

Intervene in '84 riots cases, NHRC urged

The National Commission for Minorities (NCM) has urged the National Human Rights Commission to intervene in the November 1984 Delhi riots cases as it did in the Best Bakery case in Gujarat.

NCM Chairman Sr. Tarlochan Singh urged the NHRC to make a special appeal to the Supreme Court to constitute courts to probe the 1984 anti-Sikh carnage.

The NHRC held a special meeting to acquaint itself with the case of the Sikh victims of the riots and the action taken on the NCM's letter about the disappearance of Jathedar Gurdev Singh Kaunke of the Akal Takht as well as that of Paramjeet Singh from Mohali.

In a letter to the NHRC chairman, Mr. Justice A. S. Anand, Mr. Tarlochan Singh said he was aware that the commission could not take up old cases, but maintained that the anti-Sikh massacre of 1984 was a "black spot on the face of Indian democracy."

Observing that the judiciary was equally responsible, along with the Delhi Government, for not providing justice to the victims, Mr. Tarlochan Singh said: "I officially request you to intervene in this case so that the culprits can be punished and the victims are given proper compensation not only in Delhi but all over the country where such incidents took place."

Sr. Tarlochan Singh said the NHRC could make a special appeal to the Supreme Court to order the setting up of "special courts for the 1984 anti-Sikh Carnage." He said the NHRC could call the Chief Secretaries of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh to furnish a list of the Sikh killed in 1984, along with the quantum of compensation paid.

About the disappearance of the former acting head of the Akal Takht, Mr. Tarlochan Singh said in a separate communication to Mr. Justice Anand that the NHRC should direct the Punjab Government to submit the inquiry report.

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"Blacklisted" Sikh NRIs' list pruned to 134

Even as the "blacklist" of Sikh NRIs has been pruned to 134, as of last October, from the earlier list of 489, the National Commission of Minorities (NCM) has urged the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government for a fresh review of the list.

The NCM believed that the blacklist must be put afresh under the microscope as the situation that existed in the wake of the Operation Bluestar in 1984 had changed considerably.

This assumed significance as there was a sea change in the thinking of Sikh NRIs who continued to be on the government's blacklist. The NCM believed that the Vajpayee government needed to review the blacklist because of the changed environment.

The National Human Rights Commission reviewed the government's report on blacklisted Sikh NRIs recently. It also forwarded a letter of SAD (Amritsar) chief,

Simranjit Singh Mann concerning the case of UK based Hajinder Singh Dilgeer who was a citizen of Norway.

About a year back, the government had reviewed several thousand blacklisted Sikh NRIs in the UK, Canada and the USA and slashed the number to just 50 individuals. But this had now gone up to 134.

The NCM and several Sikh organisations were persevering that the government should end the discrimination against the minority community. The Union Home Ministry had, after extensive reviews, restricted the blacklist of Sikh NRIs taking into account the current disposition of those inimical to the country.

It was hope that further pruning of the blacklist would facilitate all those anxious to visit their homeland but had been denied a visa for nearly two decades.

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US court orders Sikh's release

Houston, Dec. 4 – A federal appeals court in San Francisco has ordered immigration officials to release Sikh activist, Harpal Singh Cheema, who has been held for six years in jail for aiding and abetting terrorists overseas.

Immigration officials never tried to deport Cheema to India – where, according to court records, he had been “repeatedly arrested and tortured” – but kept him locked up because he helped raise money for Sikh militants.

According to a report published by *San Francisco Chronicle*, the US Court of Appeals in San Francisco ruled recently that a non-citizen's financial support of foreign terrorists does not automatically make one a danger to US national security. Since the government offered no evidence that Cheema was actually dangerous, he must be released from jail, cannot be deported and is eligible for political asylum, the court said, “It is by no means self-evident that a person engaged in extra-territorial or resistance activities – even militant activities – is necessarily a threat to the security of the USA,” wrote Judge John Noonan in the 2-1 ruling. “One country's terrorist can often be another's freedom fighter.”

The court also barred the deportation of Cheema's wife, Rajwinder Kaur, who lives in Fremont with their eight-year-old son, and was accused by US immigration officials of aiding terrorist groups. She has not been jailed, the couple's attorney, Robert Jobe said.

Cheema, who applied for asylum when he entered the USA with his wife in 1993, had been held in various federal immigration jails in California since November 1997.

[Courtesy: The Statesman]

Sikh woman makes it to Grammy's

Can you imagine a turban-wearing woman making it to the Grammy's with her devotional renderings?

But this is what appears to be on the cards. US-based Satnam Kaur Khalsa's solo album *Shanti* is in the semi-finals for being awarded a Grammy in the new age

category, according to a release by Sikhnet network – an American non–government organisation.

Selected from over a thousand albums by highly acclaimed artists, *Shanti* finds itself among a genre of music gaining widespread popularity with mentions in widely-acclaimed magazines like the *Time*, *Martha Stewart's Living*, *Newsweek* and many more.

In *Shanti*, Satnam Kaur Khalsa sings prayers from the Sikh tradition in Guru Granth. The “Sikhnet” network quotes Satnam as saying, “the songs go beyond all boundaries to break through to pure awareness.”

Satnam has also released three major albums and numerous *mantra* albums with a music group called “peace family.” These albums focus on spiritual themes.

[Courtesy: The Hindustan Times]

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“Desh Darpan”: Story of Calcutta’s oldest Punjabi daily

A report by Dr. Himadri Banerjee:

Since the 1930s, through the 1940s, and 1950s, and till today, the city of Kolkata enjoys the proud privilege of bringing out a Punjabi daily newspaper DESH-DARPAN, (from its office on Ashutosh Mukherjee Road). Its old files are unfortunately not available in its Kolkata office. The National Library, Kolkata is not in possession of these invaluable files. Even the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (which perhaps enjoys the privilege of having the richest newspaper collection in India) does not happen to possess its old files. The India Office Library and Records, London, could hardly offer any different answer in this regard.

