

## **The Core Group supports Baba Sarabjot Singh Bedi**

The Sikhs are resident in over a hundred countries of the world today. Yet everywhere they are only an infinitesimal minority, barring the state of the Punjab in India. The Punjab has been the cradle of Sikhism, hence the Sikhs the world over look with great expectation towards it, the same way as the Jews everywhere have been looking towards Israel.

For nearly five years now, the principal political party of the Sikhs, Shiromani Akali Dal, under the leadership of S. Parkash Singh Badal has, in association with the Bhartiya Janta Party, formed the government in this state. It was hoped everywhere that the government would uphold the lofty ideals of Sikhism and provide such a clean, efficient and just governance that it would be an example for other states to follow. However, such hopes of the Sikh people have been so tragically belied that everywhere they are sad and despondent.

The state is riddled with rampant corruption at all levels and is now virtually bankrupt. Education is at low ebb, and ranks amongst the lowest in the country. Alcoholism and drug dependence has ruined the health of the youth.

However, the present leadership seem to be complacently indifferent and worried only about self-interest and power. In this quest they have interfered with the sacred institutions of Jathedars of the Takhts as also the management of Sikh shrines. Favoritism has replaced merit and occupants of high religious offices are playing minion to political satraps. That has so disillusioned the Sikh youth that apostasy among them has come to assume alarming dimensions.

Taking cognizance of the situation, the Core Group feels impelled to sensitize the intellectual elite of the community in the Punjab - scholars, thinkers, writers, educationists, journalists and other professionals - to shake off their lingering indifference to the affairs of the community, rid the state of the present sordid government and provide effective intellectual and morally upright alternate leadership.

Efforts of well meaning and devoted Sikhs such as Baba Sarabjot Singh Bedi of Una Sahib, to strive for the welfare and well-being of the Sikh people on an on-going basis need to be complemented and supported by the intelligentsia of the community. This would provide the basis for a proactive and clean government working towards ushering in an era of Godliness, honest governance and economic resurgence.

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## **Gurbani Braille expert Kunwar Singh Negi honoured**

The Governor of Uttaranchal state, S. Surjit Singh Barnala honoured Dr. Kunwar Singh Negi (Padmashri and Padmabhushan) by offering him a shawl and Rs. 11,000 in cash, for services rendered to the cause of Indian Braille literature and Braille journalism for the blind.

Mr. Barnala spoke about the work Dr. Negi has done for the blind and described him as a Braille expert. Dr. Negi has urged the government to provide him a computerised Braille machine and a six room free residential house in Henra Colony Block, Dehradun to locate the "Maharaja Ranjit Singh National Braille Press Society". Mr Barnala said he will have a talk with chief minister of Uttaranchal state in this connection.

Mr. Barnala also said that Negi's work should be honoured. He said Sardar Negi wrote the Gurbani's basic books in Punjabi Braille which is an achievement.

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## **Future of Gurdwaras Speculated on Vision Television**

Dr. (Bhai) Harbans Lal was in Canada to present a paper, "Sikh Gurdwaras and Sikh Generation in Year 2015" at the the Ninth Sikh Educational Conference held at Kitchner, on September 22, 2001. Raghbir Singh Samagh interviewed him afterward and aired the interview on the Gurbani Hour at Vision Television on October 6 at 10.30 EST.

Dr. Lal emphasized that today's youth would be *us* in a few years and will define our religious and social culture. Although the Sikh theology will remain to be Guru Granth based and Gurdwara based congregations will remain an important medium of religious instructions, the future Sikh generation will not be as uniform with respect to defining their religious interpretations, practices and institutions. Further, religious culture of youth will be more individualistic, and it will embrace multi-layered faith practices.

To stay in faith, the future youth will struggle between two conflicting yearnings: attraction to idealized versions of religious truth but repulsion to traditional practices of their ancestors. To them cultural narratives of religious teachings that are ethnically loaded will seem outmoded and often seen as deceptive or exploitive, thus reducing their meaning in modern life. In response, the Gurdwara congregations will have to devise drastic changes to suit the new times and be proactive to the new realities in order to insure survival of the faith. Well-educated clerics, decentralization of religious teaching, availability of virtual libraries, progressive programming, diversity in services, services offered in the new mother tongue, interfaith dialogues, emphasis on ritual-free spirituality, and investment in the youth will be some of the changes considered necessary.

Dr. Lal's interview was widely appreciated by most of the people who watched him cool and composed making his points. His second interview will be aired on the same TV Channel on October 13.

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## **Key Decisions at seminar of the Institute of Sikh Studies**

**Institutional failure in Punjab with respect to Sikhism:** A galaxy of Sikh scholars and thinkers presented papers/made speeches at the seminar which was graced by very attentive and responsive audience of distinguished participants. Dr. Gurcharan Singh Kalkat, former Vice Chancellor, Punjab Agriculture University, Ludhiana, presided over the opening session of the seminar. Dr. Amrik Singh, former Vice Chancellor, Punjabi University, Patiala and Dr. Kehar Singh, Chairman, Punjab School Education Board presided over the second and third session respectively. The closing session was presided over by Justice Jaspal Singh (retd.). The audience/speakers had come from different parts of Punjab as well as from other parts of India and abroad.

Sardar Gurdev Singh, President of the Institute of Sikh Studies welcomed the participants on the opening session of the seminar on Nov. 3, 2001 and hoped that the deliberations of this seminar would help provide some solution to the problems faced by the Sikhs. Very informative elucidating, thought provoking and learned representations were made by eminent speakers and some of the ladies/gentlemen from the audience.

