secretary General of the World Sikh Council, conveyed Justice (Retd.) Kuldip Singh's letter to all members of the Executive Committee of the World Sikh Council assuring them that **“the working of the World Sikh Council is no way affected by the letter issued by Giani Puran Singh. It will continue to function as before.”**



5. Giani Puran Singh, on 3/2/00, announced that he had superseded the Regional Councils of the World Sikh Council. Maj. Gen. (Retd.) Narinder Singh, working Secretary General of the World Sikh Council, made it clear in his letter of 3/2/00 addressed to Giani Puran Singh that **“we do not accept your directive.”**

6. In summary, **I like to inform you that the pronouncements by Giani Puran Singh do not affect the functioning of the World Sikh Council - America Region in any way and should be ignored. We shall continue to work for the Charhdi Kala of the Panth in accordance with our Articles of Incorporation and our Bylaws.**

### Newsletter Publication Resumed

The *World Sikh Council America Region Newsletter* was not published in 1999. Many member Sikh organizations requested that the newsletter publication be resumed. We have now committed ourselves to the quarterly publication of this newsletter. Hard copies of the newsletter will be mailed to WSC-AR member organizations, members of regional committee and associate members. An electronic version of the newsletter will be made available to other interested Sikh organizations and individuals. To receive a copy of this newsletter in electronic format (Adobe Acrobat PDF file format), please send an e-mail to [sikhs@accesstoledo.com](mailto:sikhs@accesstoledo.com)

## US NEWS

### Activities of WSC-AR

The World Sikh Council – America Region (WSC-AR) in collaboration with other Sikh organizations was successful in the dismissal of the concealed weapon charge against Sardar Gurbachan Singh (Bhatia) of Cleveland for wearing a Kirpaan. The case was dismissed on December 6, 1999. The Cleveland Kirpaan case was reported by national media and covered extensively by the local media.

In 1999, the activities of WSC-AR were:

- Organized a convention on April 3, 1999 in Secaucus, New Jersey to celebrate the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Khalsa. More than 24 Sikh organizations of USA sponsored the event.
- Participated in the Khalsa March held in Washington, DC on April 10, 1999.
- Participated in the tercentenary celebrations at various Sikh youth camps across the US.
- The WSC-AR issued a press release on February 10, 1999 strongly condemning the illegal suspension of Singh Sahib Bhai Ranjit Singh, Jathedar of Siri Akal Takhat Sahib and hailing the courage of Giani Mohan Singh who refused to yield to government pressure. The press release deplored the interference

of the Punjab government into the religious affairs of the Sikhs by using some members of the SGPC executive committee. On February 18, 1999, WSC-AR issued an open letter to Sikh institutions all over the world urging them to support Bhai Ranjit Singh as Jathedar of Akal Takhat and leader of all Sikhs around the world. The open letter also requested Sikh organizations to declare that no political or temporal authority shall be allowed to interfere in the religious affairs of the Sikhs under any circumstances and any action which appears, to the Sikhs of the world, to be such an interference, shall be considered null and void.

- On March 19, 1999, WSC-AR issued a press release condemning the attempted interference of the Punjab government in the religious affairs of the Sikhs. The WSC-AR declared that it did not recognize any decisions taken by these government agents. The press release asserted that WSC-AR strongly believes that Sikhs should manage their own affairs themselves and the government should have no control over them. The Sikhs of the world were called upon to devise a system of selecting the Jathedar

of Siri Akal Takhat Sahib. The WSC-AR requested Sikhs all over the world to continue recognizing Singh Sahib Bhai Ranjit Singh as Jathedar of Siri Akal Takhat Sahib.

- A meeting of WSC-AR was held on September 18, 1999 at Riverside Gurdwara Sahib in California. The meeting was attended by nine regional committee members, representatives of nine member institutions of WSC-AR, nine non-member institutions, and several guests. The various committees of WSC-AR were set up. These include Education, Interfaith, Religious and Spiritual, Legal Affairs, and Social and Cultural committees.
- Provided assistance for several Kirpaan related cases including those of Sardar Gurbachan Singh Bhatia of Cleveland, Sardar Mukhtiar Singh of Michigan and Sardar Jaswinder Singh of California.
- Provided information to US Department of Justice on 3/5/99 about the role and requirements of a Sevadar in a Gurdwara.

### Cleveland Kirpaan Case Resolved

Under intense pressure from the Sikh community and its supporters across US, the Mentor City Prosecutor on 12/6/99 withdrew the concealed

weapon charge against a Sikh Granthi of Cleveland, Ohio.

Sardar Gurbachan Singh Bhatia, a 69-year old Sikh, was handcuffed and taken to the police station by the Mentor City police on 9/3/99 for carrying a six-inch Kirpaan. His Kirpaan was confiscated and he was charged with carrying a concealed weapon. Several Sikh organizations including the World Sikh Council – America Region successfully defended the charges against Sardar Bhatia. The US Ambassador to India and former Governor of Ohio, Richard F. Celeste, wrote a letter to the Mayor of Mentor: “Sheathed Kirpaans are worn under the clothing of many Sikhs, not with any criminal intent, but rather as a reminder of Sikhism’s resistance to injustice and oppression.” Honorable Edolphus Towns, a member of the US House of Representatives, also appealed for the dismissal of the case through his 9/23/99 remarks published in the Congressional Record of the 106<sup>th</sup> US Congress.

On 12/6/99 the city prosecutor dropped the concealed weapon charges. The prosecutor said that the patrolmen were unaware that the Kirpaan was a religious symbol, but rather viewed it as a concealed weapon. However, many of the Sikhs who went to the Mentor Municipal Court on 12/6/99, to show support for Sardar Bhatia, were required to leave their unconcealed Kirpaans with the court bailiff before entering the courtroom. This act of the court has been condemned by the Sikh community. A press release was issued by WSC-AR on 12/7/00 informing the media of the Sikh position with regard to the Cleveland Kirpaan case.

The 1<sup>st</sup> District Ohio Court of Appeals overturned a similar municipal court conviction of Sardar Harjinder Singh of Cincinnati for carrying a concealed weapon in 1996.

The Sikh community in Ohio is expected to lobby for an exemption to the Kirpaan from the concealed weapon law in the state. A move of this kind will join legislatures in other

states and further the goal of the Sikh community towards establishing this exemption across the entire United States. (Cleveland Plain Dealer, 9/17/99, 12/6/99, 12/7/99; AP, 12/7/99; Akron Beacon Journal, 9/1/99; Detroit News, 9/23/99, Toledo Blade, 10/3/99; WSC-AR Press Release, 12/7/99; Letter from Council of Khalistan to Gurdwara Presidents, 12/9/99)

#### **US Sikhs Condemn Inaccurate Portrayal of Hijackers as Sikhs**

The Sikh community across the US reacted swiftly and strongly in condemning the December 24, 1999 hijacking of an Indian Airlines flight in South Asia and the inaccurate media portrayal of the hijackers as Sikhs. The media sources that incorrectly published the hijackers to be Sikhs included New York Times, Associated Press, Agence France Presse, Deutsche Presse-Agentur, Columbus Dispatch, Miami Herald, Plain Dealer, and Washington Post. Letters to the Editor from concerned Sikhs were published by several US newspapers including:

- Surendra Singh, Arlington, Washington Post, 1/1/00
- Nevdeep Singh Gill, Wooster, Plain Dealer, 1/1/00
- Tarunjit Singh Butalia, Sikh Educational and Religious Foundation, Columbus Dispatch, 1/5/00
- Raminder Singh Dhadli, Detroit Free Press, 1/5/00
- Sangeta Kaur, Amherst, Buffalo News, 1/5/00
- Navreet Kaur Basati, Elmhurst, Chicago-Sun Times, 1/6/00

The Sikh Mediawatch and Resource Task Force (SMART) wrote a letter to the editor of the New York Times and the newspaper published a correction on 12/28/99 that it had misstated the ethnicity of the hijackers and omitted attribution for the description. The Arizona Republic also published a correction on 12/28/99. A news article published in Rediff (12/28/00) asserted that due to the mistaken identity of the hijackers, the reputation of Sikhs was hijacked.

Singh Sahib Bhai Ranjit Singh,

Jathedar of Siri Akal Takhat, condemned the hijacking as sad and unfortunate but held the Indian government’s incompetence responsible for it. (Tribune, 1/5/00)

#### **Sikh Participation in US Census is Important**

WSC-AR urges the Sikh community across the entire United States to participate enthusiastically in the US Census 2000 currently underway. WSC-AR calls upon the leadership of local Gurdwaras to:

- obtain census forms and distribute them to the sangat;
- arrange for census bureau personnel to visit the Gurdwara Sahib to assist the sangat in filling out the forms. In addition, fellow Sikhs fluent in English should assist Sikhs not conversant with English in filling the forms correctly.

WSC-AR also appeals to all Sikhs in the United States to list their race as **SIKH** under the *Other Asian* Category.

The Sikh Mediawatch and Resource Task (SMART) Force has been actively working for the last six months to encourage Sikhs in the US to participate in the census. SMART has collaborated with the National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium to print large sized posters about the census in Punjabi. These posters can be obtained by e-mailing a request to [info@sikhmediawatch.org](mailto:info@sikhmediawatch.org) or calling (301) 428-3593. In addition, flyers in Punjabi which elaborate exactly what will happen during the census, and give quick facts about the census can be downloaded from [www.apicensus.org](http://www.apicensus.org).

The US Department of Commerce’s Bureau of Census is conducting the national census. The census is used to count every person living in the US, citizen or non-citizen. The number of representatives each state has in the US Congress depends on the number of people living in the state. The census directly affects government decisions regarding public policy. In addition, the amount of government

money that local neighborhoods receive, for schools, employment services, housing, roads, services for elderly and children, depend on the census data.

Privacy of the person filling the census is protected by Title 13 of the US Code. The law ensures that the census information is only used for statistical purposes and that no unauthorized person can see the census form or find out what is in the form. No other government agency or court of law can see census forms filed by individuals. More information on the census can be obtained from <http://www.census.gov/dmd/www/2khome.htm>.

