

## **American Sikhs try to clear the air**

Concerned over more than 200 hate crimes being reported against their community in the wake of the September 11 strikes, US-based Sikhs will organise a unique programme aimed at clearing misunderstanding about the world's fifth largest religion.

Half a million Sikhs in the US held a "Reach Out to Neighbours" programme to clear misunderstanding about the religion, Sikh Council on Religion and Education (SCORE) said.

As Sikhs have a distinctive identity in their turbans and beards, they were erroneously associated with al-Qaida and Osama bin Laden, the organisers from SCORE said. "Although Sikhs have resided and worked in this country for more than 100 years, the aftermath of 9/11 attacks revealed that many Americans are ignorant of Sikh beliefs and their identity," the organisers said.

Sikh children were being victimised by their peers leading to tremendous psychological stress, they alleged.

A national event - "Sharing Your Faith with Your Neighbours" - was held on November 10 in association with more than 100 Sikh Gurdwaras in the US and it coincided with the birth-anniversary of the founder of Sikhism, Guru Nanak, which was celebrated from November 16-19, they said.

The objective of this event was to make Americans aware about contributions of Sikhs to the US, they said. It will also educate non-Sikhs about the Sikh religion and its traditions, including singing and reading of hymns from the Sikh scriptures besides narrating historical passages pertaining to Sikhs, they added.

The specially designed programme involved non-Sikhs mingling with their Sikh neighbours and friends and partaking Langar, they added.

"We have drawn upon the experience of the other faith communities in America that have a long tradition of inviting their neighbours to observe their services and participate in meals to create an awareness about themselves," Sher Singh, SCORE's Community Relations Director, said.

"We hope to bring our message to as many people as possible. In addition to other faith communities, we invited elected officials, members of civic groups and police and other law enforcement and support agencies," Rajwant Singh, Chairperson of SCORE, said.

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## **Jathedars not competent to issue "directives"**

By issuing "*hukumnamas*" (directives) the jathedars of five takhts have of late wielded powers which "*gurmat*" never vested in them. This observation has been made by Sr. Joginder Singh Sawhney, Sr Gurtej Singh, General Narinder Singh (Retd.), Sr. Rajinder Singh, Sr. Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon and Justice Ajit Singh Bains in a letter addressed to the Jathedar of Akal Takht.

They further held that even Jathedars elected during "Sarbat Khalsa" in 18th Century never issued any "*hukumnamas*". The practice of using Sikh clergy to issue "directives" started at the behest of the British. Neither Akali Phula Singh nor his predecessors ever issued "*hukumnama*". Sikh Gurdwara Act gave Jathedars no such rights. The *Vak* taken from Guru Granth Sahib at Darbar Sahib every morning is the only *Hukumnama*.

The panel appealed to the Jathedars to restore the right to take decisions to the Sikh congregation. The duties and responsibilities of Jathedars should be limited to the enforcement of "*gurmattas*" and decisions of the Panth.

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## **Christian Missions Proselytizing Sikhs?**

***A letter from Sr. Tarlochan Singh, Vice-Chairman, National Commission for Minorities in India to Archbishop, Vincent M Concessao, President, Catholic Bishops Council of India:***

"Dear Sir, I have been receiving a large number of reports and letters from various Sikh organizations of alleged conversion of Sikhs to Christianity. You are well aware that the Sikhs and Christians have lived in peace in India for centuries. We had always given full respect to each other and there had been no occasion for any misgiving. Even at the time of partition in 1947 when there was lot of bloodshed, the Sikh community fully protected the Christian College at Batala in Punjab and all the churches in the state. The Sikhs believe that everyone is free to adopt his way of worship and we should give full respect to all religions. We never try to influence or make any promises to anybody in order to change his religion. We pray for the welfare of entire mankind.

Two months back in some villages in Punjab, Christian Missionary, fully supported with medical teams, have been going around in many villages alluring poor Sikh families to adopt Christianity. There have been some instances where they helped them with medicines and, after the treatment, they told them that it was not medicine but the name of Christ which ultimately cured. There have been a few cases of conversion on this account in Punjab. The recent happenings in Bhilai in Chhatisgarh where the Christian Missionary have again tried to woo Sikh families has been seriously noticed.

I request you to please examine all these cases and adopt a policy not to make further attempts of converting Sikhs through any means. You will agree with me that conversion is a serious issue with all communities and already there have been tension between various communities in India in the recent past because of this. We do not

want that two minority communities, i.e. Sikhs and Christians, should now try to make efforts to undermine each other or try to get more numerical strength through conversion. Indian Constitution allows freedom of expression and we all should adhere to this principle. It is always better to consolidate our positions and make our own people better citizens and better human beings without religious preaching. Communal tension in India has already done more harm than any other thing. Our efforts should be towards inter-faith unity in order to achieve brotherhood among ourselves.

I hope you will be kind enough to take action at your end.

Yours sincerely,

Tarlochan Singh"

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## **Sarup Singh Alag awarded D.Litt**

Raman Deep Singh reports: Eminent scholar and international fame, Dr. Sarup Singh Alag, Chairman, Alag Shabad Yug Trust, Ludhiana, has been awarded the D. Litt Degree by an American university for his outstanding achievements in literature. Dr. Alag is the author of 42 books in Panjabi, English and Hindi, which are being distributed free of cost, with the financial support of sangat and donors through Alag Shabad Yug Trust. Earlier in 1999 Dr. Alag had been awarded Ph.D. by a Washington based university on his thesis concerning Sri Guru Granth Sahib.

Dr. Alag is doing yeoman services to society in variety of ways. Because of his selfless services he was recently awarded 'Rising Personalities of India award' for year 2002 by International Penguin House, New Delhi. This coveted award was bestowed upon Dr. Alag keeping in view his exceptional calibre, outstanding achievements, and enrichment of society by his writings.