After extensive discussions held by the speakers and a good number of ladies and gentlemen from amongst a very articulate audience, the following resolutions were unanimously passed:

**Resolution 1:** This gathering of Sikhs assembled on the occasion of the Annual Seminar of the Institute of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh, has reviewed the progress and contribution of the major Sikh institutions, and is of the view that the institution inherited from the Gurus are relevant for all times, and have been playing an abiding role in the growth and development of the Panth. However, some of the major organisations and institutions set-up by the Sikhs, which initially played a very significant role, have not subsequently evolved to the extent required to meet the current challenges, and are now marked by lack of inadequacy of performance.

The gathering noted that the Sikh Panth is passing through critical times, and was currently afflicted with numerous problems, like lack of unity, challenge to Sikh identity, hurt Sikh psyche, mushrooming *deras*, besides the difficulties faced by Sikh diaspora and backward tribes, like Vanjaras, Sikligars, etc. The gathering has come to the conclusion that this failure is due to the absence of a central apex organisation envisaged by Guru Gobind Singh at the time of conferring the eternal Guruship to Guru Granth Sahib and entrusting the Panth with empirical responsibilities, under the doctrine of Guru Granth-Guru Panth.

The gathering recommends, therefore, that this vacuum be filled, and calls upon the SGPC, as the most representative organisation of the Sikhs, to convene immediately a meeting of representatives of all recognised Sikh institutions, including the Sikh diaspora, to draw up concrete plans to set-up such a body. The gathering also calls upon all other Sikh organisations to co-operate with SGPC in this noble task.

**Resolution 2:** The participants at the seminar on Institutional Failure in Punjab with respect to Sikhism and missing Sikh prisoners conducted by the Institute of Sikh Studies, calls upon both the Central government and the government of Punjab and other states to provide the names, addresses, dates of arrest, dates and places of release wherever applicable, of all prisoners held

under legal or illegal detention for so called Sikh militancy-related offences in Punjab and other states. This is in the public interest and in compliance with the laws of the country.

At the same time, the participants at the seminar on institutional failure in Punjab with respect to Sikhism and missing Sikh prisoners conducted by the institute of Sikh Studies, call upon both the Central government and the government of Punjab and other states to conduct a census of persons killed or disappeared in Punjab between the years 1982 and 1995. This is necessary in view of the fact that figures published by various sources, including the government, vary from 18,000 to more than 2 lakh! Only a meticulously conducted census organised by the government with the participation of all political parties and human rights groups will establish the true figure (and bring due succour to prisoners).

[Courtesy: Harbans Lal]

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## **Human Rights: POTO - More of TADA**

A meeting of the Chandigarh Chapter of the Sikh Core Group (SCG) was attended by Dr Kharak Singh, Brig (Retd) Gurdip Singh, Dr Gurmit Singh, Sardar Gurdev Singh, Dr Kirpal Singh, Sardar Mohinder Singh, Dr Gurcharan Singh Kalkat, Dr Gurbaksh Singh (USA) and Sardar Satinderpal Singh (UK). The members discussed the ramifications of the Ordinance notified by the central Government on Prevention of Terrorism with specific concerns of its constitutional and operational fallouts as under:

- i. The Ordinance is violative of fundamental rights enshrined in the Constitution of India as well as the Charter of the U.N.O.
- ii. The law and order is a state subject under the Constitution of India. POTO seriously impinges on the powers of the state and overrides the state jurisdiction. POTO violates the cardinal principle of autonomy of the states and is another nail in the coffin of autonomy for the states. The law and order situation in Punjab has been peaceful and free from terrorist incidents for the past 6/7 years. Punjab does not need to be covered by POTO.
- iii. The constitutional aberration apart, the draconian provisions of the Ordinance are intimidatory to the minorities and its promulgation gives evidence of spreading majoritarian terror. It is significant to note that in the Government's view the terrorist organisations belong only to the minorities since no organisation of the majority community has been listed in the schedule of the POTO. Further, ignoring the universal norm of alphabetical order, it is extremely agonising, and adding insult to injury, for the Sikhs to note that the first four organisations listed in the schedule of POTO are pertaining to the Sikhs.
- iv. The definition of the terrorist acts itself is non-specific and vague, as such the misuse of the Ordinance is intrinsic.

Punjab, particularly the Sikhs have gone through untold misery in coping with misconceived policies during the disturbed phase of terrorism and imposition of TADA regime. It is well experienced fact that TADA itself became the mother of terrorism.

POTO has more sinister coverage than TADA. Its clauses relating to culpability of those possessing information and providing assistance to loosely defined terrorist acts are dangerous tools in the hands of not-so-scrupulous law enforcement agencies. It curtails the fundamental rights of freedom of expression and is an attack of freedom of press. Those advocates of POTO who highlight human face of POTO, by referring to legal obligation of recording and informing about arrests and such formalities, are either naive or intentionally ignore the culture of callousness of policing authorities. Punjab, and Sikhs in particular, have fresh memories of *vigilante* groups, fake encounters, missing youths, unclaimed bodies and other forms of counter-terrorism. All this abetted by misinformation of government propaganda machinery. The human rights violations *ad lib* apart the degradation of life and ruination of economy in the state is still felt in Punjab.

We urge the the top Sikh leadership, to address this vital issue of unconstitutional and draconian enforcement of POTO.

We demand that Union Government should immediately withdraw this Ordinance.