### **President Clinton to Visit India**

US President Bill Clinton will be traveling to India for a five-day official visit on 3/20/00 to hold wide-ranging discussions on a wide spectrum of issues and themes with Indian political leaders. On 12/17/00 President Clinton said that the US wants to be "more involved" in resolving the Kashmir dispute if Indian and Pakistan agree for such a mediation.

President Clinton may visit Harmandar Sahib in Amritsar. The WSC-AR wrote a letter to President Clinton on 2/24/00 requesting him to visit Harmandar Sahib and impress upon Indian political leaders to allow greater religious freedom for Sikhs in India. (Tribune, 2/2/00; 2/18/00; 2/21/00)

### **President Clinton Salutes Sikhs across US on Gurburab**

President Bill Clinton issued a written statement on 11/22/99 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.*

*As Americans, we can be proud of our diversity. People of different ethnicities, backgrounds, races, and beliefs have contributed to the*

*success of our nation, reflecting the profound truth that this rich diversity is one of our greatest strengths. The teachings of Guru Nanak, founder of Sikhism, echo this important ideal. Based on the principles of equality, charity, and humility, his message encourages us to face our challenge together in spirit of compassion, fellowship, and hope.*

*I am confident that we will be infinitely better, stronger country if our decisions are informed by, driven by, and advanced by people of faith, and I applaud the followers of Sikhism for your efforts to promote spiritual growth and devotion to service. As you gather to celebrate the life and teachings of Guru Nanak and to reaffirm your commitment to the values that guide you, I commend you for striving to create a society united in peace and mutual understanding.*

*Hillary joins me in extending best wishes for a meaningful observance.*

### **Domino's Drops Beard Ban**

With effect from January 2000, Domino's Pizza Inc. changed its policy forbidding employees from wearing beards as a part of a settlement with a Sikh who had sued the company. Sardar Prabhjot Singh, a resident of Catonsville, Maryland, had sued the pizza company in 1988 claiming that the franchise refused to hire him as a manager trainee in Baltimore because he would not shave his beard. The settlement included a payment of \$5,000 for legal fees and \$5,000 the company was ordered to pay Sardar Kohli by a Maryland court. Kohli remarked, "I am really happy. My contention was you cannot discriminate against a competent person based on religion." The new policy allows employees with bona fide religious beliefs to wear a net or other beard restraint acceptable to the company. However, Pizza Hut, America's number one pizza chain, has long permitted its employees to wear beards. (Associated Press, 1/4/00; Seattle Times, 1/4/00; Columbus Dispatch, 1/7/00;

Washington Post, 1/8/00; Observer, 1/9/00)

### **North Carolina Sikh Settles Discrimination Lawsuit**

Sardar Major Singh, a resident of Durham, North Carolina has reached a consent agreement with Weck Closure Systems. He was fired by a temp agency of the company in September 1997 for not trimming his beard. The United States Equal Opportunity Commission had filed a suit on his behalf against the company. The commission had determined that the company had violated parts of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex or national origin. The settlement includes a payment of \$23,000 by the company to the victim. In addition, under the settlement agreement, Weck will provide a training program to all of its management and supervisory employees, including those jointly employed by an employment agency, that will include an explanation of the requirements of the federal equal opportunity laws.

The victim had also filed a suit against the California based Adeco Employment Services, which had placed him at Weck. A separate settlement has been reached in that case.

Commenting on the settlement, Sardar Major Singh remarked, "I feel that my rights have been upheld. Employers now should know that we are good workers, but we cannot be forced to disobey God and cut our hair."

Dr. Daljit Singh Caberwal, President of the Sikh Gurdwara of North Carolina explained, "It was not about the money; it was about the basic right to practice our religion. Make no mistake about it. Our community will support individuals who have been discriminated against." The Sikh Gurdwara Sahib of North Carolina in Durham strongly supported the victim in both lawsuits. The Gurdwara Sahib is a member of WSC-AR. (The News and Observer, NC, 3/6/00)

### **New Book on Sant Bhindranwale**

The Sikh Educational and Religious Foundation, a member of WSC-AR, recently published a new book titled *Struggle for Justice: Speeches and Conversations of Sant Jarnail Singh Khalsa Bhindranwale* by Dr. Ranbir Singh Sandhu.

The Sant spoke only Punjabi and authentic material in English has been virtually non-existent. Following his death at the hands of the Indian army in 1984 and the ensuing religious and ethnic cleansing, people hurried to destroy photographs, literature, and recordings to avoid persecution. Through this culmination of fifteen years of painstaking research, the author has provided for a rare opportunity to meet and understand Sant Bhindranwale through his own words.

This 608 page book includes an introductory essay titled "Sant Jarnail Singh Khalsa Bhindranwale Mission and Martyrdom" and chronologically arranged English translations of forty-four speeches and three conversations of the Sant transcribed from several audio and videotapes.

This publication raises vital questions for the media and academia, who expect transparency from the state agencies and hold them accountable for their words and deeds. They might have to undertake a probing self-analysis and ask themselves, why did they accept the official media blitz of misinformation without verifying the sources and thus unwittingly becoming a party to distorting the truth?

The cost of hard bound copy is \$29.95 and the paperback edition is \$19.95 per copy (for mailing within US and Canada). To order a copy of the book, please send payment in US\$ to Sikh Educational and Religious Foundation (SERF), P.O. Box 1553, Dublin, Ohio, 43017, USA. Inquires for bulk orders or mailing to other countries can be e-mailed to [sandhu.2@osu.edu](mailto:sandhu.2@osu.edu).

### **Newspaper Highlights Census Campaign at Seattle Gurdwara**

The Seattle Post-Intelligence (2/21/00) showcased the visit of representatives of the US Census Bureau to the Renton Gurdwara Sahib to encourage members of the Sikh community to participate in the census. Dr. Gurmit Singh Aulakh, President of Council of Khalistan, who addressed the Sangat that day urged Sikhs to not only provide the census-takers with information but to make sure they put Khalistan as their nation of origin. Dr. Aulakh remarked, "We are not Indians. . . We are a separate nation. It is crucial for us – we all must be counted."

### **Human Rights Exhibit**

Khalsa Human Rights, a UK based Human Right Organization was scheduled to display an exhibition at El Sobrante Gurdwara Sahib on 2/27/00 on human rights abuses in India. The exhibition has already traveled to Canada, Germany, Belgium, Italy, France, Switzerland, Pakistan, and all over Britain. It contains pictures of brutality and thousands of innocents being tortured or killed by the Indian Government. More information on the human rights exhibit can be obtained by e-mailing Sardar Gurjeet Singh Samra at [gssamra@hotmail.com](mailto:gssamra@hotmail.com).

### **Sikh Network Meeting Scheduled**

The Sikh Network, a geographically distributed forum of Sikh youth, is organizing its annual administrative meeting in New York City on March 11 & 12, 2000. The Sikh Network's mission is to promote the spiritual and political growth of the Sikh nation through personal and collective development with a commitment to the Guru Granth and Guru Panth as manifested in the Sikh Rehat Maryada. More information of the event can be obtained from Sardar Harpreet Singh at [harpreet.singh@citicorp.com](mailto:harpreet.singh@citicorp.com).

### **Call for Article on Sikh Women**

The editor of a major encyclopedia on women and religion in North American to be published in 2003 is looking for someone who could write an article on women in the Sikh

tradition in North American context. More information can be obtained by e-mailing the Sikh American Heritage Organization at [SikhUsa@aol.com](mailto:SikhUsa@aol.com).

### **City Council Approves New Texas Gurdwara Sahib**

On 2/9/00, the Euless City Council near Dallas, Texas unanimously approved the conversion of an old bank building into a Gurdwara Sahib for the local Sikh community. Until now, local Sikhs either made a trip to one of Dallas County's three Sikh Gurdwaras – in Richardson, Garland, and Irving – or attended services at a Veterans of Foreign Wars hall in Fort Worth that has served as the congregation's meeting place. The local Sikh community was very pleased with the cooperation shown by the city council. The organizers of the Gurdwara Sahib emphasized the need to have a religious home to share, love, and learn from one another. Remarked a local Sikh leader, "The gift of life is a precious gift. We are not owner's of God's gifts. But we are basically the custodians of those gifts." (Arlington Morning News, 2/12/00)

### **Freemont Sikhs Help Homeless**

Hundreds of Sikhs of Fremont Gurdwara Sahib participated in a blanket collection drive for homeless persons in December 1999. About one thousand blankets were donated to homeless persons. Fremont Gurdwara Sahib is a member of WSC-AR. (AP, 12/20/99)

### **New Orleans Sikhs Donate Food Baskets**

The Sikh community of New Orleans partnered with St. Philip Community Center to provide Thanksgiving food baskets for 55 needy families. This service, as in past years, was done in honor of Parkash Divas of Siri Guru Nanak Sahib in November 1999. A letter of thanks by the St. Philip Community Center to the Sikh community was published in The Times-Picayune, 12/21/99.

### **Sikh Film Broadcast**

A 30-minute documentary film titled "Faith Focus" on the Sikh faith was aired on 2/5/00 on the PBS station in

Dallas, Texas. (Dallas Morning News, 2/5/00)

### **Sikh Relics Exhibited**

The San Jose Mercury News (2/29/00) reported on the exhibit of Sikh relics at the local Gurdwara Sahib on 2/27/00. The relics included a handwritten manuscript of Siri Guru Granth Sahib and a silver ceremonial whisk. The items are reported to belong to the family of Bhai Roopa of Punjab, India.

