

Malaysian Exhibition on bravery of the Sikhs in W.W. II

Malaysians will get to learn about the military contributions of the Sikhs at a one-day exhibition.

The exhibition, which will be held tomorrow at the Guardwara Sahib Tatt Khalsa hall, in Jalan Raja Alang, will showcase more than 300 black-and-white photographs of Sikh military participation all over the world, from the late 19th century till the end of World War II.

The exhibition organiser Harchand Singh said the exhibition was held in conjunction with 111th anniversary of the Battle of Saragarhi, which took place on Sep. 12, 1897.

The battle, which took place in the North-West Frontier Province (today a state in Pakistan), is recognised by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco) as one of the eight greatest stories of collective bravery in human history.

The battle pitted 21 Sikhs from the 36th Sikh Regiment of British India against more than 14,000 Afghan tribal warriors. All the 21 Sikhs were killed defending their post.

Among the highlights of the exhibition are 15 rare photographs of the Saragarhi battle in 1897.

[Courtesy: *The New Strait Times*, Malaysia]

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Bibi Gurddev Kaur Honoured

Bibi Gurdev Kaur, Chairperson of Sikh Nari Manch UK was awarded an OBE in Queen's Birthday list, for services to Sikh and Asian women. She attended her investiture at Buckingham Palace on 24th of November 2009 and received her award from the Princess Royal. She is the first Sikh lady to receive such an award for her work for the upliftment of the Sikh cause.

It is a proud moment for the Sikhs to be recognised by the Queen for her work on *Sikhi*.

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US Government Reverses Ban on Sikhs as Federal Security Officers

Landmark Civil Rights Victory for Sikh Community

Fresno, CA - The federal government has issued a policy allowing all Sikhs to serve as federal security officers while maintaining their turbans and beards. The decision was the result of a discrimination case filed by a Sikh security officer who was told that he could not maintain his turban and beard on the job.

The lawsuit settlement and change in policy are a major civil rights victory for the Sikh community. It marks the first time that a federal law enforcement agency has changed policy to accommodate the Sikh articles of faith.

The lawsuit that led to the settlement was brought jointly by the Sikh Coalition, Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights of the San Francisco Bay Area, and the law firm of Kecker & Van Nest LLP.

Fired Because He was a Sikh:

Ragbir Singh (who goes by “Major Gill”) wears a turban and keeps an unshorn beard, which are requirements of the Sikh faith. He comes from a family of freedom fighters who fought and were jailed during India’s struggle for independence. Major Gill served in the Indian Army for almost 34 years, retired with the rank of “major”, and subsequently immigrated with his family to the U.S. in 2004. Soon after, he began working as a security officer in Fresno, CA.

In 2005, Major Gill obtained a position with a company called NCLN20. The company held a contract with the Federal Protective Service (FPS) - a division of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) - to provide security guard services for federal facilities. Contract security officer positions are desirable because they often pay more than regular guard positions. Major Gill began serving on NCLN20’s government contract guarding a federal building in Fresno.

However, FPS’s uniform and grooming policies prohibited Major Gill from wearing a turban or keeping a beard on the job. Under these policies, contract security officers had to wear a uniform hat and be clean-shaven. Major Gill requested that the government accommodate his Sikh articles of faith. However, FPS refused - and forced him off of the contract. Because NCLN20 had no other security officer positions, the company fired him. Major Gill lost his job only because he is a Sikh.

The Sikh Coalition Intervenes:

Major Gill reached out to the Sikh Coalition for help in November 2005. The Coalition engaged the Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights (LCCR) and the law firm of Kecker & Van Nest LLP (KVN), both based in San Francisco, CA. The joint legal team filed internal complaints with DHS, and ultimately a lawsuit in a San Francisco federal court in 2007.

Through the case, the Coalition was able to push FPS to change its uniform and grooming policies to accommodate Sikh articles of faith. As a result, Sikhs can now serve as contract security guards with the federal government with unshorn hair, beards, turbans, and kirpans intact.

“Holding the federal government accountable for discriminating against Sikhs sends a strong message to private employers. If the government includes Sikh Americans in its workforce, then other employers are encouraged to do the same,” said Harsimran Kaur, Legal Director at the Sikh Coalition.

Notably, Major Gill’s case not only pushed the government to change its discriminatory policy, but he obtained money damages as part of its resolution. Major Gill settled his lawsuit against NCLN20 in January of 2008, and against the federal government in June of 2009. He received money damages from NCLN20 in 2008, and from the federal government just this month. “Both the policy change and the money damages will ensure that other employers think twice about the price of discriminating against Sikhs,” added Ms. Kaur.

The Sikh Coalition would like to thank attorneys Khari Tillery, Rose Darling, and Jon Streeter at KVN, Robert Rubin at LCCR, and Shirin Sinnar (formerly at LCCR) for their hard work and dedication to the case.

The Sikh Coalition urges all Sikhs to practice their faith fearlessly. If someone tells you to remove your articles of faith, please report the incident.



[Courtesy: Sr. Virenderjit Singh, Canada]

