

A Multi-million Gurdwara in Mumbai

Shailesh Bhatia writes: The day Gurudwara Sri Dasmesh Darbar at Guru Tegh Bahadur Nagar, Sion, was inaugurated was memorable for Mumbai's Sikh community. Not only because the gurudwara took three years to build, at an estimated cost of Rs 5 crore, but also because it was the first time the Five Head Granthis from Amritsar, Patna, Damdama Sahib, Nanded and Rakabganj, New Delhi assembled at one venue.

The Head Granthis performed the religious ceremonies for inauguration of the Gurudwara, which also houses a community computer centre (that can accommodate over 50 students at a time), a 20-bed hospital, a charitable outdoor dispensary, a library and a sewing class.

More than 500 Sikhs and non-Sikh *kar sevaks* volunteered to work in eight-hour shifts in their spare time for the last three years to construct the new five-storey structure, often carrying bricks and cement on their heads. "The Head Granthis are revered by the Sikh community for their devotion and deep scholarship.

Singh Saheb Jagtar Singh of the Golden Temple, Amritsar, said: This is the first time I have seen Arabian Sea," he exclaimed, as he stepped on to the promenade at Haji Ali and gazed at the sunset behind the Dargah on April 24. He explained: "Very few people know that our holy scripture gives a colourful account of Guru Nanak travelling to the Islamic holy city of Mecca from the shores of Mumbai?" (Actually, Guru Nanak used Kandla in Saurashtra for the voyage).

There are a lot of references made to the ocean in our holy text, in the physical and metaphorical sense. Till now I could only imagine what an ocean looked like whenever I came across any reference in the Granth Saheb, but seeing it with my own eyes is an experience beyond words," he said.

Singh Saheb Bhai Maan Singh of Damdama Sahib, Bhatinda, was greatly impressed by the short ferry ride off the Gateway Of India.

"The vastness of the sea can be only compared to the teeming humanity of this great city," he said.

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SGPC to set Minar-e-Khalsa

In connection with the 500th birth anniversary of Guru Angad Dev Ji, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbhandhak Committee (SGPC) plans to establish a "Minar-e-Khalsa."

This was decided in the meeting of SGPC's *shatabadi* committee held at Gurdwara Fatehgarh Sahib last May.

SGPC president Kirpal Singh, jathedars of Takhts Keshgarh Sahib, Damdama Sahib, head priest, Darbar Sahib, representative of Akhand Kirtani Jatha and noted scholars from three Punjabi Universities took part in the meeting.

A research centre would also be set up at Khadoor Sahib (where Satguru had spent lot of time) for research on Gurmukhi *Lippi* and *bani* of Guru Angad Dev ji. The

SGPC would publish Guru Granth Sahib in major Indian languages. Guru Angad Sahib had established *akharas* (sports -arenas) to promote physical fitness. A hospital could be established at Sarai Naga village, where the Guru was born.

President, SGPC recalled that the Sikh Reference Library was gutted during the infamous "Operation Blue Star," and many historical manuscripts had been taken away by the military and the civil authorities. He said he had no hope that these manuscripts could ever be retrieved, but scholars had been asked to extend help by providing historical documents to the SGPC.

[Courtesy: Jagpal Singh Tiwana]

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Bhai Mohkam Singh Memorial Gurdwara

When Guru Govind Singhji called for sacrifice and infused a new spirit by creating Khalsa on the historic Vaisakhi day 1699 AD among the people at Anandpur who came forward to offer their heads and receive Amrit was Bhai Mohkam Singh from Dwarka, Gujarat.

To celebrate this extraordinary even the sangat of Gujarat has decided to establish at Dwarka a Gurdwara. Accordingly a function was held last February, and foundation stone was laid. Besides prominent Sikhs representing Gurdwaras in Gujarat, Prof. Manjit Singh, Jathedar, Keshgarh Sahib attended. It is significant that the Jathedar of Kesgarh was associated since the Panch Piaras made history at Kesgarh Sahib.

Baba Lakha Singh has undertaken the *Kar Sewa* of this Gurdwara. The actual place of Bhai Sahib's is Bet-Dwarka, which is 30 km away from Dwarka, on the seashore. To reach Bet-Dwarka one has to travel to Okha, and then proceed by motorboat, to reach Bet Dwarka. Okha is connected with rail and is the last railway station of Ahmedabad, Rajkot, Jamnagar, Dwarka, and there is a direct train from Jammu Tavi to Okha, apart from other trains from Ahmedabad. Bet-Dwarka has a population of about 10,000, mostly inhabited by Muslims and Hindus, with virtually no Sikh population, although there are couple of Sikh families at Dwarka and a Gurdwara exists.

Donations are invited for the Bhai Mohkam Singh Memorial Gurdwara.

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KPS Gill set 'quotas' for killings

Amit Sharma reported from Chandigarh last May:

The committee for Co-ordination on Disappearances in Punjab (CCDP) claims to have a "taped" conversation with a senior superintendent of police (SSP), in which he disclosed how "torture and killing" had become routine for a set of SSPs in Punjab during the days of insurgency.