### **Sikh Youth Asserts Turban**

National Public Radio broadcast a program on 10/29/99 featuring several basket ball players. One of the participating basketball players was Sardar Horan Singh Cheena. Cheena elaborated that he played basketball wearing his turban. He remarked, "That's my religion. And part of the religion is a turban, because I have long hair, and so we wear a turban." (NPR, 10/2/99)

### **Nightclub Apologizes for No-Hats Rule**

The Country Club nightclub in New York issued an apology to Sardar Chetan Singh Rakieten, a 23-year old Sikh of Elbridge, New York, for barring him for entering the nightclub in July, 1999. Six years ago, he had won the right to wear the turban in high school soccer games from a national sports federation that creates and interprets rules for high-school sports. Rakieten considers turbans to be "signs of integrity, signs of compassion." (Post Standard, Syracuse, NY, 9/6/99)

### **Detention Under Secret Evidence**

The National Coalition to Protect Political Freedom reported that a Sikh is one of the eight immigrants known to be detained by the US Government under secret evidence laws. Sardar Harpal Singh, a 42-year old lawyer, came to the US in 1993 after being arrested and tortured by the Indian government for supporting the concept of an independent Sikh nation. He was arrested in November 1997 and federal agents said that he and his wife (Sardarni Rajvinder Kaur) were threats. An immigration judge found the government's

evidence lacking and ordered Harpal's deportation order withheld and granted asylum to his wife. The INS has appealed the case and Harpal is still in jail. The couple's 13-year old daughter is in India and cannot join her parents unless their cases are resolved. The other seven persons detained under secret evidence laws in the US belong to the Islamic faith. (St. Petersburg Times, 2/29/00)

### **Sikh Role Model Shot Dead in Gurdwara Sahib**

Sardar Ajmer Singh Mahli, a founder and the secretary of the El Sobrante Gurdwara Sahib was shot to death on 1/23/00 at the Gurdwara Sahib by Joga Sandher of Hayward, California. Another person, Sardar Gurmeera Singh was injured in the shooting. Malhi was a respected Sikh leader of the local community, a husband and father of three, head of the mathematics department at Oakland Skyline High School, and secretary of the Oakland Education Association. Sandher's request for addressing the Sangat was denied by Sardar Mahli earlier and he returned with a loaded rifle inside the Gurdwara Sahib at the end of closing prayers and fired several shots killing Sardar Malhi and injuring Gurmeera Singh. The assailant was wrestled to the ground by the Sangat and handed over to the police. He has been charged with suspicion of murder and assault with a deadly weapon. Joga Sandher was clean shaven and not a member of the Gurdwara Sahib. Published news reports have indicated that the Gurdwara Sahib officials believe that Malhi was the victim of a conspiracy linked to his ardent support for a separate Sikh nation.

Students and faculty at Skyline High School in Oakland were assisted by school counselors in coping with the sudden and tragic death of one of their favorite teachers. Several of Malhi's nearly 200 students, in five classes, wrote messages and letters to his family. The students considered Malhi to be a buddy, the ultimate compliment a teenager can bestow on an adult. They described him as a non-violent role model with a gift for defusing disagreements and as a

peacemaker who had both serious and humorous sides. He often struggled between being a friend to students and making them focus on learning. "He was the kind of guy who would get along with his class but then feel, this is getting too comfortable, now let's start working," said Jennifer Stovall, a junior in Malhi's advanced algebra trigonometry class. "I think he was more comfortable being friendly. And if he knew you were trying, he wouldn't fail you." An emotional memorial held at the school on 1/28/00. "In his teaching, in his work, in his prayers Mr. Malhi was a man of God," said senior Julia Gregoary, one of hundreds paying loving tribute to Malhi." (AP, 1/23/00, 1/24/00, 1/25/00, 2/11/00; ABC News, 1/24/00; San Francisco Chronicle, 1/2/400,1/25/00, 1/29/00, 2/11/00; Agence France Presse, 1/24/00; Contra Costa Times, 1/25/00, 1/26/00, 1/29/00, 2/11/00; San Diego Tribune, 1/25/00, 1/29/00)

### **Council of Khalistan**

The recent activities of Council of Khalistan include:

- Millennium message to the Sikh Nation that Guru Sahibs gave sovereignty to the Sikh Nation and calling for introspection, unity, and Chardhi Kala of the Panth. (1/18/00)
- A press release was issued on 1/6/00 in which Dr. Gurmit Singh Aulakh, President of Council of Khalistan welcomed the end of the Air India hijacking and blamed the Indian injustice and injury done to Kashmiri people as the source of the hijacking.
- The Council issued a press release on 1/13/00 asking the US government to declare India a terrorist state.
- The Council protested India's Republic Day on 1/26/00 by organizing a demonstration in front of the Indian Ambassador's residence.
- In response to published news reports of President Clinton's upcoming visit to India, Dr. Aulakh's letter to the Editor of Washington Times was published

on 2/7/00. The letter called on India to free thousands of Sikh political prisoners held in India.

- The Council of Khalistan issued a press release on 1/10/00 asking the People's Commission in Punjab to defy the illegal court order shutting down the commission and to keep investigating police crimes of Sikh torture and murder.
- A press release, issued by the Council on 2/10/00, called on Sikh leaders in Punjab to celebrate Sant Bhindranwale's ideals along with his birthday. The Council issued another press release on 2/14/00 thanking the Sikh leaders who spoke in support of Khalistan at the February 12 birthday celebrations of late Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale in Punjab.
- On 2/18/00 the Council issued a press release alleging that political parties in Punjab were illegally buying votes with liquor and poppy husk.
- The Council issued a press release on 2/24/00 asserting that the alleged dissolution of World Sikh Council by Giani Puran Singh showed that the Indian Government had complete control over Sikh institutions.

#### **Recent Activities on Capitol Hill**

- Honorable Edolphus Towns, Member of US House of Representatives addressed the House on 2/1/00 asking the US government to declare India a terrorist state. Representative Towns said: "India is one of the leading practitioners of terrorism in the world, but they get away with it by cloaking it under a mask of democracy. India practices terrorism internally against its minorities and externally against its neighbors."
- US House of Representatives member Honorable John T. Doolittle presented before the House on 2/2/00 the case of self-immolation by a Sikh youth in Lucknow due to police brutality.
- On 2/16/00, Honorable Edolphus Towns, Member of US House of

Representatives, addressed the House on denial of justice to a Sikh of the 1984 massacres.

#### **Interfaith Activities**

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

- The Interfaith Alliance of Iowa unveiled a "Framework of Civility for Political Candidates" on 1/6/00 asking presidential hopefuls for Iowa primaries to keep focused on issues and away from negative attacks. The Alliance includes local representatives from Christian (Protestant, Catholic), Mormon, Jewish, Islamic, Buddhist, Hindu, and Sikh faiths. (Associated Press, 1/7/00)
- Speakers from several faiths joined Bahai's in celebrating World Religion Day on 1/16/00 in Scottsdale, Arizona. Participating faiths included Islam, Judaism, Sikh, Christian, Buddhism, and Zoroastrianism.
- An inter-religious conference on aging and spirituality was held on 2/9/00 in Alhambra, California. The conference featured speakers from Catholic, Protestant, Sikh, Native American, and Jewish backgrounds to explore such issues as aging and poverty, illness, cultural differences in perception of the elderly, and how to transmit spiritual heritage to younger generations.
- Many people of faith all over the US celebrated New Year's eve by attending religious services on New Year's Eve. These included persons of various faiths including Sikhs, Protestants, Catholics, Buddhists, Quakers, and Jews. (AP, 1/1/00)
- An interfaith new year celebration titled "First Light" was organized on the city river front in Hartford, Connecticut on 1/1/00. Participating faiths included Christian, Jewish, Islamic, Sikh, Hindu, and Baha'i.
- The Washington Post (1/1/00) published an article on the role various religions of the world have played in sweeping political

and cultural change in the last thousand years. The article highlighted the fact that diverse faiths have fueled a search for meaning among humanity. The world Sikh population was estimated to be about 22 million (0.4% of world population).

- The Interfaith Association of Central Ohio held an interfaith forum in Columbus, Ohio on 11/7/99 on the role of various religions in promoting a just society. Sardar Ravinder Singh of Westerville, Ohio was the Sikh speaker. The Association also organized an interfaith human rights day observance on December 10 in front of Columbus City Hall. The Sikh Educational and Religious Foundation was a part of the event.
- Mayor Michael Coleman, the newly elected mayor of Columbus, Ohio, held an interfaith inaugural prayer breakfast before his swearing his ceremony on 12/30/99. Members of several faiths participated in the event. The Sikh Educational and Religious Foundation participated in the breakfast prayer service by offering the opening prayer at the event. (The Columbus Post, 12/6-12/99)

#### **US Report on Religious Freedom in India**

A report on religious freedom in countries of the world was submitted to the US Congress on 9/8/99. The congressional report criticized the decline in religious tolerance in India. The report made several pointed references to "a significant increase in attacks against Christians by Hindu extremist groups" and suggested that the BJP government in India was not doing enough to curtail the spread of violence against religious minorities. The report stated: "the Government reacted with statements criticizing the violence against Christians, but efforts to prevent such incidents from occurring and to prosecute those responsible at the state and local level were inadequate." (Indian Express, 9/10/99)

**WSC Recognizes Singh Sahib Bhai  
Ranjit Singh as Jathedar of Siri  
Akhal Takhat Sahib**

The World Sikh Council (WSC) has repeatedly made it clear that it completely rejects SGPC's illegal dismissal of Singh Sahib Bhai Ranjit Singh as Jathedar of Siri Akhal Takhat Sahib and does not recognize Giani Pura Singh as the legitimate Jathedar of Siri Akhal Takhat Sahib. The Council continues to recognize Singh Sahib Bhai Ranjit Singh as the Jathedar of Siri Akhal Takhat Sahib.

