

Prayer facility for Sikhs at JFK airport

New York: At a meeting - in 2007-end with local Sikh community, by New York City Assemblyman, Rory Lancman, the Port Authority has agreed to provide prayer facilities for Sikhs at the John F Kennedy Airport. The meeting was attended by Susan Baer, Gen Manager, Aviation, JFK airport, and Jerry Spampinato, Deputy General Manager, Aviation, JFK, who both agreed that there was a need for a prayer room for Sikh passengers.

The meeting, which took place on November 30th at the Chapel Museum Hall at John F. Kennedy Airport's Terminal 4, was coordinated by Amarjit Singh, the UNITED SIKHS' Multifaith Coordinator.

Assemblyman Lancman, who has a large Sikh population in his constituency of 25th District, Queens, said, "The Sikh community is a growing population in Queens, and many Sikhs go back and forth to India quite regularly. Sikhs travelers deserve a place to worship at JFK airport alongside those currently set aside for other faiths, and I am very pleased that the Port Authority has committed to work with the community to obtain this goal."

Balbir Kaur, Community Services Director of UNITED SIKHS, said, "Most airports have "meditation rooms" used for prayers by passengers. We are very pleased that the Port Authority recognizes the need for prayer facilities for the Sikhs."

"The Queens area of New York has received a large number of Sikh migrants for many decades and the JFK airport is a hub for Sikh travelers. Therefore the Port Authority's accommodation of Sikhs' needs is a step in the right direction," said Avtar Singh Pannu, President of the Sikh Cultural Society. Gurdwara, Queens, which is the oldest Gurdwara (Sikh place of worship) in the East Coast of USA.

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Sikh schoolgirl in UK fights ban on *Kara*

A Sikh student of Indian origin, excluded from her school in Britain, three months back, for refusing to take off her iron bangle, or *kara*, has moved the High Court against the authorities' decision.

The authorities at the Aberdare Girls' School in South Wales had barred 14-year-old Sarika Singh attending attending her classes temporarily after she declined to remove the kara, a symbol of her religion.

The challenge at the High Court has been filed on her behalf by human rights group 'Liberty'. It argues that the school has breached race relations and human rights laws.

"My bangle is very important to me. It reminds me always to do good." Sarika had said immediately after her expulsion from school in November last year.

Her mother, Sunita Singh, had said that the family would seek legal recourse against the decision after she failed to convince the school's governing body that the bracelet was a symbol of their faith. "It is not a jewellery, it is a symbol of our belief."

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'Allow kirpans in schools'

Sikh students can carry kirpans while Muslim girls can wear hijabs or veils to schools, a Parliamentary Committee in Australia's Victoria state has recommended, but the move has drawn sharp protests.

The Education and Training Committee, which tabled its report in the Victorian

Parliament after a year-long inquiry into uniform, recommended that all schools should accommodate clothing or other items that are religiously significant.

It asked schools to work with the Sikh community to allow male students to carry a *kirpan* - a small, curved steel dagger which is one of five articles of faith that Sikhs must carry. The committee found there were concerns from principals and teachers about students carrying the *kirpan* - which is hidden under the school uniform - but the item was important to the Sikh community.

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A Milestone

Lieutenant General Amarjeet Singh Sekhon has been appointed as director general, military operations. He was commander of the J & K-based 15 Corps and takes over from Lieutenant General Mohan Pande.

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Bhindranwale still haunts the Congress!

Upset over SGPC's installation of the Sikh ideologue's portrait at Golden Temple Museum, the Punjab Congress said, last December, that the move of SGPC to display a portrait of Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale in the Sikh museum at Harmandir Sahib was a "dangerous step" aimed at "reviving terrorism" in the state. PPC President Rajinder Kaur Bhattal, convened an emergency meeting of the party leaders to discuss the issue. The Congress decided to convene a meeting of like-minded parties to devise a further policy to "expose the Akalis move of reviving terrorism in Punjab"!

After 23 years of Sant Bhindranwale's death in 'Operation Bluestar' the SGPC on November 29 had unveiled the portrait in a low-key ceremony.

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Our Rep. in Kenya honoured

Sr. Mohan Singh Padam has been, as a senior Freemason, honoured with the UK Grand Lodge's distinction of "Past Grand Standard Bearer". Our hearty congratulations to a longtime friend and standard bearer of Sikhism in Kenya, E.Africa.

It is noteworthy that the distinction comes with the approval of Prince Michael of Kent, younger son of HH Prince Charles and the late Princess Diana.

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Gurdwaras to adopt 'unwanted' girls

It's God and the Gurdwara now for Punjab's unwanted girl child. Agonized by the state's dipping sex ratio and terror tales of girls, both born and unborn, being killed or left to die, Sikhism's highest temporal body, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), has announced it will henceforth 'mother the abandoned babies.'

In its urgent effort at erasing Punjab's darkest gender blot, SGPC will soon ask important gurdwaras in Punjab to place cradles at their entrances and exhort unhappy parents obsessed with boys to leave "those innocent children at God's door, not death's." "We will bear the expenses for bringing up these children. Don't kill them," SGPC chief Avtar Singh Makkar told a gathering at the Takth Damdama Sahib. He said the decision had to be taken because of the spurt in cases of abandonment of girls, many of them just born, in public parks, railway compartments, roadsides and even in

garbage heaps.

That men in the state can't find Punjabi women to marry, and are scouting for partners in different cultures and distant places - Tripura, Assam, Jharkhand, Kerala, Orissa and Bengal - hasn't really deterred Punjabis from doing away with girls as the sex ratio dips to an embarrassing 793 females to 1,000 males. In Fatehgarh Sahib district, it is an abysmal and astounding 754:1000.

Social activist Pam Rajput welcomed the SGPC initiative. "It's a laudable step, though I feel that SGPC should launch a campaign against female foeticide and issue directions to all gurdwaras to outcast people who kill their infant girls." Women activists working to spread awareness against infanticide, especially of girls, have cheered the SGPC. Murti Devi, one such volunteer who's taken seven abandoned girls under her care, said, "I hope the decision to place cradles in gurdwaras will lessen incidents of parents deserting babies."

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