

First Sikh enters Pak Army

Islamabad, Dec.20 – A 19-year-old Sikh youth has become the first person from the minority Sikh community to become an officer in the Pakistan Army.

Harcharan Singh, from Nankana Sahib, Lahore, cleared the Inter Services Selection Board tests for military services at his second attempt this year.

“It was the happiest moment of my life when I came to know about my selection. I am privileged to have this honour which never visited any of my predecessors,” Harcharan was quoted as saying by the *Dawn* today. Though many Christians had served in the Pakistan military, neither a Hindu nor a Sikh had got selected since the birth of the country, the paper said.

Mr. Singh, who has passed FSc (a pre-engineering course), was a little “skeptical” this year while attending the ISSB preliminary exams thinking that such tests were “not meant for Sikhs”. – PTI

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Bulletproof cases for ‘jalao’ items offered

Varinder Walia of Tribune News Service reports: The Birmingham-based Guru Nanak Sevak Jatha, which has already undertaken gilding of the interior of the Golden Temple, has now offered to put priceless gifts and rare artifacts of ‘jalao’ (show of splendour) in bulletproof glass cases.

This was disclosed by Mr. Tarlochan Singh, Chairman, National Commission for Minorities, while talking to TNS here today. He said Baba Mahinder Singh of the Guru Nanak Sevak Jatha had told him that they were ready to bear all the expenses to put the ‘jalao’ items in bulletproof cases within the Golden Temple complex. Mr. Tarlochan Singh said they would them be exhibited through the year.

These artifacts are traditionally put on grand display on four occasions, the birth anniversaries of Guru Nanak Dev, Guru Ram Das and Guru Gobind Singh and the installation ceremony of the Guru Granth Sahib. Apart from these artifacts were exhibited on two special occasions. The first was in 1965 when sacred relics and arms of Guru Gobind Singh were brought from the UK and the second was to mark the concluding of ‘kar seva’ in 1973.

The artifacts are of rare craftsmanship, elegance and beauty. These priceless articles were presented by Sikh sardars to the Golden Temple from time to time. The four silver gates of Harminder Sahib were replaced with golden ones believed to be presented by the legendary Maharaja Ranjit Singh at the time of ‘jalao’. The other articles include the bejeweled peacock canopy, gold ‘chakras’, pearl tassels, golden frill, golden fans, bejeweled gold and pearl headband, two necklaces, gold-plated clubs, a canopy, silver pans, golden spades and the sword of Maharaja Ranjit Singh with a golden handle studded with rubies and emeralds.

The NMC Chairman also held a meeting with the UK based jatha and members of kar seva institutions. He said representatives of various institutions who attended the meeting agreed in principle to carry out *kar seva* in the Sikh shrines strictly in accordance with the Sikh traditions. Mr. Tarlochan Singh said much damage had

already been done to the invaluable Sikh heritage while carrying out kar seva in the past.

He suggested that the silver gates of Darshani Deori in the Golden temple needed to be repaired at the earliest. He said these gates should be preserved with the help of experts. He claimed that the SGPC had agreed to the proposal and the gates may be replaced with new ones. He also emphasized upon the need to preserve Ramgarhia bungas in the Golden Temple complex with the help of Ramgarhia association.

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Gurpurab Celebration in Nigeria

Our representative in Lagos reports: The Sadh Sangat of Lagos celebrated the Birth Anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev Ji from 12th to 20th November, 2005. Ragi Jatha of Bhai Chattar Singh from Bombay were invited to perform on this auspicious occasion. Their devotional Shabad Kirtan was excellent, educative and deeply touching.

During all these days, Asa di Var was sung every day. The actual celebration of the birthday was the local Gurdwara on 15th November 2005. Thereafter a Guru Premee had Akhand Path at his residence. Bhog ceremony and the concluding celebrations were held on 20th November, attended by a large gathering of the Indian community. There was extremely active participation by members of our community.

NEENA KAUR AHLUWALIA (Mrs.)