**WSC Regional Councils Are  
Independent**

On 2/23/00, the General Secretary of WSC, Major General Narinder Singh (Retired) announced that the regional councils of WSC were functioning as independent and autonomous wings of WSC. (Tribune, 2/24/00)

**Giani Pura Singh Attempts to  
Illegally Dissolve WSC Executive  
Committee & Regional Units**

On 2/23/00 the illegally appointed Jathedar of Siri Akhal Takhat Sahib, Giani Pura Singh, attempted to dissolve the existing executive committee of WSC and tried to illegally replace it with a new 12-member executive committee. In response to this development, Singh Sahib Bhai Ranjit Singh, the Jathedar of Siri Akhal Takhat Sahib, said that Giani Pura Singh had no locus standi to interfere in the affairs of the WSC as he was a "sarkari jathedar" and added, "I shall oppose this move tooth and nail. Let Giani Pura Singh dare summon me to Akhal Takhat" (Tribune, 1/24/00). Justice Kuldip Singh, President of WSC, has refused to serve on the new 12 member executive committee due to several reasons. Meanwhile, the WSC-Amritsar Region Chairman, Sardar Kulbir Singh said in a statement, "The WSC is working as per its approved constitution. Giani Pura Singh has not right or power to disband the council. He is clearly playing into the hands of the RSS and other anti-Sikh forces." (Tribune, 2/25/00)

On 3/1/00, the illegally appointed new executive committee of WSC presided over by Giani Pura Singh, attempted to abruptly and illegally dissolve all the zonal units of WSC (Tribune, 3/2/00). WSC has declared that it does not recognize the authority of Giani Pura Singh as Jathedar of Siri Akhal Takhat and hence will defy the illegal decisions made by him. Sardar Kulbir Singh Kaura, WSC Chairman for the Doaba, Majha, and Jammu Region, responded that according to the constitution of WSC, a registered body, nobody had the right to dissolve the organization" (Tribune, 3/3/00).

**WSC Strongly Rejects Directives of  
Giani Pura Singh**

The WSC has responded firmly to Giani Pura Singh's attempted and illegal orders dissolving the zonal units of WSC and replacing its Executive Committee with a new one. In a published news report in The Tribune (3/5/00), the Working General Secretary of WSC, Major-General Narinder Singh challenged the reported dissolution of the regional councils and the constitution of the new executive committee by Giani Pura Singh. In a letter faxed to Giani Pura Singh, he said, "We have come to know that regional branches of WSC have been superseded by you. This action on your part is not only against the law of the land but also against the Sikh tenets and Gurmaraada." The letter further stated that the suppression of the regional branches was against the Societies Registration Act of 1887 under which WSC had been registered. "For these reasons we do not accept your directive," the letter said.

**Major Policy Decisions Made at  
WSC Seminar**

A Sikh seminar organized by WSC-North-West Zone on 3/4/00 overwhelmingly endorsed a call to hold a "Sarbat Khalsa" on the historic occasion of next Vaisakhi in April 2000 to find ways and means to

restore the pristine glory of Siri Akhal Takhat Sahib.

A major resolution adopted at the Seminar rejected the appointment of Giani Pura Singh as Jathedar of Siri Akhal Takhat Sahib by the ruling Akali party, using political power.

The resolution charged Giani Pura Singh with trying to challenge the distinct identity of the Sikhs by opposing the Nanakshahi calendar. It alleged that Giani Pura Singh had hatched a conspiracy under the influence of "Brahminical forces and the RSS to create inferiority complex" in the Sikh community through his "arbitrary and dictatorial edicts", claiming that the Sikhs were descendants of Luv and Kush, the sons of Lord Rama.

Singh Sahib Bhai Ranjit Singh dared Giani Pura Singh to summon him to Siri Akhal Takhat Sahib in defiance of his ban. He urged the Sikhs to shed fear of Giani Pura Singh's edicts and directives. "When he could not do anything to SGPC President Jagir Kaur whom he had excommunicated, he will dare not act against any other Sikh," he said.

The seminar, in another resolution, endorsed the need for a separate calendar for the "Sikh quam" but added that controversy about some disputed dates should be resolved by Sikh scholars. Dubbing the opposition to the calendar by communal "Hinduvata" forces and the RSS as interference in the internal affairs of the Sikhs, the resolution called upon Sikhs to mobilize themselves against these forces. Singh Sahib Bhai Ranjit Singh, however, said the new calendar should be debated thoroughly and consensus arrived at before its implementation. He said when Giani Pura Singh himself could set up a seven-member and then an 11-member committee of Sikh experts to debate the calendar, he had no right to ban the seminar to discuss the issue. "I am not aware if the new

calendar is right or wrong. But when I received objections against it from Takhat Hazoor Sahib and the Sant Samaj, I referred the matter to Jathedar Tohra (then SGPC chief),” he said. The calendar controversy had led to differences between Bibi Jagir Kaur and Giani Puran Singh. Later, these differences snowballed, leading to her ex-communication from the Panth by Giani Puran Singh through a directive issued from Guna in Madhya Pardesh on 1/25/00.

The seminar warned that the “assault on Akal Takhat, genocide of Sikhs, demolition of the Babri mosque, ban on Islamic madarassas, arson in Christian churches, permission by Gujarat and Uttar Pardesh government to let their employees join the RSS, and the RSS interference in religious affairs of Sikhs” either in the garb of the BJP or the Congress could lead to a “civil war condition due to communal tension in the country.” It appealed to all justice-loving people in the country to oppose the activities of these communal forces.

The fourth and last resolution, passed on “Akal Takht maryada and Sikh situation”, expressed concern over “war-like atmosphere in South Asia.” It said expenditure of millions of dollars on producing atom and hydrogen bombs was “an act against humanity”. It condemned the government attempts to “suppress political movements in Jammu and Kashmir and elsewhere with force.”

The resolution appealed to US President Bill Clinton to focus his attention on “Sikh genocide” in the past 15 to 20 years so that his dream of peace in the South Asian region could be realized.

Others who addressed the seminar were Sardar Gurtej Singh, Punjab Human Rights Organization Chairman Sardar Ajit Singh Bains, and World Sikh Council Secretary General Sardar Narinder Singh. (Tribune, 3/5/00).

WSC-AR, in a written communication dated 3/15/00 to Singh Sahib Bhai Ranjit Singh,

suggested that he direct the World Sikh Council to hold a Sarbat Khalsa as a part of the International Sammelan proposed to be held at Amritsar in the third week of December, 2000.

### **Sikhs Oppose All India Gurdwara Legislation**

The Sikh community in India has virtually rejected with unanimity the proposed All India Sikh Gurdwara Legislation. The World Sikh Council organized an international seminar at India International Center in New Delhi on 12/5-6/99 to discuss the response of Sikh organizations and scholars to an All India Gurdwara Legislative action. Dr. Ranbir Singh Sandhu, Secretary-General of WSC-AR attended the seminar and presented a paper on the interests and concerns of Sikhs living outside India. A copy of Dr. Sandhu’s presentation is attached.

The legislation had been forwarded in September, 1999 by Chief Justice (Retd.) Sardar Harbans Singh, Chief Commissioner, Gurdwara Elections, to the Joint Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India. Based on near unanimity at the international seminar, it was resolved that “the proposed All India Sikh Gurdwara Legislation was not in the interest of the Sikhs and as such was not acceptable.”

### **Sikhs Observe Birth Anniversary of Sant Jarnail Singh Khalsa Bhindranwale**

Representatives of many Sikh religious, political, and social welfare organizations, observed the 53<sup>rd</sup> birth anniversary of late Sant Jarnail Singh Khalsa Bhindranwale on 2/12/00 by organizing a conference at Fatehgarh Sahib. Addressing the meeting, Simranjit Singh Mann, Member of Parliament said that Sant Bhindranwale never preached violence, and unfortunately the Government of India infiltrated into the movement and began violence to teach a lesson to the Sikh community.

The meeting called for an immediate ban on RSS for its anti-Sikh and derogatory activities. At the meeting,

the demand for Khalistan, an independent Sikh Nation, was raised by Sardar Satwant Singh Nandpuri of the Khalsa Conference. Other participating Sikh organizations included Damdami Taksal, Punjab Human Rights Organization, All India Sikh Students Federation, and Sant Samaj. (Tribune, 2/8/00, 2/13/00; The Hindu, 2/8/00)

### **RSS Distorting Gurbani**

Several Sikh organizations in Punjab have accused the Rashtriya Swamyasewak Sangh (RSS) of distorting the Baani of Siri Guru Gobind Singh Sahib at its “shakhas” (camps). The Baani is reported to be recited by RSS organizers in rural areas to attract Sikhs. The RSS camps compare Guru Sahibs with Indian national heroes. Mr. Deena Nath, the secretary of the Ferozepore division of RSS admitted that Guru Gobind Singh Sahib was compared with Indian national heroes. In a published news report, Mr. Nath said, “By equating the Guru with other national figures, we only try to integrate the Punjabi spirit with the larger national mainstream.” Several Sikh organizations have demanded that RSS be banned in Punjab. (Tribune, 2/2/00, 2/13/00)

### **Sikhs Protest Hindi Movie Contents As Offensive**

Several Sikh organizations and scholars have protested certain scenes in a Hindi movie “Khoobsurat” as being derogatory towards the Sikh community. SGPC wrote a letter to India’s Minister of State for Information and Broadcasting arguing that, “The film mocks at the religion of the Sikh community. There is a strong sentiment among Sikhs, and the SGPC office has been flooded by letters, telegrams, and telephone calls protesting the movie.” SGPC asked that the objectionable portions of the movie be deleted from the film. (Tribune, 1/2/00)

### **Amritdhari Sikhs Refused Entry to Camp, Threatened with Murder**

The Spokesman (February 2000 issue) reported an incident near Jammu in which four Amritdhari Sikh youths of NCC from Poonch were denied entry

into a camp organized at Nagrota on the evening of 12/2/99 because they were wearing Kirpaans. The youths pleaded with the organizers but with no avail and they were told by the camp officials to leave the site or they would be shot dead in an encounter. The youths trekked 15 miles to reach Jammu at midnight and narrated their tale to the Sikh residents. The local media reported on the incident but no action has been taken against the errant officials. The youths, Arvinder Singh, Prithipal Singh, Parvinder Singh, and Bhupinder Singh, tried to meet the Director of NCC to voice their protest, but the Director refused to meet them.

