

Minorities Commission Vice Chairman Honoured in USA

India Journal reports from Los Angeles, CA - Vice Chairman of National Commission for Minorities, Government of India, Sardar Tarlochan Singh, was honoured by the Sikhs of Southern California at a grand dinner reception held at Sitar Cuisine of India in Pasadena, June 22. He was praised for protecting and defending the interests and concerns of all the minorities in India and acting as their voice.

Addressing over 150 members of the community who attended the dinner reception, Tarlochan Singh urged the Sikhs to make it a habit of donating 10 percent of their time and intellect for community purposes. He said it is all right if some members of the community donate 10 percent of their income also for community causes and concerns, but it should not be wasted on putting more gold and marble on Gurdwara buildings.

Projecting a positive and better image of the Sikh community by displaying various exhibits depicting glorious aspects of Sikh tenets, history, culture and traditions in various museums, and getting them included in some good Hollywood movies, would be a much better investment. Opening more schools should be preferred to establishing more shrines, he added.

He urged the Sikhs to keep and preserve their distinct, separate and independent identity as ordained by Guru Gobind Singh in 1699 while transforming Sikhs into Khalsa Panth 303 years ago. Disappointingly seeing some Sikhs without turban and beard, he remarked that not a single Muslim is reported to have disobeyed or questioned the order of Hazrat Mohammed Sahib contained in Koran during their history of nearly 1,400 years to get circumcised, whereas some of misguided Sikhs have sadly started disobeying the order of Guru Gobind Singh to preserve *Kesh*.

Referring to the latest, American scientific studies which have pronounced the existences of innumerable skies, suns and moons, Tarlochan Singh said this was proclaimed by Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, more than 500 years ago and was mentioned in the holy scripture. He said the world started worrying about the environment only since 1983 but Guru Nanak had said about all this more than 500 years ago.

Referring to Guru Granth Sahib, the holy scripture of the Sikhs, he said this was the only inter-faith scripture in the world in which are contained the holy composition of not only Gurus but also of 30 Muslim sufis, Hindus, Brahmins and Hindu saints.

His 20-minute speech was applauded and at the end of the speech, he was given a standing ovation.

Sardar Tarlochan Singh also addressed large Sunday congregations at Gurdwara Vermont in Hollywood, Guru Ram Das Ashram in Los Angeles and Gurdwara Lankershim in North Hollywood on June 23. He was presented *Siropas* (robes of honor) at these shrines. Dr. Piara Singh, President, Kirtan Singh Khalsa, Secretary, Sikh Dharma of Western Hemisphere, and Bhupinder Singh Brar welcomed Sardar Tarlochan Singh at their respective Gurdwaras.

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Ranbaxy: A global corporation

Interview with Malvinder Singh

"My credo: I believe in a global mindset, quality and scale. I remain focussed and take risks. I'm open and transparent, see what is best in an overall perspective and act on own initiative, repose full confidence in my team and assume full responsibility.

"My aspirations: I inherited a business and I will go on to build an empire ... turn Ranbaxy into a global corporation. I want to redefine health care in India. Create strong brands that people have faith in.

"My inspiration: N.R. Narayana Murthy, whom I admire for his professional values, ethics and for down-to-earth style.

"Success for me: The corporation that I lead should be seen as a benchmark of excellence, be it Ranbaxy, Fortis or SRK Ranbaxy.

"Vision for India: A country where every citizen has access to basic necessities for a decent living. Alleviation of poverty. Opportunity to all for good education and healthcare facilities."

UK Sikhs want to shed Indian tag

Times News Network reports: Amid apparently gathering momentum, members of 600,000-strong British Sikh community, the largest outside Punjab, are lobbying to break free from the tag of 'India' and be recognised by the government as a "separate ethnic group".

The campaign is spearheaded by the Sikh Secretariat (SS), which describes itself as the aspirational "civil service of the Sikh nation" It wants the classification 'Sikh' to be entered into all government community data, such as the ethnic make-up of companies and racial harassment cases, particularly post-September 11. The move, claims Davinderjeet Singh of the SS, is utterly "unthreatening for the India government, not linked to a separatist agenda and is meant only for the UK to prevent discrimination and victimisation".

The SS, an umbrella body of Sikh organisations, however, offers frank support to its eight-month old, grandly titled campaign for the "Sikh Agenda", which lists as its aims "self-determination for the Sikh nation" and the lifting of the UK government's ban on the International Sikh Youth Federation under anti-terrorism laws.

Britain's Home Office Minister Angela Eagle is to meet Singh, a second-generation Indian immigrant, later this month to discuss the SS demands for her government to recognise the UK's 28-year-old legal position, that Sikhs are an ethnic group with a unique identity.

Adds Bhupinder Singh, another second-generation immigrant who edits a leading community chronicle *Sikh Spirit*, "This has nothing to do with demands for autonomy from India or separate statehood. If it were , I would have second thoughts".