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Tsunami – 2004 The Hero Who Set The Model For Rehabilitation

Cuddalore, Dec. 25. – If there is one person who has received all round kudos for effectiveness in handling the disaster after Tsunami, it is the Cuddalore district Collector, Mr. G Gagandeep Singh Bedi. An affable person, Bedi makes it a point to speak to everyone who approaches him with a problem. He even returns calls assiduously. With a working fluency in Tamil, Mr. Bedi has been most approachable to officers, NGO's, local people as also the media. There is still work to do, he says.

Q: One year on, where does rehabilitation work in the district stand?

A: Fishing activity has resumed in the Cuddalore coast with distribution of boats almost over. As far as housing is concerned we are midway. 2,500 permanent houses have been handed over in 7 villages. 4,000 are being built. All houses will be handed over to the affected by March, including to the Dalits. We have also drawn plans on building multi-crore projects like building bridges and roads. After Tsunami, better village is our hope.

Q: There are numerous NGO's working in the district. What kind of coordination takes place?

A: Every Monday, I hold a meeting with the NGOs. It is routine now. We choose the issue and call NGOs working on it and discuss work undertaken and the problems.

Q: When do you expect the rehabilitation programme to end?

A: As far as the community is concerned they are already on their own. But my assessment is that there is work for us for one more year. After we finish with houses in March, there would still be the work of building infrastructure facilities like roads and bridges, at Sothikuppam for instance, improving facilities in the harbour and in the coastal areas for fishing.

Q: Any glaring inadequacies in overall relief?

A: Yes. Agriculture labourers who also lost their livelihood when Tsunami made agricultural land saline, have not been provided for. The owners have been compensated. - SNS

[Courtesy: *The Statesman*]

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Iraqi Terrorists threaten to kill Sikh Canadian hostage

S Rajagopalan reports from Washington:

Last December Iraqi Insurgents have threatened to kill Sikh Canadian Harmeet Singh Sooden and three other Western peace activities in their custody if prisoners at US and Iraqi detention centres are not released.

The ultimatum was delivered in a new video tape broadcast by Al-Jazeera a week after the four members of the Chicago-based Christian Peacemakers Teams (CPT) were abducted in Baghdad by the militant group that calls itself the Sword of Righteousness Brigade.

All the four shown in the video clip appeared frightened. The 32-year-old Sooden and a fellow Canadian were shown eating, while the British and American hostages were seen talking to the camera. But there was no audio transmission.

Al-Jazeera, however, reported that the hostage urged the US and British governments to withdraw from Iraq. The CPT has also blamed the actions of US and UK for the plight of its activists.

Harmeet Singh, an electrical engineer, has lately been studying literature in New Zealand, where his sister Harpreet Singh Brewer and brother-in-law Mark Brewer live. The family felt devastated watching the new video carrying the death threat, Brewer said.

“There has been a terrible mistake. Harmeet is a peaceful guy, he is a pacifist by nature and by cause,” Brewer said in response to the claims by the kidnappers that the hostage were “spying for occupation forces”.

Canadian Prime Minister Paul Martin, terming the kidnapping “a callous act of terror against innocents”, said his government was working to secure the release of the hostages. “Let us remember these people are in the country on a humanitarian mission. They came to help the people of Iraq,” he said.

[Courtesy: *Hindustan Times*]

DGMC: Dharam Pracher Com.

The Delhi Gurudwara Management Committee has nominated Sardar Arvinder Singh Chhatwal as a Member of the Dharam Parchar Committee. A public spirited resident of Dwarka, Arvinder Singh is senior vice chairman of the Guru Harkishan Public School, Tilak Nagar, Managing Board. He earlier served as the Governing Body Member of Guru Teg Bahadur Polytechnique Institute, Vasant Vihar, New Delhi and Asstt. Manager of Shree Guru Teg Bahadur Khalsa (Boys) Senior Secondary School, Dev Nagar, New Delhi.

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