### **Christians Seek Assistance of Akal Takhat**

The Tribune (2/17/00) reported that a leading forum of Christians in Punjab has appealed to Siri Akal Takhat Sahib to summon Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal to instruct him on the safety of Christians in the state. The group alleged that over 30 Christian congregations in Punjab have been disrupted by hooligans and 28 copies of the bible have been burnt in the past three years in the state, but no action was taken by the authorities despite state wide protests. This appeal of the Christian group is reported to be the first time in recent history that a non-Sikh community has sought the intervention of Siri Akal Takhat Sahib. (Tribune, 2/17/00, 2/27/00)

### **Sikhs Being Defamed in Murder of Christian Missionary**

The Indian media has been publishing the name of the recently arrested killer of Australian Christian missionary Graham Stuart Staines, as Dara Singh, portraying that the arrested person is a Sikh. The real name of the accused is Rabinder Kumar Paul and he is a Hindu by faith. Staines and his two sons Philip (10 years) and Timothy (7 years) were burnt alive in their vehicle on the night of 1/22/99 in front of a church in Manoharpur in Keonjhar district by a Hindu mob led by the accused. (Tribune, 2/2/00, 2/9/00)

### **Sikh Museum At Anandpur Sahib**

The Khalsa Heritage Complex, being set up by the Anandpur Sahib Foundation, will involve several major thrust areas which include a Sikh art gallery, Sikh library, traditional museum, Guru Granth and Gurdwara institutions, and Kirtaan in Sikh tradition. The core group of scholars have approved that "Gurdwara" will be given prominent representation while projecting the Sikh tradition. (Tribune, 1/30/00)

### **Minority Commission to Compile Book on Sikh Artifacts**

Sardar Tarlochan Singh, Vice-Chairman of Minority Commission of India announced on 2/27/00 at Patiala that the commission will compile a book on rare Sikh artifacts. (Tribune, 2/28/00)

### **No Sikh Representative on Constitution Review Committee**

The recently appointed Indian Constitution Review Committee does not have a Sikh representative. Retired Justice (retired) R.S. Sarkaria has been incorporated as a constitutional expert but it is doubtful that he understands adequately the political requirements of Sikhs in India. Justice Sarkaria is not a representative of the Sikh community on the review committee

### **Miri Piri Academy Highlighted**

The Miri Piri Academy near Amritsar was highlighted in the Boston Globe (2/13/00) as a faith-based school for obtaining suitable education of western Sikh children. The school was opened in 1997 under the direction of Sardar Harbhajan Singh Yogi.

### **Peoples Commission Restrained by High Court**

The Punjab and Haryana High Court on 12/20/99 restrained the Peoples Commission and the interveners from holding public sittings and making investigations into the cases which have already been decided or were pending before courts.

The Court further restrained the Commission from issuing summons to the officers of the government and other agencies to appear before the

commission for purposes of the "so-called investigations and inquiry into complaints of alleged violation of human rights allegedly committed by the functionaries of the state."

The Court's decision does not prevent the Commission from "collecting information regarding violation of human rights, if any, by the state and its agencies and approach the court or reference of such cases to the state Human Rights Commission and the National Human Rights Commission for appropriate consideration."

The Court determined that the commission is attempting to set up a parallel system of adjudication, and observed that "it is difficult to comprehend how a private body can be allowed to do so and usurp judicial powers. Apart from this, the charter framed by the interveners includes a clause which empowers the Commission to reopen the decided cases which cannot be done without following the procedure of law."

"In our opinion neither any functionary of the state nor any private individual can have the right to arrogate to itself the power to adjudicate and decide the dispute except when permitted by the law enacted by Parliament or state legislature. Power, if upheld, would amount to attack on the established system, said the judges.

Commenting on the citizens' right to freedom of speech as advocated on behalf of the commission, the court held that he had the right to receive and disseminate information.

Permitting the respondent to raise issues like abductions and murder of innocent persons, the Court made it clear that the heinous offence of abduction and murder would not be covered under the law of limitation under the Criminal Procedure Code and can be taken cognizance by the courts without any limitation. (Tribune, 12/21/99)

### **Interim Report of CCDIP**

The Committee for Coordination on Disappearances in Punjab has compiled and published an interim report with regard to the enforced disappearances, arbitrary executions, and secret cremations of Sikhs in Punjab by police, paramilitary, and armed forces owing allegiance to the Government of India.

The report includes a survey of 838 incident report forms. It also includes ten examples of victimization under seven categories. The survey shows that in 222 out of 838 surveyed incidents, one or more members of the families died due to trauma of the incident. The report also includes further evidence of secret cremations of Sikh youths labeled as unidentified at crematoriums all over Punjab. The report includes a list and description of 934 unidentified cremated bodies. The nearly 125 writ petitions of habeas corpus, filed on behalf of those who disappeared after police abductions, being analyzed by CCDIP are not included in the interim report. The report also does not include 523 complaints of gross human rights violations which CCDIP received for submission to the Peoples Commission. (Press Release Issued by CCDIP, 7/22/99; Tribune, 6/23/99)

### **Update on Cases of November 1984 Massacre of Sikhs**

- Two senior Congress (I) politicians accused of organizing the killings of hundreds of Sikhs in Delhi in November 1984 were acquitted by Indian courts. Mr. Jagdish Tytler was acquitted by a Delhi court on 8/9/99, which accepted the Central Bureau of Investigation's (CBI's) report that there was no evidence of his involvement in the massacre of Sikhs. Sajjan Kumar, former Member of Parliament from outer Delhi, was acquitted on 1/6/00 of the murder of a Delhi Sikh. The acquittal of the two senior politicians of that time, indicates the inability of the Indian judicial system to deliver justice to the over 3,000 Sikhs burnt and killed by mobs in Delhi, the capital of

India, in the first week of November, 1984. (The Hindu, 8/10/99, 1/7/00)

- The Indian Supreme Court commuted the death sentence of Kishori Lal, Manhor Lal, and Jasdish Lal on 12/17/99. All three of them had earlier been convicted and given death penalty for brutally burning and killing Sikhs alive in November 1984. Kishori Lal, also known as the "Butcher of Trilokpuri" is reported to have killed over 100 Sikh men with his meat chopping knife. However, the Indian Supreme Court declared that the cases of all the three men did not fall into the rarest of the rare category. In another case decided on 1/5/00, the Supreme Court commuted the death sentence of Kishori Lal on the same grounds in a murder case involving three Sikh youths, although the convict had been convicted of the brutal and merciless killing of the three youths who had been dragged out of their homes and hacked to death in the presence of family members in 1984 in Delhi. It is indeed no surprise that many Sikhs have lost faith in the Indian judicial system for not obtaining justice for the Sikh victims of 1984. (The Statesman, 12/17/99, 1/5/00; Agence France Presse, 1/6/00; The Hindu, 1/6/00)
- The Indian Government has decided to appoint a new one-man judicial commission to probe into the 1984 Sikh massacres. The Union Cabinet approved on 1/12/00 the setting up of a commission of Inquiry to be headed by a retired judge of the Supreme Court of India. The commission will be given a six-month maximum time to complete its investigations. Mr. Pramod Mahajan, Union Minister for Parliamentary Affairs, said, that the earlier Ranganath Mishra Commission and two other sub-committees, which went into the riots did not do a thorough job. The Chief Justice of India has been entrusted with the task of nominating a suitable retired

judge of the Supreme Court to head the commission, he added. Mr. Mahajan said the earlier commission of inquiry was more of an "eyewash" and that is why the government had decided to institute another inquiry commission.

The earlier Commission named only 147 police officials for dereliction of duty, out of which 42 had either died or retired from service. Of the 105 police officials against whom prosecution was launched, 77 were exonerated and 14 were punished and one official warned. Thirteen officials were still under prosecution, said Mr. Mahajan. Similarly, of the 707 criminal cases registered, prosecution had been launched only in 374 cases and 322 were sent as untraced or cancelled. Out of the 374 persons put to trial, 320 were acquitted and only 30 were prosecuted. Twenty persons were still under trial.

The Hindu (1/21/00) published an editorial in response to the announcement for the appointment of a new commission of inquiry. The editorial argued: "The cause of justice is better if only the state takes the business of prosecuting the guilty with seriousness it deserves and does not engage in futile diversions like another judicial inquiry at this point in time." (Agence France Presse, 1/12/00; AP Worldstream, 1/12/00; Tribune, 1/13/00; The Hindu, 1/13/00, 1/21/00; United Press International, 1/13/00)

### **Bizarre Contract Killing of Sikh by Police Comes to Light**

The Tribune (2/12/00) reported that Sardar Bahadur Singh, a resident of Khatra village in Ludhiana district, was killed by two serving constables of the Jaitu police station for a contract killing in exchange for Rs. 1.80 lakh. The victim was reported to have been forcibly picked up from Khatra village on 6/19/99 in a Tata Sumo vehicle and brought to

Kotkapura. There the victim was strangled and his dead body was thrown into the canal. To mislead the family of the victim, the police officials spread a rumor that the victim had been taken into police custody by the Uttar Pradesh police. The two cops have been absent from duty ever since the matter came to light.

### **Police Cats Injure, Attempt to Loot Sikh**

Three police Cats or paid informants of Punjab police are reported (Tribune, 1/7/00) to have attempted to rob Sardar Harcharan Singh, a Sikh businessman, in the Model Town area of Ludhiana on 2/3/00. The police cats fired at the victim and fled. The local residents maintain that the three police cats were arrested by the police, while the police argue that the three robbers fled and were not arrested. The Tribune newspaper report identified two of the three police cats as:

- Avtar Singh Tari, a resident of Khandewal village in Patiala, and an alleged Cat of a Punjab police DIG.
- Avtar Singh Tari, a resident of Ludhiana and an alleged Cat of an SP of Punjab police.

