

## **Post-9/11 killer of Balbir Singh Sodhi in Arizona convicted**

Rejecting claims of insanity, a jury convicted the man who killed Indian immigrant Balbir Singh Sodhi after the 9/11 terror attacks of first-degree murder.

Frank Silva Roque, who assumed the turbaned Sodhi to be an Arab terrorist and gunned down the Sikh immigrant outside his petrol pump on September 15, 2001, could get the death penalty.

The jury, which began the hearing on Monday in Arizona, also found Roque guilty of attempted murder, drive-by shooting and endangerment for two more racially motivated attacks.

Roque's lawyers argued that he was insane at the time of the shooting and suffered from mental illness his entire life. They contended that Roque did not start using racial slurs until after the terror attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

Prosecutor Vince Imbordino argued that Roque was motivated by anger and hatred following the terrorist attacks, not insanity.

He noted that Roque had practiced shooting and reloading before killings Sodhi in Arizona. After killing Sodhi, Roque allegedly shot at another gas station where the clerk was a man of Lebanese, and later opened fire at the home of an Afghan family. No one was hurt in these incidents. Sodhi's brother expressed satisfaction with the verdict.

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## **Killer of Sikh gets death sentence in US**

The man who gunned down Sikh gas station owner Balbir Singh Sodhi in a post-9/11 hate crime in Mesa, Arizona, has been awarded the death sentence. The jury made the decision on Thursday after rejecting the killer Frank Roque insanity plea.

Before the pronouncement the jury heard a psychiatrist and members of the Sodhi family. Psychiatrist Jack Potts had claimed that the 9/11 attacks had acted as a trigger for Roque's rage, born of a genetic history mental illness.

But prosecutors told the court that Roque had also fired shots at the home of an Afghan family and another service station which employed a Lebanese American cashier.

Prosecutor Vince Imbordino, who had argued that Roque acted out of anger and hate, said after the verdict, "I'm pleased to see they (jurors) were able to see through the guise of mental illness."

Sodhi's brother, Lakhwinder Singh Sodhi, welcomed the death sentence to Roque. "The jury brought justice back to our family. They came with a verdict of the truth... We showed the whole world that this is the country of justice," he said.

Chairman of the Sikh Council, Rajwant Singh, welcomed the judgment, saying: "We are quite satisfied that justice has been done, although the suffering and the loss suffered by the Sodhi family cannot be compensated. The ruling has given a very strong signal that hate crimes cannot be tolerated in the American society."

Sodhi (49) had emigrated to the US in the 1980s. His parents and the rest of his family live in Peshewal in Kapurthala district in Punjab.

He was gunned down in front of his petrol station on September 15, 2001, four days after the twin tower attacks.

Sodhi was the first victim in a rash of hate crimes against Sikh men, who were mistaken to be Arab followers of Osama bin Laden because of their turbans and beards. Later, Sikh organizations launched a major campaign in the media to explain that their religion demanded sporting of beard and wearing a turban. Many wore buttons saying, "I am a Sikh."

Eyewitnesses said Roque, who is on powerful anti-psychotic drugs, showed no emotion when the verdict was read out.

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## **The 1984 Massacre Nanavati Panel extension**

The Union Cabinet is likely to extend the tenure of the Justice Nanavati Commission, enquiring into the anti-Sikh riots in the Capital and other parts of the country after the assassination of Indira Gandhi on 31 October 1984.

The issue will be placed before the Union Cabinet on Friday.

The riots began the next day and a number of Delhi Congressmen were accused of being involved in them. Over 10,000 Sikhs died in the riots.

The Commission was set up on 8 May 2000 and it has already received four extensions. The new date of submitting the report is 3 April 2004.

Several other commissions have preceded the Nanavati panel on the anti-Sikh riots, including the Ranganath Mishra Commission.

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## **Sikh high priests define Takht role**

The five Sikh high priests announced that all the four Takhts, including Patna Sahib, Hazoor Sahib, Damdama Sahib and Kesgarh Sahib could take up regional issues pertaining to Sikh affairs, including the religious and social. Akal Takht, however, has been declared supreme of all Takhts by the Sikh clergy.

