

Sikh youths toiled to keep forces well fed

During the chaotic aftermath of the terror strikes many ordinary Mumbaikars came out on the streets to offer whatever help they could. One such group of young Sikhs worked relentlessly during last few days to offer food and water to security forces at Taj and Oberoi hotels. About 20 to 25 young Sikh men, volunteering for Gurdwara Shri Dashmesh Darbar in Sion, saw the chilling pictures of the carnage on television and offered to help. With the help of women from the community, they set up a temporary langar at several gurdwaras in the suburbs and cooked food day and night. "Once Shri Guru Nanak Sahib had little money left in his pocket, but he used that money to serve food to the needy. We all draw inspiration from that incident. A Sikhs' first duty is to serve the needy," said Ajit Singh, a volunteer who was serving food at Taj.

Volunteers supplied to 500 packets of food to forces along with water. For lunch and dinner, 1000 packets of puri bhaji was prepared and served to forces at Oberoi and Taj.

This isn't the first time these men have offered help during crisis. During the serial blasts in 2006, the men helped police to pack dead bodies in plastic bags, and thereafter immediately washed themselves and cooked food for the injured at the spot. "That was a completely different experience and one that changed out lives for ever," said another volunteer.

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Ajaypal Singh Banga Highest paid Sikh executive

A PTI newsitem originating in New York, last June, identified Ajaypal Singh Banga as Asia-Pacific CEO of Citibank. He will get a package of about Rs 90 crores as the new second-in-command at payment services firm MasterCard - an offer that could be billed as the biggest package in the current state of the global economy.

Mr Banga will join MasterCard as president and Chief Operating Officer on August 31 and could possibly become CFO of the global financial services giant in a year. As per his contract, Mr Banga will be paid around \$2.15 million (about 10 crore) in salary and other allowances every year and would also get a one time benefit totalling about \$15.9 million (about Rs 80 crore).

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The IAS Topper who took exam in Punjabi

Varinder Kumar Sharma, who stood first among male candidates and fourth overall, believes in thinking positive. Afflicted with polio, he calls it a "blessing in disguise as it gave me a chance to appear in the UPSC exam even at 35". (The government introduced three per cent reservation for the disabled in 2003). As PCS (Allied) officer, Sharma comes from a family of teachers. His wife too teaches Punjabi. "This was one reason why I opted for the language as a medium and for Punjabi literature as one of the optionals despite initial discouragement from well-meaning friends. I can express myself freely in it."

Sharma was educated in schools in Patiala.

[Courtesy: *India Today*]

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Freedom Fighter: Ghadar Party icon, Baba Bhagat Singh Bilga dies at 102

Bhagat Singh Bilga, popularly known as “Baba Bilga” - a torchbearer of the Ghadar movement - died after a brief illness in England at the age of 102, Kulbir Singh, Bilga’s eldest son, informed. He is survived by his two sons. Baba Bilga, the namesake of martyr Bhagat Singh was born on April 2, 1907 and was testimony to a century of people’s struggle. Bilga was president of Desh Bhagat Yadgaar Hall (DBYH) committee.

The last of the surviving Ghadarites, Baba didn’t want corruption and nepotism in his country. He was fiery old man with steel in his voice and fire in his eyes. Born in nearby Bilga village, which was called *baghi* village by the British, he grew up in company of freedom fighters. It was Roor Singh Ghadari Baba, who inspired him to join the Ghadar movement.

Babaji was instrumental in introducing ‘mela ghadri babeyan da’ nearly 17 years back to mark the contribution of freedom fighters of the Ghadar movement in India’s Independence struggle. Bilga’s dream was to develop DBYH as India’s leading research centre on freedom movement to impart proper knowledge about the martyrs and freedom fighters.

Notably authored five books including *Ghadar party de Unfole warke, Mera Vatan, Meri Soch Meri Samajh*. It was his efforts that the rarest photographs of “*Komagatamaru*” incident were brought back from across the world to DBYH museum, which has more than 200 photos of freedom fighters.

Punjab deputy chief minister Sukhbir Singh Badal expressed grief on Bilga’s death.

[Courtesy: *The Hindustan Times*]

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Nankana Sahib Sewa:

US Sikhs honor Manzoor Khan of Lahore

The Dallas Sikh Sangat, of Garland Gurdwara, honored Janab Manzoor Ali Khan of Lahore on June 28, 2009 for his ‘sewa’ at Nankana Sahib in the days of Indo-Pak tensions during 1960-70’s. Mr. Khan was visiting Dallas and other cities in USA on a private goodwill mission.

Dr. Harbans Lal, while introducing Mr. Khan to the Sangat, recalled the help and guidance that Manzoor Khan provided to Sri Nankana Sahib Foundation (led by Sardar Ganga Singh) in the stressful times. The Foundation had then depended on Muslim friends like Mr. Khan to help create goodwill around the holy Sikh shrines in Pakistan. This was crucial to secure free access to our historical gurdwaras.

Dr. Khan recalled his ordeals when his family was evacuated to Pakistan during August 1947. He narrated how he learnt about the Sikh chivalry during the 1971 war of Pakistan with India; he was then a Flight Lieutenant in Pakistan Air Force.

While working at World Bank, Khan Sahib became a close friend of Dr. Manohar Singh Gill (currently a member of the Prime Minister’s cabinet in India.) This friendship flourished during his visits to India as a member of various Pakistani delegations.

When Manzoor Khan learnt about S. Ganga Singh's efforts for free access to the Sikh holy shrines in Pakistan, he offered his helping hand. He helped the Nanakana Foundation leadership to inculcate good understanding among Muslim population about the Sikhs. Muslim religious leaders and Islamic scholars were approached to help. These scholars provided support from the Islamic scripture and the Islamic laws for protection of minority religious institutions in the Islamic Republic. This work was 'no less than a Jihad', according to Mr. Khan.

Today, Sikh holy places in Pakistan are open to global visitors, even as the management has been in Sikh hands.

At the end, Manzoor Sahib invited 'followers of Guru Baba Nanak' to visit their holy places in Pakistan to pay homage. Their Muslim friends would welcome them any time. He also thanked the Sikh friends in USA for their love and courteous reception.

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Sikh Athletes donate \$10,000 for Children's Hospital in Canada

Canadian journalist Dan Arsenault reports that a group of 32 Sikhs donated \$10,000 to the IWK Health Centre (Halifax) as part of a cross-country relay run, to raise funds for children's hospitals. Among athletes are: Gagandeep Kaur Babra (24), Sophia Kaur Randhawa (20) and Pavan Kaur Ubhi (18) as also Paramjot Singh Sabharwal (16) Aman Singh Chahal (16) and Jagdeep Singh Saggu (17) all from Toronto.

These Torontonians are among the 32 Sikhs taking part in a cross-Canada relay run to raise money for children's hospitals. They donated \$10,000 to the IWK Health Centre in Halifax last July.

[Courtesy: Jagpal Singh Tiwana, Dartmouth, Canada]