### **Police Lawlessness Against Sikhs Continues in Punjab**

➤ Two Sikh youths, Sardar Despal Singh (22 years) and Gurmit Singh (23 years) were killed in a firing by Punjab police at Jethuke village near Bathinda on 1/31/00. The local villagers have demanded an inquiry into the incident. They alleged that the police made false statements that residents of the village opened fire on them. They challenged that all licensed weapons of the villagers could be checked in a laboratory, which would make the issue clear. Bhai Jasbir Singh, the Granthi of the village Gurdwara Sahib has alleged that recitation of Gurbani and Kirtan in the village was forcibly stopped by Punjab police officials for two days and some items of the Gurdwara Sahib were forcibly

taken away by police. The relatives of the dead Sikhs youths have alleged that subsequent to the shootings, they have been brutally tortured by the police. The residents also claimed that a number of their neighbors were missing as they had allegedly been taken into police custody. Interestingly, the firing orders for the shooting are missing. A magisterial inquiry has been ordered into the firing. The Association for Democratic Rights has held the Punjab police guilty of illegally firing and killing the two Sikh youths. The village was virtually converted into a police cantonment to prevent residents from attending the Bhog ceremony of the murdered youth. (Tribune, 2/2/00, 2/3/00, 2/5/00, 2/10/00, 2/22/00)

- Sardar Mandeep Singh, a 27-year old Sikh youth of Lucknow, who had been harassed by the local police without specifying any charges for more than a year, committed suicide on 1/10/00 in front of the Uttar Pradesh Assembly building by setting himself on fire. The victims mother, Sardarni Manpreet Kaur has accused the police of forcing her son to commit suicide. "Fed up with police harassment, my son committed suicide," she said. At the time of the suicide, the dead youth's brother, Sardar Yashpal Singh was in the illegal custody the local police. The Uttar Pradesh government has ordered a magisterial inquiry into the suicide. (Hindustan Times, 1/11/00; Tribune, 1/12/00)
- Sardar Gurdev Singh, a resident of Ughi village near Jalandhar, died in police custody of Nakodar police station on 1/4/00. Village residents alleged that the Sikh man was tortured to death by the police. They surrounded the police station, broke open the door of the station and carried out the body of the Sikh victim to the Nakodar Civil Hospital for a post mortem that was conducted on 1/8/00. (Tribune, 1/9/00)

- Sardar Balbir Singh and Sardar Tarsem Singh of Krishna Nagar in Chheharta in Amritsar are alleged to have been tortured by Punjab police officials in the last few week of December. The two had been arrested and tortured several times since 1991 when a relative complained to police that they were in possession of an AK-47. (Tribune, 1/4/00)
- The Director-General of Punjab Police has alleged that 70 militants (mainly Sikhs) have been arrested by the Punjab police and a lot of arms and ammunition has been recovered. (Tribune, 1/1/00)
- Four Sikh men were arrested in Ahmedabad by the city's crime branch for being alleged members of Babbar Khalsa International. Those arrested include Sarabjit Singh (33 years), Sajan Singh (35 years), Lakhvinder Singh (29 years), and Paramjit Singh (35 years). (Tribune, 1/21/00)
- Sardar Kabul Singh, a resident of village Chakla Baksh, was abducted by uniformed Punjab police officials from his village home on 1/20/00 at 6 AM. On 1/25/00, the Director General of Punjab Police claimed to have arrested two Babbar Khalsa International militants who had just returned from Pakistan with explosives and arms. The Khalra Mission Commission claimed that the police's assertion that Kabul Singh was a top terrorist was wrong and he was arrested from his village house and not the Batala Sadar Bazaar as claimed by Punjab police. The human rights organization has sent a written investigative report to the government. The report says, "such ham-handed steps may further alienate the Sikh population on the Indo-Pakistan border." Copies of the report were sent to Supreme Court of India, Punjab and Haryana High Court, Chief Minister of Punjab, Amnesty International, and Punjab Human Rights Commission. (Tribune, 2/14/00)
- About 12 policemen in plain clothes raided the home of Sardar

Harbhajan Singh on the night of 2/17/00 at village Kakowal near Ludhiana. The drunk police officials allegedly abused the victim's mother and manhandled his pregnant wife. The women raised an alarm and the village neighbours rushed to their house. The villagers overpowered the police personnel and taking them for dacoits, thrashed them and detained them. The local DSP and SHO rushed to the scene to rescue the police officials. (Tribune, 2/19/00)

➤ A 16-year old Sikh girl was raped on 1/22-23/00 by Mr. Ashok Puri, DSP Jagraon, at his residence. The victim's mother and step-father, both alleged drug addicts, took the girl forcibly to the DSP and waited outside while the police official raped the minor. The elder brother of the Sikh girl, Sardar Gurbachan Singh, a Raagi, said in voice choked with emotions, "When the entire episode occurred I was away to perform Kirtaan. Since a long time, I have been aware of my mother's misdeeds and had also warned my sister to be on guard. Our step-father Darshan Singh is a drug addict and had tried to molest my sister. Since I came between my sister and our parents, they planned everything

for when I was away." The DSP has been suspended. (Tribune, 2/19/00, 2/22/00)

➤ Sardar Harjit Singh, a resident of village Jhoke Harihar near Ferozepore is alleged to have been picked up from his home on 2/13/00 by an ASI and Home Guard and has since alleged to have disappeared from police custody. Earlier, Ferozepore police officials were reported to have shaved the head and beard of the Harjit during an illegal detention and that case is pending with the Punjab Human Rights Commission. (Tribune, 2/23/00)

#### **Witness in Khalra Murder Case Being Harassed**

The Khalra Mission Commission has alleged that a Special Police Official who is an important eye-witness in the police assassination of human rights activist Sardar Jaswant Singh Khalra is being harassed by Punjab police. The eyewitness to the murder has not been paid salary for the past many months. Earlier, Rajiv Singh, another eyewitness in the case had been dragged by police. (Tribune, 2/28/00)

#### **House of Sikh Freedom Fighter Now A Dera for Radha Soamis**

The Tribune (1/19/00) reported that the residence of Sardar Nishan Singh

Makhu, a resident of Makhu, has been turned into a Radha Soami center of worship. The Sikh freedom fighter was killed by Punjab police in early 1990 in a faked encounter and the police took over his house. The house was converted to a police post at which young Sikh boys were tortured and killed in illegal police custody. About four years ago, the police vacated the house and it was converted into a Radha Soami worship center.

#### **Punjab Government to Make Liquor Cheaper**

A published news report in the Tribune (1/8/00) indicated that the Punjab government is planning to slash the prices of liquor in the state from the next financial year. The objective of the liquor price reduction is to reduce the smuggling of liquor from other states into Punjab. This will also result in increased consumption of alcohol in Punjab, a Sikh majority state. The Sikh faith prohibits the use of alcohol or other intoxicants by its adherents. The current annual revenue generated by the Punjab Government from auction of liquor vendor licenses is about Rs. 1,300 crore.

## **NEWS FROM OTHER PARTS OF THE WORLD**

### **Parliament of World Religions**

About 4,000 representatives from many diverse faith traditions inaugurated the World Parliament of Religions in Cape Town, South Africa on 12/1/99. The opening day coincided with World AIDS Day and the focus of the event was the AIDS plight. Sixteen panels of the 40,000-panel AIDS quilt were displayed in an adjoining park. The following day, the delegates marched 1.3 miles to District Six, a vibrant mixed-race area which was bulldozed by the former white minority government to make place for a white community. The leaders of all faiths blessed the soil and vowed that such injustices would not be allowed to happen again. The

parliament meeting has traditionally drawn members of traditional African religions, Bahai's, Buddhists, Christians, Confucianists, Jains, Jews, Mormons, Muslims, Native Americans, Sikhs, Taoists, Unitarians, and Zoroastrians from over 70 countries. (AP Worldstream, 12/1/99; Agence France Presse, 12/1/99)

### **Canadian Boxer Wins Case Over Beard**

Sardar Pardeep Singh Nagra, a 29-year Toronto native, won a court battle on 1/12/00 against the Canadian Amateur Boxing Association (CABA), which kept him from a national event in December

because he refused to shave his beard. The Ontario Supreme Court ruled that the CABA's regulations on facial hair violated the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The Canadian association has agreed to let Sardar Nagra cover his beard with a net during the boxing matches. But Nagra, who hopes to qualify this year for the 2000 Olympic games, added that "the battle is not really over" since the International Amateur Boxing Association also prohibits boxers from wearing beards in international competitions such as the 2000 Olympic Games. Nagra said that even if he does not qualify for the Olympic games, he will still fight to change the international rules.

Several Canadian coaches are upset at the attention received by this case in the media. The Ottawa Citizen (1/22/00) quoted one coach as saying, "Why don't you do a story on a Canadian Champ instead of a guy with a beard?" (Toronto Sun, 1/13/00, 1/18/00, 1/19/00; UPI, 1/13/00; St. Petersburg Times, 1/15/00; Christian Science Monitor, 1/20/00; Ottawa Citizen, 1/22/00)

### **Skinheads Sentenced for Granthi's Murder**

Five skinheads with neo-Nazi ties were sentenced to prison terms ranging from 12 to 15 years for the brutal and vicious killing of Sardar Nirmal Singh Gill, a 65-year old Granthi of Surrey, Canada. The provincial judge ruled on 1/16/99 that the killing was racially motivated, calling the incident repugnant and described the killers as moronic braggars. The judge wrote that Gill died "simply because he was Indo-Canadian. He was attacked because he was different from the accused. It is that simple." The five convicts had pleaded guilty to manslaughter charges in January 1998. Sardar Gill was brutally killed in the parking lot of the Gurdwara Sahib in the early hours of 1/4/98 by the five skinheads. (Toronto Star, 9/28/99; CBC TV, 11/16/99; CTV News, 1/16/99; Columbus Dispatch, 11/17/99)