This newspaper remained the most important platform of Sikh political and cultural activities in Eastern India. It used to highlight the manifold problems of the Sikhs of the region and its pioneering role could only be appreciated if some of its old files are seriously read and scrutinised.

I have with me, however, a few files of the *Desh-Darpan*. They are invaluable if any one is committed to reconstruct the history of the Eastern Indian Sikh activity of the pre-independence days.

The city of Kolkata had a small Sikh literary centre in the pre-independence days. Here, we have Munsha Singh Dukhi, Saudagar Singh “Bikhari” and many other Punjabi writers, who did pursue their literary activity at the Kavi Press, Bhowanipur. They would carry on their literary activity after performing their normal duties. They also contributed to the pages of the *Desh-Darpan* during its early days. Its founder editor was Sardar Niranjana Singh Talib, later joined by Raghbir Singh Bir. He played a very significant role in organising the scattered local Sikhs against British rule. The fighting role of the Kolkata Sikhs during the days of the Simon Commission agitation and the Akali movement have so far received very little attention of the scholars. They were all closely associated with the national movement.

Talib was perhaps preoccupied with the native Punjab state politics of Nabha in the pre-independence days. There is reason to believe that he was close to Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and probably helped him slip out of Kolkata in the late 1940s.

Since the 1920s, Baba Gurdit Singh, of *Komagata Maru* fame, had been in the city. All these factors gave a new dimension to the Sikh political and cultural life of the period. This newspaper no doubt highlighted these news in its different pages. The Punjab politics of the 1930s and 1940s did not escape the attention of the *Desh Darpan*. But we need to know more about this phase of Sikh political activity beyond Punjab.

The historic role of the Kolkata Sikhs in the Akali movement of the 1920s and other national political arena as well as their close link with the Punjab need no special mention. The city proudly remembers the role of Sikh leaders who had played an important role in the wider arena of the Sikh politics. We have heard about Mohan Singh Kalra, while we have long seen the legendary Captain Bhag Singh who, for decades, served as General Secretary of Sikh Cultural Centre and hon. editor of *The Sikh Review* during 1960's, & beyond, upto the days of the Operation Bluestar.

The daily *Desh Darpan*, and the monthly *The Sikh Review* remain landmark publication of the Sikhs, and indeed constitute a part of the larger Sikh heritage outside Punjab. **Any help in tracing the old files of Desh Darpan will be appreciated and gratefully acknowledged.** It is needed for reconstructing the history of the Sikhs outside Punjab within India.

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Sikhs Identified as The Community most at risk from Heart disease

There are an estimated 45 million patients of Coronary Artery Disease (CAD) in India. One fifth of the deaths in the country are from CAD. By the year 2020, the disease will account for one-third of all deaths in India. Sadly, many Indians will be dying young.

"In an Indian, heart disease occurs 10-15 years earlier than in people in the West," says Naresh Trehan, Chief Cardiac Surgeon of the highly acclaimed Escorts Heart Institute in the country's capital, New Delhi. Trehan strongly favors improving the awareness levels among school children and college goers so that the young generation is educated about the problem.

More and more people in India are becoming victims to CAD. According to a latest study, even people in their 30s are falling prey to the disease. Among those younger than 30, the CAD mortality among Indians is three times higher than those in the United Kingdom and 10-fold more than the Chinese in Singapore. **Among Indians, most at risk of CAD is the Punjabi/Sikh community, followed by the Rajasthanis and Keralites - the Sikhs for excessive use of dairy products, eggs and full-fat milk, including milk products like butter and ghee.**

“In Northern India, specially in Punjab, the pre-dominant cause of people suffering from heart diseases has been wrong food habits. In Kolkotta, smoking has been the prime culprit. In Chennai, patients suffer from diabetes, whereas residents of Mumbai seem to have high level of stress,” said Trehan.

“Stress and a sedentary lifestyle are the main causes of the people of Punjab suffering from heart problems.”

A pioneer cardiac surgeon, trained in Lucknow and New York, Naresh Trehan considers it fortunate that many new procedures and techniques are now available in the country.

“The newly developed beating-heart technique may benefit countless heart valve patients in the country,” he says. “Indian heart care and by-pass surgery are much less expensive than in the advanced countries.”

According to Trehan, not only are Indian cardiac surgeons better trained but also they provide the safest treatment with more than a 99% success rate.

The Escorts Heart Institute and Research Center has been organizing free heart checkup camps for people from Punjab. Though, in the past two years, awareness about diet and physical exercise has increased, the results will be seen only after five years.

“We cannot change the genetic pattern but some precautions can definitely reduce the incidence of heart diseases,” says H.P. Singh, “Heart disease is rising alarmingly, especially in the urban population.”

Giving up smoking, management of stress, relaxing exercises, yoga, control of high blood pressure and diabetes, and dietary precautions can help prevent heart disease.

H.P. Singh recommends a “Low-fat diet, lots of vegetables and fruits, exercise, and a complete change in lifestyle if there are strong hereditary indications such as diabetes or blood pressure.”

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Pritpal Singh Bindra’s Translation of Bhai Nand Lal’s Poetry

“*Kalaam-e-Goya*”, the English translation, by Sr. Pritpal Singh Bindra, of Persian works of Bhai Nand Lal has been published by the Institute of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh. The book was released by Sr. Gurcharan Singh Tohra, on the occasion of a seminar at Chandigarh in November, 2003. The book can be had from I.I.S.S., Tribune Chowk, Chandigarh.

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