

# THE SIKH NETWORK

# quarterly

Issue 06  
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Responsible for monitoring progress and strategic direction of the Sikh Manifesto over the next five years

**The Sikh Network presents its quarterly newsletter as a regular update on the activities, events and campaigns by the team on the priorities and general progress on each of the 10-points in the Sikh Manifesto and the UK Sikh Survey.**

## **Sikhs and politicians mark annual Guru Nanak Dev Ji's Gurburab event in UK Parliament**



Guru Nanak Dev Ji's Gurburab (Birthday) was marked for the second year running with a memorable celebration at the Houses of Parliament. The Sikh Network, the Sikh Federation (UK) and the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for British Sikhs organised a befitting evening of celebration, inspiration and recognition. The event was full and attracted many politicians, professionals, business and interfaith leaders as well as media outlets.

The event was opened with a tribute to Sir Mota Singh, the first ethnic minority judge who was an early role model to turban wearing Sikhs who sadly passed away at the age of 86 a couple of days earlier. This was followed by opening remarks and welcome by Conservative Lord, Ranbir Singh Suri.

The event saw representation from all political parties. Rob Marris MP, the Labour MP for Wolverhampton South West and the Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for British Sikhs provided an update on the work of the APPG.

Rt. Hon. Maria Miller, the Conservative MP for Basingstoke and former Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport and the Minister for Women and Equality who currently is the Chair of the Women and Equalities Select Committee, acknowledged Guru Nanak's vision for equality for all, regardless of gender, religion and colour. .

Angus Robertson, Deputy Leader for the Scottish National Party (SNP) commended Sikh engagement in politics in Scotland, acknowledging Charandeep Singh as the first Sikh SNP candidate. Baroness Lorely Burt, represented the Liberal Democrats and shared a personal connection with the Sikh community, paid tribute to Sikh soldiers who fought in both World Wars and the importance of Sikh representation in Parliament.

David Lelliott, British Deputy High Commissioner for Chandigarh, shared his experience of the Sikh community in both Punjab and across the UK and thanked them all for their unified generosity.

Other speakers included Archbishop Kevin McDonald who has responsibility for Interreligious Relations within the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales. He shared the message of equality and hospitality shown by the Sikh faith.

Some of the other politicians who attended included; Alex Salmon (SNP), John Spellar (Lab), Baroness Jenny Jones (Greens), Stephen Timms (Lab),

Khalid Mahmood (Lab), Mike Gapes (Lab), Amanda Solloway (Con), Pat McFadden (Lab), Ruth Cadbury (Lab), Shailesh Vara (Con), Nic Dakin (Lab), Valarie Vaz (Lab), Jim Cunningham (Lab), Dawn Butler (Lab), Kirsten Oswald (SNP).

Jonathan Hellewell, Theresa May's Special Adviser on Communities and former Private Secretary to the Prince of Wales also attended the Gurburab celebrations.

Spiritual Kirtan was performed by the renowned Manika Kaur followed by special recognition awards for contributions in all aspects of life were presented to Jas S Athwal (Politics), Phil Miller (Human Rights), Ninder Johal (Business), Kaka Mohanwalia (Media), Harleen Kaur (Sports), Nik Kandola (Education), Ravi Singh Khalsa Aid (Selfless seva Charity), SWAT (Organisation), Jagmeet Singh (International) and Dr Jagir Kaur Sekhon OBE (Lifetime achievement).

## **Government U-turn on Sikh regiment reflects the xenophobia running through politics following the Brexit vote**

In February 2015 just before the General Election Mark Francois, the Armed Forces Minister said in Parliament that Lieutenant General Sir Nicholas Carter, the Chief of the General Staff was examining proposals to create a Sikh regiment and the proposal 'may well have merit'.



Speaking during defence questions, Conservative former defence minister Sir Nicholas Soames urged ministers to "do away with political correctness" and raise a Sikh regiment.

The U-turn by Sir Michael Fallon, the Secretary of State for Defence, at a Conservative Party conference fringe event will disappoint many British Sikhs and Conservative Party supporters.

The Defence Secretary had previously stated that Sikhs "make great soldiers" but his backtracking now seems to feed into the current atmosphere of xenophobia in the political world following the Brexit vote and the racist culture in the armed forces.

The Sikh Network is very disappointed by this change of tact by the government when it was deemed necessary 100 years ago for tens of thousands of turban wearing Sikhs to fight and subsequently die for the freedom of Europe.

## **Sikh Network advisors speak at famous Belfast Festival - Féile An Phobail**

The Sikh Network together with the Sikh Federation (UK) have been working with the Relatives for Justice organisation in Northern Ireland, who represent families who have suffered at the hands of the UK Government during the troubled times in the Northern Ireland conflict.

There are many parallels for the Northern Irish and Sikh struggles against the states oppression, demonisation, infiltration and human rights abuses. Recent revelations from government archives discovered in 2014 shocked the UK Sikh community as they learnt of the UK Government direct complicity and involvement in one of the most bloody and painful massacres in recent history, in



Operation Bluestar and the deadly Indian Army assault on the sacred Sri Harmandir Sahib often called the Golden Temple in Amritsar in 1984. The documents revealed how the SAS were sent to Amritsar to help plan an attack at the behest of the Indian government and obsession with increasing arms trade by the then Thatcher Government. This arrangement between PM Thatcher and PM Gandhi continued as the latter insisted on tighter controls and measures against the UK Sikh population who were calling for justice for the genocides of June and November 1984.