### **Canadian Sikhs Sue Indian Govt. for Libel & Defamation**

Nineteen Canadian Sikh organizations and individuals have jointly sued the Indian Government and India's Counsel General in Toronto (Mr. C.M. Bhandari) in Ontario Superior Court, seeking about CAN\$120 million for libel, slander, and defamation. The petitioners include Shiromani Sikh Sangat, Shiromani Sikh Society, Shiromani Sikh Sangat (Toronto), and the Ontario Khalsa Darbar. The petitioners have alleged that their names were printed without their authorization in a list of organizations and individuals said to be participating in Indian government's celebrations to commemorate India's Independence Day. The petitioners claim that at no time did they

participate or support the celebrations, adding that some of them had in fact publicly protested the festivities. The petition says, "Many Sikh Canadians, particularly those who are constituents of the plaintiff organizations, would be extremely offended and troubled if they believed the plaintiffs were participating in the festival and presentation organized by India." The petition further alleged that their names had been included in the pamphlet titled *Panorama India: Towards the New Millennium* "deliberately by the defendants ... for the very purpose of creating confusion and concern in the Sikh Canadian community and in particular to undermine the plaintiffs in the minds of their constituents, friends, and community." (India West, 1/28/00)

### **Sikh Students Assaulted in Canada**

Six students face assault charges in connection with what the local Sikh community claims was a racially motivated attack on several Sikh students outside the Oakville-Trafalgar Secondary School on 2/15/00. The incident began when two Sikh students were hit with snowballs as they left the school at the end of the day. The attack escalated into racial slurs, punches, and kicks. One male and female student came to the rescue of the Sikh students and the female was also attacked. One of the four Sikh students assaulted suffered a fractured skull. One of the Sikh students had his turban torn off and thrown into a garbage pail. The Oakville Sikh Cultural Association contends that the attack was racially motivated. (Toronto Star, 2/28/00, 2/29/00)

### **Air India Bombing Investigations**

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) is looking into possible obstruction of justice by a former agent of Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS), who is alleged to have destroyed tapes relating to the 1985 bombing of Air India Flight 182. The tapes are alleged to have contained some 150 hours of taped interviews conducted about 14 years ago with two informants from the Vancouver Sikh community. The CSIS agents were

asked to turn over their sources to the RCMP, and the agent, fearing for sources who did not want to be identified or asked to appear in court, destroyed the tapes. (AP, 1/26/00; Agence France Presse, 1/26/00; Toronto Star, 1/27/00; Ottawa Citizen, 1/27/00; The Gazette, 1/27/00;

### **Montreal Sikhs Launch Human Rights Fund**

Sardar Inderpal Singh, a Montreal Sikh engineer, businessman, and pillar of the Gurdwara Sahib Quebec, has launched an impressive campaign to set up a foundation to promote respect for and adherence to human rights. The new foundation would put a high priority on intervening anywhere in the world where human rights of Sikhs or anyone else are threatened. The fund raising efforts include gold medallions commissioned by the Royal Canadian Mint. The \$50 profit of each medallion will be used for benevolent works. An international marketing effort is being organized in Canada, USA, Europe, India, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, and elsewhere. The profits of the fundraising efforts are expected to be about \$1 million. Montreal Sikhs are expected to be a bare majority on the international board of a trust to administer the funds. (The Gazette (Montreal), 12/11/99)

### **Updates on Recent Canadian Deportation Cases**

- Heavily armed Canadian police and immigration officials are reported to have broken down the door of a Malton Sikh family, handcuffed the occupants, and arrested Sardar Harjinder Singh in the middle of the midnight on 2/10/00, although a day before he had voluntarily shown up to meet immigration officials to arrange for his deportation to India. Following the raid, the Citizenship and Immigration Canada spokesperson would not disclose to the media why Harjinder was being deported or comment on how he was arrested. The victim's family has filed an

appeal to the deportation order, but a Canadian immigration official said that she could find no record of it. Harjinder's relatives fear that if deported to India, Harjinder will be tortured or killed by Indian security forces for expressing support for an independent Sikh nation. A relative of Harjinder said, "This is what you expect of the police in India. They beat you first and talk later. But now I realize that the Canadian police are also becoming like that." (Toronto Star, 2/15/00; Rediff on the Net, 2/18/00)

- Sardar Parminder Singh Saini, who was pardoned for a hijacking conviction has been allowed to stay in Canada by the Federal Court on 2/17/00. The court quashed the immigration department's deportation order against Parminder. He is currently studying international relations at Ontario University. (Toronto Star, 2/23/00, 2/24/00; Ottawa Citizen, 2/24/00)
- Sardar Iqbal Singh, an alleged member of Babbar Khalsa, was quietly removed from Canada to Belize on 1/6/00 after losing a court battle to avoid deportation. This was the first deportation under Canada's anti-terrorism law since 1998. Iqbal Singh claimed that he had never been involved in violence and did not belong to any extremist groups. (Ottawa Citizen, 1/23/00)

### **Multi-faith Canadian Rally for School Funding**

About 1,500 parents from across the Toronto area packed the Hollywood Princess Conference Center on 2/5/00 to show their commitment to continuing to seek full funding of their religious schools in compliance with a United Nations ruling. A recent United Nations Human Rights Committee ruled Ontario's education funding policy to be discriminatory because it only funds Roman Catholic religious schools and not those of other religious denominations. The rally was organized by Ontario Parents for Equality in Education

Funding, a multi-faith parents group representing Muslim, Sikh, Christian, and Jewish schools. The organization champions the role of denominational schools in Ontario and is particularly focused on working towards the extension of full educational funding of denominational schools on an equal basis. (Canada News Wire, 12/16/00, 1/14/00, 2/3/00, 2/5/00; Toronto Star, 1/14/00)

### **UK Faith Leaders Commit to Common Good**

Leaders of the Christian, Islamic, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Sikh, Jainism, Baha'i and Zoroastrianism faiths came together in Britain on 1/3/00 to make a public interfaith commitment to "work together for the common good" in the Third Millennium. At the event, the leaders recited together: "In a world scarred by the evils of war, racism, poverty, injustice, and poverty, we offer a joint Act of Commitment." They committed themselves to "build a better society, grounded in values and ideals we share" and to work together "to help bring about a better world now and for generations to come." The event was hosted by the British Department for Culture, Media and Sports and was supported by the Inter Faith Network, a national organization with 86 member organizations representing nine faiths. (Daily Telegraph, 1/4/00; The Times - London, 1/4/00; M2 Presswire, 1/4/00)

### **Sikh Heads UK Racial Equality Commission**

The British Government has appointed Sardar Gurbux Singh as the chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality. Singh will be the first Asian to serve as the head of the racial equality commission. On his appointment, Singh remarked, "I'm not a soft touch. I'm somebody who is very much committed to racial equality. If I believe that the government's not doing what it should, then I will say so. In the first instance, my style is to say things in private rather than in public." He further added, "The majority of the public are not wholly committed to equality and fairness. They have to be

persuaded that racial discrimination cannot be accepted." (Guardian, 2/5/00; Daily Telegraph, 2/5/00)

### **British Census to Include Religious Affiliation**

For the first time since 1851, the British Government has decided to ask people to give their religion in its official 2001 census. The questions will ask: "What is your religion?" and people will be given the options: none, Christian (including Church of England, Catholic, Protestant, and all other Christian denominations), Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Jewish, any other religion. (Guardian, 1/11/00)

### **World's Most Multi-Lingual City**

London has overtaken New York as the world's most multi-lingual city with 307 languages spoken there, according to a recently published British University study. After English, languages from South Asia are most prevalent with Punjabi - spoken mainly by Sikhs - heading a list which includes Gujarati Hindi, and Urdu. (Agence France Presse, 1/22/00)

### **New Book on Maharaja Dhuleep Singh**

Harper Collins recently published a new book titled *The Maharaja's Box: An Imperial Story of Conspiracy, Love, and a Guru's Prophecy* by Christy Campbell. The book has 474 pages and costs 19.99 pounds. The book is also available from the Maharaja Dhuleep Singh Centenary Trust home page at <http://www.mdsct.org.uk>.

### **Three British Sikhs Detained in Nepal**

The Japan Economic Newswire (2/3/00) reported that three Sikhs (Kazinder Singh, Heera Singh, and Shahdir Jalal Singh) with British passports were taken into custody in Katmandu, Nepal on 2/3/00 on suspicion of carrying fake travel documents and being sympathizers of the Sikh freedom movement.

### **Dhaka Gurdwara Under Surveillance**

An article published in The Guardian – London (2/14/00) suggested that the Gurdwara Sahib within the Dhaka University campus at Ramna may be a cover for Indian intelligence agencies. A recent visitor, Sardar Lakhwant Singh Khalsa, to the Gurdwara Sahib was met by a plains-clothes man, who refused to give his name, but finally admitted that his job was to “keep an eye” on the visitors to the Gurdwara Sahib. The Gurdwara Sahib has a white building, surrounded by high walls and topped with a dome. The front gate is always locked and visitors are allowed to enter through a side door. Two Granthis (Gurdip Singh and Piara Singh) take care of the Gurdwara Sahib and are appointed by the Calcutta-based

Bangladesh Gurdwara Management Board.

#### **Sikhs Flee Afghanistan**

The Tribune (2/9/00) reported that the number of Sikhs coming from Afghanistan to India via the Samjahauta Express train service from Pakistan has increased recently. The article interviewed several Afghani Sikh men and women who contended that their religious rights were being infringed by the Taliban imposing a strict code of conduct in Afghanistan.

#### **Protesting Asylum-Seekers Released From New Zealand Prison**

Twelve asylum-seeking Sikhs who had been on hunger strike for 34 days

in prison were released on 12/1/99 in Wellington, New Zealand after a High Court ruled that they had been wrongfully detained. After being freed, the men visited the local Gurdwara Sahib at Otahuhu for a prayer service and were subsequently moved to stay at the homes of Sikh community members. The men were freed by a High Court judge on the strict condition that they live at a specified address, report to police three times a week, pursue their refugee claims with due diligence, and surrender themselves when the Court of Appeals returns a judgment on their case. (Deutsche Presse-Agentur, 12/1/99; The Dominion – Wellington, 12/2/99)

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# @ World Sikh Council America Region @

(A Representative Body of Sikh Institutions of America)

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## **PRESS RELEASE**

*(Issued on February 24, 2000)*

### **World Sikh Council, America Region Rejects the Disbanding of World Sikh Council by Giani Puran Singh Pledges to Work for the Charhdi Kala of Panth**

The Regional Committee of the World Sikh Council – America Region affirms its allegiance to Siri Akal Takhat Sahib but likes to make it clear that this allegiance is to the institution and not to any particular incumbent. It recognizes the desire of all Sikhs around the world that the Jathedar, Siri Akal Takhat Sahib be the foremost representative of all Sikhs and that this most important institution be above interference by political parties or government agencies.