The SS, which admits only to an "informal administrative structure" says it is seeking to "influence the UK government's foreign policy" towards India, while its charter of aims makes reference to Bhindranwale and "the widespread abuse of human rights of Sikhs... state oppression in India".

Sikhs, who claim to be the third largest religious grouping in the UK, with "Punjabi" as the second language of London and England", are generally thought to enjoy a positive image, as in their fielding of the 91-year-old Fauja Singh as the oldest runner in the London marathon last April.

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Sikh charges NYPD with bias

New York: A former Sikh police officer has filed a federal discrimination complaint against New York Police Department with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, alleging that his services were terminated because he refused to remove his turban and trim his beard.

According to the complaint filed with the commission, Americ Singh Rathour, 25, of Queens borough of New York, passed all the requisite tests. He was sworn in as a traffic enforcement agent with the NYPD on June 18 last year.

During his training period, his supervisors reportedly objected to his wearing a turban and keeping a beard. Subsequently, Rathour was expelled from the department on August 27.

Maintaining that he was harassed by his superiors, Singh said: "They tried to pressure me to remove my turban and trim my beard and I felt I was being punished because of my unwillingness to compromise on my religion."

"The NYPD forced Americ to choose between his religion and his livelihood. This is a choice no one should be forced to make," said Harpreet Singh, director of a Sikh coalition.

[Courtesy: *The Telegraph*]

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American Sikhs win \$5m in racial bias lawsuit

A US Federal jury has asked oil giant Arco to pay over \$5million to three Sikh brothers who filed a suit against the company saying they were harassed, discriminated against and fired.

The Seattle district court ruled in favour of the Bains brothers - Harinder Paul, Gurinder and Gagandeep - ordering Arco to pay the amount in damages.

The verdict, the brothers said, is vindication of their company "Flying B", a gas station chain in Eastern Washington, which Arco said was fired because of safety violations and poor performance.

"This is telling them they cannot treat us like this," Paul said. "This is sending a message to Arco and people like that. For us, it is a milestone."

But Arco insisted the contract with Flying B was terminated because of safety violations, adding it may appeal the verdict.

The brothers said an Arco employee harassed them and their other Indian drivers repeatedly calling them "rag heads", "diaper heads" and "camel jockeys" because of their heritage. Two of the three brothers wear turbans and beards.

The Bains family, who arrived in the US since 1987 and settled in Okanogan, had set up their company in 1996. Paul said the discrimination began on the first day, when he tried to make conversation with the a supervisor at the Seattle gas pumps.

For the seven months Flying B contracted with Arco, its employees, many of them Sikhs from India, were almost constantly abused by Arco workers, Bains said.

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Jadavpur University revives the Guru Nanak Chair

Honour for Prof. Himadri Bannerjee

To mark the celebration of Quin Centennial of Guru Nanak Devji in 1969, India's University Grants Commission established four Chairs for the development of Sikh studies in different parts of India. One of the Chairs was assigned to Jadavpur University, Department of History, Kolkata, in recognition of the rich contribution of many Bengali scholars.

Its first incumbent was Professor Anil Chandra Banerjee, a pioneer in the field of research on Sikhism, appointed to the Chair in 1970. As the first incument, he authored some outstanding works in the history and religion of Sikhs. However, after his retirement, there was a *hiatus* and, in the process its scope and work were very much diluted. The Chair remained vacant for nearly a decade. The Sikhs of Kolkata and the SGPC tried their level best so that the Chair could be restored to its rightful dignity.

At long last in June 2002, the University has finally selected a person to the post. He is Professor Himadri Banerjee (b.1945) of Rabindra Bharati University, Kolkata. His association with Sikh history goes back to the 1980s when the Punjab tragedy led to the massacre of many innocent Sikhs. The suffering of the Sikhs as well as the conflict with the ruling class compelled Professor

Banerjee to focus on the field of Sikh studies. In his two-decade long work of history and perceptions of Sikhism, he has been trying to reconstruct the Sikhs history and Sikhism's close contact with the Indian social and cultural tradition over the centuries. His studies are primarily centred on the Assamese, Bengali and Oriya sources traceable to the days of First Anglo-Sikh War (1845?) concluding with a note outlining the patterns of the development of Sikh studies of the post-Partition India, entitled *The Other Sikhs*, to be published shortly by Manohar of New Delhi. He is presently engaged in a second volume dealing with the advent of Sikhism in eastern India (*circa* the early sixteenth Century. It seeks to outline the evolution and development of Sikhism in a region far away from its place of birth.

Professor Banerjee has been long associated with the different reputed academic journals associated with the standard history of Sikhism. His scholarly essays have been published in India and abroad. In the course of the last two decades, he has attended several leading international and national level symposium on Sikh studies. He has long been on the Editorial Panel of *The Sikh Review*.