Jathedar Patna Sahib, Giani Iqbal Singh and a representative of Hazoor Sahib were present at the meeting held at Akal Takht secretariat in Amritsar today. With the today's decision, the functioning of all Takhts and role of jathedars has become clear. The issue of supremacy had emerged when Takht Patna Sahib has declared Mr. Mohinder Singh Romana *tankhaiya* (guilty of religious misconduct). Mr. Romana had claimed that it was the prerogative of Akal Takht to declare any Sikh *tankhaiya* and the Jathedar of Patna Sahib had stuck to his point that all Takhts had the right to pronounce edicts.

However, the Sikhs high priests have declared that the decisions pertaining to the entire Sikh Panth would be taken up by all five Jathedars of the Takhts at Akal Takht. In case the Jathedar of any takht is not able to attend such meetings, a high

priest from Akal Takht and the Golden Temple could participate in their place. The decision of Akal Takht would, however, would be considered final.

Meanwhile, the Sikh clerics took a serious view of a defamation suit filed against Takht Patna Sahib by Mr. Romana. The development was considered a violation of the *maryada*. The Sikh clergy directed Mr. Romana to give his explanation by 20 October by presenting himself before Akal Takht.

The meeting also took a serious view of the acts of sacrilege with regard to the holy Guru Granth Sahib. The state government was asked to cooperate with the SGPC's fact-finding teams to prevent such act in future.

[Courtesy: *Statesman New Service*]

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## Celebrating Scholarship

**W.H. McLeod – A Tribute**  
**A life devoted to the study of the Sikhs**

As it often happens, foreign scholars do a more thorough research on Indian themes than Indians themselves. When it comes to the Sikhs, Cunningham, followed by Trump and Macauliffe, were the pioneers. The latest is the New Zealander, W.H. MacLeod.

Emeritus professor at the University of Otago in Dunedin, he is seriously ill. I wish to record the gratitude of my community for what he has done for it.

After getting a Doctorate from the school of Oriental Studies in London, McLeod came to Batala, in Punjab, to teach English. He was there for nine long years. The choice was to do research on the Arya Samaj or the Sikhs. He chose the latter. He learnt Gurmukhi, studied the Sikh scriptures, *janam sakhis* (life stories) of Guru Nanak and whatever else was available on the subject. His first book, *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*, was published in 1968. It shook conventional Sikh scholars out of their complacency as he cast doubts on the authenticity of Guru Nanak's travels to Basra, Baghdad, Makka and Madina as well as to distant parts of India and Sri Lanka.

His second book, *The Evolution of the Sikh Community*, was published in 1976. He gave a lucid account of how, from modest beginnings as a Bhakti cult, Sikhism spread to the people to become a formidable force. Eight other books followed. I did not go along with McLeod on his later works, particularly one on *rahit maryadas* (traditional rituals), in which he highlighted the writings of nondescript *granthis* of little repute or consequence, pronouncing *fatwas* as some *maulvis* do. Nevertheless my respect and affection for the man remained. It was too much to expect emotional involvement in the fortunes of a community to which he did not belong.

I am told he has recently published his autobiography. I have not yet laid my hands on it. It should be worth reading. Besides writing on the Sikhs, he nurtured Sikh studies in universities in N. America. My good wishes to the ailing scholar.

Khushwant Singh  
[Courtesy: *The Telegraph*]

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## **U.S. Award for Dr. Jasbir Singh Sarna**

Punjabi poet, scholar and historiographer Dr. Jasbir Singh Sarna has been nominated by the American Biographical Institute, as a Consulting Editor of 'The Contemporary Who's Who'. The prestigious nomination arrived to Dr. Sarna in a personal letter by C. A. Mitchell, Editor-in-Chief along with a complimentary certificate. Dr. Sarna has sixteen books to his credit. It is for the first time that a Sikh scholar has been nominated to this prestigious title.

### **Human Rights: India Prunes Sikh NRI "Blacklist"**

Government of India The Union home has "substantially" pruned the "blacklist" of NRI Sikhs following the intervention of the National Human Rights Commission. These Sikhs living in various foreign countries are being denied visas to visit the country.

The Home Ministry has removed the names of 355 people from the "negative list", which had 489 names during 1998-99.

The NHRC initiated action on the basis of a letter from Sr. Tarlochan Singh, Chairman, National Minorities Commission highlighting the issue relating to denial of visas to some Sikh NRIs who wanted to visit the country for humanitarian reasons. These people were among the Sikhs who are holding foreign citizenship and whose names were "blacklisted" by the Home Ministry in the wake of Punjab militancy in 1980's.