In January 1999, The World Sikh Council – America Region rejected the action of the Shromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, when they appointed Giani Puran Singh as the Jathedar of Siri Akal Takhat Sahib. It continues to recognize Singh Sahib Bhai Ranjit Singh Ji as the Jathedar, Siri Akal Takhat Sahib and Patron of the World Sikh Council. This will continue till the Sikhs of the world establish a suitable system to elect/select the person to this supreme position in the Khalsa Panth.

The Regional Committee of the World Sikh Council – America Region rejects the order by Giani Puran Singh disbanding the World Sikh Council. It also rejects the twelve-member committee appointed by him.

The Regional Committee of the World Sikh Council – America Region calls upon the Executive Committee of the World Sikh Council to denounce the action of the "Sarkari Jathedar" and to continue its work in bringing together, uniting, and providing leadership to Sikh institutions around the world.

We also call upon all the other Regional Councils to join in this endeavor to protect all that we have achieved over the last two years and to ensure non-interference by agencies working at the behest of political leaders and enemies of the Panth.

The Regional Committee of the World Sikh Council – America Region assures all Sikh institutions in the Region that our work will not be affected by any announcements and actions by Giani Puran Singh or by others working on his behalf. We shall continue to work with all Sikh institutions in the region for the Charhdi Kala of the Panth.

**In the Service of Guru Panth**

***Kuldeep Singh,***

***Chairperson, World Sikh Council, America Region***

**Text of speech delivered by Dr. Ranbir Singh Sandhu, Secretary General of World Sikh Council – America Region, at the Seminar on All India Sikh Gurdwara Legislation, December 5/6, 1999, New Delhi, India**

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen:

I note that I am the only speaker at this Seminar who is not from India. As such I shall endeavor, as best as I can, to represent the interests and concerns of Sikhs living in other countries. I note that views/suggestions were sought and received from Dr. Ujagar Singh Bawa of Maryland and Sardar Kuldeep Singh of New York. I am not aware of the actual suggestions that were received.

I received a phone call from Sardar Kuldeep Sigh, Chairperson, World Sikh Council – America Region, on the 16th November. He told me about this seminar. I thank Dr. Sukhjeet Kaur Gill of Chandigarh for providing me a copy of the Draft of The Sikh Gurdwara Bill, 1999 on the 27th. I also thank Justice Kuldeep Singh for inviting me to attend the seminar and speak here today.

Because of my belated involvement in the process, I have not been able to discuss the issues with other Sikhs living abroad. Therefore, the views that I am going to present are based upon a general awareness of our shared concerns rather than formal deliberations.

I have looked at the draft and appreciate the work that its authors have put in. It will take me some time to go through its every detail. However, it is easy to see that the document is deficient in several respects and nowhere near ready for implementation. Before I comment further on the draft, it is necessary to list the reasons why we need a change in the existing set-up and why it might be necessary to develop new systems for proper management of Sikh religious affairs.

Nearly seventy-five years ago, the Shromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee was created as a representative body of Sikhs to take over management of historical gurdwaras. At that time, most of the historical gurdwaras were located in the then province of Punjab and were the most conspicuous places of congregation and worship. Created for management of gurdwaras, the SGPC has been looked upon as a ‘Parliament’ of the Sikh Panth. In the absence of alternative sources, Sikhs around the world have come to expect it to provide religious leadership, publish authentic religious literature, defend religious freedom and, in general, take care of all issues pertaining to the Sikh faith. The expectation is that any future organization should continue to serve these interests.

Since that time, the role of the SGPC, the political configuration of the subcontinent and of the Indian State, and the demographics of the Sikh population have undergone significant change.

With political parties competing for election to the SGPC, this body has been politicized. Political parties have issued directives to their adherents in the Committee to vote in certain ways in order to further the political interests of the party. This has made Panthic authorities subservient to political leadership in the state of Punjab. An example is the removal of the Jathedar, Siri Akal Takhat Sahib, earlier this year.

The present system centralizes resources and creates a bureaucracy involving a large number of employees under central control. This concentration of power has led to corruption and to bitter struggles for achieving positions of control and authority within the SGPC.

After partition of Punjab in 1947, many historical gurdwaras were left in Pakistan. A large number of Sikh refugees from Pakistan settled in Delhi and elsewhere in India. After the 1947 partition, Punjab has gone through repeated partitions into smaller territorial units.

The number of gurdwaras and other Sikh institutions has increased dramatically to meet the needs of the growing community. Most of the new gurdwaras are 'congregational' although some are 'historical' as well.

A significant development is the migration of Sikhs to other countries. The Sikh religion today is an international faith. There are several hundred gurdwaras outside India and the number is rapidly growing. In the United States of America, there were only two gurdwaras in the 1960's. We now have over one hundred. In any new set-up that we might try to develop, these considerations must be given due weight.

In representing Sikhs living outside India, I like to emphasize our several concerns and problems. We are deeply concerned with all matters relating to the proper upkeep and management of our historical gurdwaras. We are concerned about preservation of our distinct identity and our glorious socio-cultural heritage. We are concerned about the socio-economic well-being of our community.

Sikhs living abroad have many problems. These include not only matters of employment and economic advancement but, even more importantly, religious education for our children, education of the 'host' communities in which we typically are small minorities, promotion of interfaith understanding and reduction of prejudice, and correction of misrepresentation of our faith, our religious practices, and our history.

Perhaps the most important development has been the growth of religious chauvinism in the majority community in India. This had expressed itself most virulently in operation 'Bluestar', in operation 'Woodrose', in massacres of November 1984, and in 'disappearances' and 'encounters' resulting in the death of tens of thousands of innocent Sikhs. The result is the general feeling of insecurity that pervades the Sikh community today. Textbooks in schools (for example: The Story of Civilization, Volume 2, textbook for class X) eulogize the reformist role of the Arya Samaj but overlook the contributions of the Sikh faith to society. We know how the Arya Samaj created the Hindu-Sikh divide in Punjab and, with support from the central government, blamed the Sikhs for it. The book cited makes no mention of the Babbar Akali movement and the Ghadar movement. It fails to mention that most of the victims of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre were ordinary Sikh villagers who had come to Amritsar to celebrate Vaisaakhi with no knowledge of the political situation. Police harassment of devout Sikhs continues till today. A friend told me the other day that when he started to sport a flowing beard he got a visit from the police. He was taken to the police station and questioned about 'extremists' visiting his home.

With this background, let us see if the Draft Bill addresses these issues properly. In revisiting our organizational structures, we need to learn from our experience so that we can eliminate features that have been found to be detrimental. I believe the Draft Bill we are considering today does not do so.

The Draft Bill is ill-conceived, inadequate, and essentially counterproductive.

The Bill is ill-conceived in that it is an extension of the existing system with modifications to extend its scope to the whole of India. It retains the electoral system currently in place for Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, the Union Territory of Chandigarh, and Delhi. It retains the potential for corruption and politicization. It ignores several of the clauses of the Sikh Rehit Maryada and introduces ideas at variance with the Rehit.

The Bill is ill-conceived in that it involves the Indian government in the enactment and implementation of a process applicable to institutions of the Sikh religion. None of the religions of the world, to my best knowledge, has the management and control of its religious institutions legislated by the political set-up of any country. No religion has lists of its adherents prepared and maintained by appointees of any government. Please recall that voter lists were used to identify Sikh homes in Delhi during the November 1984 massacres. Even in countries which have a 'state religion', the governments do not make rules for appointment of preachers or for election/selection/appointment of functionaries at their places of worship.

The Bill is inadequate in that it totally ignores the gurdwaras outside India as well as the sentiments, concerns, and interests of Sikhs living there. It could be argued that an Act of the Indian government can apply only within its jurisdiction and, therefore, must only cover Sikhs and Sikh institutions in India. However, this is precisely the reason why any set-up that we Sikhs design for ourselves must not involve the government of India or, for that matter, of any other country in the world. Any new set-up must transcend national boundaries. It must be international in scope and character and it must be designed to effectively address the aspirations and interests of all Sikhs wherever they might be.

The Bill is counterproductive because instead of bringing Sikhs together, it is divisive. Sikhs and Sikh institutions in India, firmly under control of the Indian government and its legislative, executive and judicial branches, would be in a position of subservience. Sikhs living abroad may be forced to develop systems of their own based upon free association regardless of national boundaries and unfettered by government interference. Decisions and acts of each of the two groups may or may not be acceptable to the other.

Summarizing:

1. The Bill contains features that are in violation of the Sikh Rehit Maryada.
2. The Bill does not address several of the concerns which are of primary importance to Sikhs.
3. The Bill does not give, and cannot give, any consideration to Sikhs and Sikh interests and institutions outside India.
4. The Bill retains some of the detrimental features of the present system.
5. The Bill vests ultimate authority in the Indian government and its various branches. Sikhs have suffered for over fifty years under a government which, controlled by the majority religious community, has been constantly hostile to Sikh interests, has patronized the extremist elements in the Arya Samaj, has engaged in disinformation and smear campaigns against the Sikhs and declared 'amritdharis' to be arsonists and murderers, patronized so-called 'moderate' Sikhs who violate the norms of their faith, and has failed to punish the perpetrators of massacres, gang-rapes, and torture of innocent Sikhs.

I believe that seeking enactment of laws to regulate management of matters relating to our faith is an admission of our moral and social bankruptcy, and of our inability to govern our own institutions. It is an abject surrender of responsibility and religious sovereignty. I recommend that:

1. The Draft Bill be withdrawn.
2. We must set up a mechanism for all Sikhs around the world to work together on development of an organizational system appropriate to our special needs without involving any agency of any government.

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