The SSP disclosed how the Akal Takht jathedar, Gurdev Singh Kaonke, was "actually killed" during police torture. The CCDP says it had conclusive evidence that Kaonke was tortured and killed by the police.

The report also says former Director-General of Police, K.P.S. Gill used to give SSP “quotas” for killing Sikhs in exchange for powerful postings at his periodic review meetings. Though the full transcript of the taped interview has not been released, excerpts of the interview have been reproduced in CCDP’s report - “Reduced to Ashes: The Insurgency and Human Rights in Punjab”. The report is yet to be released.

In the report, a copy of which Hindustan Times has procured, the SSP is quoted as having told the committee members: “Before such a meeting with Gill, 300-400 Sikhs used to die in Punjab. Every SSP had to report: I have killed 14. The other who said I have killed 28 was appreciated more. The third SSP who had to outsmart the first two had to report 31. The night before the periodic meeting with Gill, the Sikhs used to die so that the SSP’s in (the) state could vie with each others in showing their anti-terrorist achievements.”

Prepared by human right activist Ram Narayan Kuma, the report was to be released, in New Delhi last May. Ram Narayan Kumar, the CCDP convenor, has been working with Tapan Bose, secretary-General of the South Asia Forum for Human Rights (SAFHR) on human rights violation in Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir over the past two decades. SAFHR has undertaken to publish the contents of the report after its release.

The CCDP examined 513 cases, which offer information on 672 bodies that were illegally cremated. Listing case studies of how human rights organization were “silenced to hush up” violation of human rights, the report also accuses the CBI of giving in to pressure while dealing with the Supreme Court’s mandate to investigate secret cremations.

Gill described the report and the taped interviews as “malicious and far from the truth.”

“It is absolutely false and nasty,” he told the *Hindustan Times*. Questioning the credentials of the report and the writer, Gill said: “Though I have not yet gone through the contents of report, at this stage I can say that human rights organizations had virtually created a mess in Punjab during those tough days.”

[Courtesy: *HindustanTimes*]

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Sikh falls victim to US hate crime

S. Rajagopalan reporting from Washington, last May: A Sikh was shot at and seriously injured by a group of white men in the latest incident of hate crime in the US, triggering fresh concern among the immigrants who have condemned the attack.

At least two white men fired at Avtar Singh Chiera, a 52-year-old driver, injuring him seriously when he was waiting for his son to pick him up after parking his 18-wheeler in north Phoenix, Arizona. While he was waiting, the white men pulled up in a small red pickup truck and started yelling at him, Chiera said in a Phoenix hospital. “I heard that voice: ‘Go back to where you belong to’. And at the same time I heard the shot,” he said. The men opened fire, wounding Chiera in the lower abdomen and

upper thigh. He was not robbed and nothing was taken from the truck, said Phoenix police detective Tony Morales.

Chiera's son, Hardeep Singh, 23, an Arizona state university student, found his father bleeding in the parking lot. "He was in a lot of pain," Hardeep said.

"He is recovering,": Dr Rajwant Singh, chairman of Sikh Council said. Police and Federal authorities are investigating the shooting as a case of hate crime.

The shooting of Chiera comes less than two years after Balbir Singh Sodhi, a gas station owner, was shot dead in Arizona, days after the 9/11 terror strike. Because of his turban and beard, he was probably mistaken as a follower of Osama bin Laden. The alleged killer, Frank Silva Roque, was subsequently arrested and charged, but the trial has yet to commence. Lakhwinder 'Rana' Singh Sodhi, Balbir's brother, who also knows Chiera, said the second shooting in Arizona is "frustrating".

The Sikh Council issued an appeal to President George Bush urging him to call upon "fellow Americans to observe tolerance and respect for diversity which are hallmarks of our society". While appreciating Bush's efforts in the war against terror, the council urged the administration to deal with the racial profiling and discrimination against Sikhs.

[Courtesy: *Hindustan Times*]

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Sant Bhindranwale declared martyr by Akal Takht

Amritsar/New Delhi: Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, said to be the architect of militancy in Punjab in 1980's, was last June declared a "martyr" by Akal Takht, 19 years after he was killed in the army assault on the Golden Temple.

Akal Takht Jathedar Joginder Singh Vedanti, while honouring Bhindranwale as a 'martyr', presented a robe of honour to his son Ishar Singh at a function organised by the SGPC at Manji Sahib on the premises of the Golden Temple. The function was attended by almost all SGPC functionaries, including loyalists of veteran Akali leader G S Tohra and former chief minister, Parkash Singh Badal. However, chief Kirpal Singh Badungar was conspicuous by his absence.

The function coincided with the anniversary of 'Operation Blue Star'. Bhindranwale was killed on June 6, 1984 during the operation.

In New Delhi, the Congress Party who was in power in 1984 when the army invaded the holy precincts, regretted the Akal Takht action. "It is very unfortunate. any philosophy which propogates violence and terrorism should not be honoured," spokesman Anand Sharma said.