The NHRC had issued a notice to the Home Ministry on the issue. In its 6 August report to the Rights panel, the Home Ministry stated that the "negative list" had been reviewed periodically and that the last "deletion circular" was issued on 28 July. The report said the list, as on 6 August, accounted for only 134 Sikhs, still barred from entry.

The Rights panel reviewed the report yesterday. It asked the Ministry for a copy of the 28 July circular. It also forwarded to the ministry a recent letter from Mr. Simranjit Singh Mann, MP, regarding the case of an England-based Sikh for its comments, sources said. – SNS

**[Courtesy - *The Statesman*]**

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## **Sikhism in South America**

With the efforts of Yogi Bhajan, the Sikh Dharma Western Hemisphere has been able to translate Sri Guru Granth Sahib in Spanish language. This translation which is in 8 volumes has been done by S. Gurdev Singh Khalsa living in Houston. According to the information received by S. Tarlochan Singh, Chairman, National Commission for Minorities, the language used is 'Neutral Spanish' which is the prevalent language in Mexico, Chili, Argentina and Paraguay, the South American countries. In addition to this, Japji of Guru Nanak Dev Ji has been translated in '*Guarani*' which is indigenous language used in Southern Bolivia, Northern Argentina

and Paraguay. It is estimated that about 6 million people will be benefitted to know about Sikh Dharma through this.

S.Gurubachan Singh Khalsa who is leading jewellery designer in New Mexico state of America was deputed by Yogi Bhajan to the South American countries and he has organised the first 'Kundalini Yoga Festival' in Asuncion, Paraguay on June 27th where more than 130 Paraguayians learned yoga practiced meditations from Sri Guru Granth Sahib and also learned Bhangra. S. Gurubachan Singh Khalsa also appeared on television and more than one million Paraguayians heard his one and half hour interview on Sikh religion and meditations. The telephone lines were so flooded with callers asking about Sikh Dharma, meditation and yoga that the phone operators were not able to handle all the calls. Sri Guru Granth Sahib in Spanish language was also installed in the Republic of Paraguay by organising the function on Sunday the June 29th. A similar function was also organised in Buenos Aires, capital of Argentina and as per the information received, there was a tremendous amount of interest about Sikh religion among the people.

About 100 years ago, the Sikhs from Punjab were taken to Argentina by the British authorities when the railway line was being laid between Argentina and Bolivia. They settled permanently in the province of Salta in Northern Argentina and engaged themselves in agriculture. They have moved from farming to business and are now considered as highly respected community in that area. During the last 50 years, the community integrated in Argentina culture by marrying local women and now they speak only Spanish language. There are thousands of daughters and sons of Sikhs who were completely Argentine. After the visit of Giani Zail Singh, the then President of India to Salta, the Sikhs built a Gurdwara in Rosario De la Frontera, Salta, where they offer '*Langar*' (community kitchen) as per the Sikh tradition. They have recently engaged a Punjabi knowing Granthi. S. Gurubachan Singh Khalsa provided them a copy of Sri Guru Granth Sahib in Spanish and told them that they should not consider as the last of the Sikhs in Argentina because in reality, they are the first of the new wave of Sikhs in South America. The Sikhs were appreciative of the fact that finally they can learn Sikh scriptures in Spanish. The response was over-whelming especially from the youth. They have all prayed that someone to come and help them to bridge the tremendous gap in language, culture and teachings. Yogi Bhawan is confident that teachings of Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji will be accepted by large number of people in South American countries.

Tarlochan Singh, Chairman  
National Commission for Minorities  
Lok Nayak Bhawan  
New Delhi 110 003

## **Turbaned Sikhs to walk the fashion ramp**

Turbaned Sikh youths will walk the ramp for the first time during the International Sikhs Youth Conference in Amritsar.

These models will be a part of the fashion show "Ni Maye: Sikh Sohne Lagde Ne" (Oh Mother: Sikhs look Good). A Delhi-based model agency, Launchers, is training the 11 turbaned men. They have been asked to follow a diet chart. These young Sikh models have been short-listed from 20 Khalsa collegians and other institutions. They have worked hard on their walk as they have never been on the ramp. They

are watching videos of fashion shows to improve their body language so that they can look great on the ramp without compromising their religious values.

The models are happy that they will be a part of history as they would be the first turbaned Sikh men to walk the ramp. The choreographer of the show, Elusra Khan, says they will have a fusion of Western and Punjabi music for the show. The models will wear casuals, formal Western and ethnic outfits as well.