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Delhi Gurdwara Election: Use of money, liquor reported Sr. Tarlochan Singh's Protest

Varinder Walia of *The Tribune News Service* writes:

"Despite clear directives of Jathedar Akal Takht, liquor and money were distributed freely during the recently concluded Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee elections."

In a communication to Giani Joginder Singh Vedanti, Mr Tarlochan Singh, Vice-Chairman, National Commission for Minorities sought his immediate intervention in bringing about reforms in the gurdwara polls. He said it was a matter of shame that the candidate also indulged in horse-trading during the election.

Mr Tarlochan Singh said that it was a matter of concern that the "gurdwara funds" were misused during the Delhi gurdwara polls. He said the serious allegations and counter-allegations, levelled by the candidates during the gurdwara poll attracted criticism from all quarters, including from the non-Sikhs. He said huge amounts were spent by the candidates to woo voters, as such no 'clean person' could contest the gurdwara elections.

The vice-chairman said in wake of the 'pollution' creeping into the gurdwaras management of these, shrines had become a great challenge for even Akal Takht how to take corrective measures to bring reforms. He said in the prevailing situation doubts were being raised about the enactment of the proposed All-India Gurdwara Act. Mr Tarlochan Singh said Sikh all over the

country felt if the prevailing situation continued it would be difficult to give clean administration in the Sikh shrines in the rest of the country.

Sikh shot in US

Ignored father's advice to return home

K.P. Nayar reports from Washington: Jaswant Singh Sodhi, whose son Sukhpal lost his life in a fatal shooting at his cab in San Francisco on Sunday, August 4, had asked all his six sons living in the US to return home to Punjab's Kapurthala district in the wake of hate crimes against Sikhs following the terrorist attacks against American on September 11, 2001.

Last month the Sodhi family, which has more than 50 members in the US, was regretting that the old man's wise advice was not heeded.

On Aug. 4, Sukhpal became the second of Jaswant's sons to be murdered in America in less than a year. His elder brother Balbir was the first person to be killed at the petrol station he owned in Mesa, Arizona, in a wave of hate crimes against Asians and Arabs following September 11, 2001.

Balbir's alleged killer, who now faces death penalty, told the police that "I stand for America" and that the Sikh was targeted because he was "dark skinned, bearded and wore a turban"; his murder was clearly a hate crime. However, Inspector Joe Toomey of the local police told the media: "I don't know what happened - I don't think he was the intended target." But Toomey's investigators so far have no suspects.

Sukhpal was killed a day after he turned 50. He was planning to celebrate his birthday with friends and relatives on Sunday because it was his off-day from work as cabbie.

Sukhpal came to the US about 12 years ago and, like his deceased brother in his early years in America, worked as a taxi driver. His four remaining brothers live in Arizona.

The family was well-to-do and so Jaswant had asked his remaining four sons to return to India after the murder of the eldest son. The sons, however preferred to stay on in the US, calling it their adopted home.

Sikh Mediawatch and Resource Task Force, a Sikh advocacy group in the US, has urged the Federal Bureau of Investigation to immediately take charge of the Sukhpal murder case.

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Novelist Dalip Kaur awarded Saraswati Samman

At a function organised by Bhai Vir Singh Sahitya Sadan, scholars felicitated Dr. Dalip Kaur Tiwana on her receiving Saraswati Samman for 2001 by the K.K. Birla Foundation. The award

was presented by Mr. I.K. Gujral, former Prime Minister of India, alongwith a cash prize of Rs. 5 lacs and a citation.

Dr. Tiwana who is the author of a score of novels, in addition to collection of short stories, is a well-known Punjabi writer. Speaking on the occasion Dr. J.S. Neki, highlighted Dr. Tiwana's unique contribution to Punjabi literature. He mentioned that she has the rare ability to enliven different characters in her works.

Dr. S.S. Noor mentioned that what distinguished Dr. Tiwana from her contemporaries is the fact that she has created her own models rather than working on borrowed models. Dr. Vanita mentioned that while 'woman' is the focal point of her novels some of her characters are able to convey deep emotions even through silence.

Dr. Bhisham Sahni, the chief guest, mentioned that while his own major writings were in Hindi he has the passion of depicting Punjabi culture through his works. He lamented that not much is being done to project Punjabi cultural heritage at a bigger level.

Earlier, while welcoming the guests Dr. Mohinder Singh, Director of the Sadan, mentioned that it was a matter of great honour that the Punjabi writers are getting due recognition with two of them being honoured with Jnan Peeth and other two with Saraswati Award.

Dr. Amrik Singh, presiding over the function, exhorted scholars to study the role of woman in literary works of other languages. Dr. Karanjit Singh mentioned that while some distinguished writers, such as Faiz Ahmad Faiz, Bhisham Sahni, Rajinder Singh Bedi and Krishan Chander, have not written in Punjabi, nonetheless the Punjabi passion is evident in their writings.