The UK government implemented a number of civil rights restrictions and anti-sikh measures in attempts to please the Indian Authorities and continued to offer military support and assistance to further strike down the Sikh nation in the troubled Punjab. During this decade they happily turned a blind eye to mass human rights violations, even worse they may have been complicit in providing tactical and operational training to conduct them.

Such revelations were less shocking to the Irish as they have witnessed and experienced very similar and worse treatment by the UK Thatcher Government and hearing about other communities' examples offered some small level of vindication to both our causes, as we both strive for Truth, Justice and Freedom.

This was the subject of the talk and presentation provided at the famous Belfast Feile. During the trip they visited and walked the International Wall of Murals and also met with Sinn Fein politicians and advisers outside the Belfast HQ.

### ***Sikh Network team attend Conservative & Labour Party conferences***



The Conservative Party Conference took place from 2- 5th October 2016 in Birmingham, at the ICC. The Conference was attended by Manjit Kaur Kang and Gursewak Singh, representatives of Sikh

Network. This was a fantastic opportunity to connect with many politicians and fellow Sikh Conservative members, to network and share key issues and views around the Sikh Manifesto. The team were also invited to hear the first conference speech from Prime Minister Theresa May.

Our board member Cllr Preet K Gill also attended the Labour Party conference in Liverpool this year. Preet was asked by the LGA Labour group to chair the Women Councillors task force - Leading in Local Government. This fringe event was very well attended and supports the work of The Sikh Network on engaging more women into politics at every level. The panel included leader of Haringey and Stevenage Council along with Alice Perry Cllr from Islington and a NEC representative.

Preet had the opportunity to discuss the Sikh Manifesto directly with party leader Jeremy Corbyn and he is keen to meet again to discuss our priorities and support the work we do.

Preet also attended the Indian High Commissioners reception, taking the opportunity to discuss more direct flights from Birmingham to Amritsar.

### ***Sikh Network attends Sikh Roundtable meeting with UK Government representatives***

The Sikh Network joined the Sikh Federation (UK) in a roundtable meeting at the Home Office on 12 September. The meeting was attended by Home Office and Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) officials and chaired by the faiths minister, Lord Bourne. He commented on the great contribution of the Sikh community to British life and was pleased to have given his first speech as faith minister at a Gurdwara.

It was noted that there had been an alarming increase in hate crime, especially post Brexit, and as such, it was important to separately monitor hate crimes against Sikhs. The findings of the UK Sikh Survey, the largest independent survey of British Sikhs, with respect to hate crimes was discussed. Both Home Office and FCO officials showed significant interest in the survey results. The Sikh Network has arranged a government-wide briefing event in December with officials from a number of government

departments and public bodies to explore the findings of the UK Sikh Survey.

The interfaith wedding incident that took place at Leamington Spa Gurdwara the day before was also brought up at the meeting and representatives expressed their concern as to how the national press had reported the issue. It was also expressed that the police could have handled the incident more professionally and there were clear lessons to be learnt.

In response to a Parliamentary Question tabled by Rob Marris on 4 November and answered on 14 November the government formally confirmed the participation of the Sikh Network alongside the Sikh Federation (UK) and will continue to attend these roundtable meetings and ensure important Sikh communities issues are brought to the attention of government.

### ***Sikh Network invited to read Sikh sermon at St Pauls Cathedral multi-faith service***

One of our Advisors, Mankamal Singh, was invited to speak at a multi faith service held in St Paul's Cathedral to commemorate 150 years of Barnardo's, one of the oldest charities in the UK.



Mankamal Singh read a sermon on the inspiring life of Guru Ram Das Maharaj, the fourth Sikh Guru. The sermon also described how the Sikh tradition of giving a child love, spiritual and moral guidance and believing in them align so well with the great work of Thomas Barnardo.

The service was led by the Cannon in Residence with contributions by Javed Khan, CEO of Barnardo's, and David Barnardo OBE, a descendent of the founder Thomas Barnardo and current Chair of Barnardo's Trustees. Other faith leaders, political representatives, celebrities and former Barnardo's children also spoke during the service.

### ***UK Sikh Survey 2016 Findings Report released at UK University***

The findings from the UK Sikh Survey 2016, the largest and most comprehensive ever Sikh survey in the UK with over 4,500 respondents was recently released at a launch event held at the University of Wolverhampton. The Sikh Network who developed and managed the survey went to great lengths to get responses from Sikhs across the spectrum in terms of their concerns.

To date much of the data that was available on the Sikh community, in respect of contemporary issues and challenges, has been anecdotal. The survey provides invaluable information to decision makers, academics, government bodies, politicians and political parties and will help shape policies which affect all Sikhs in the UK. The Office for National Statistics (ONS), the government's largest producer of statistics has in particular been interested in the findings and how they could be used.

To fill this void, the Sikh Network created the UK Sikh Survey with three clear aims;

1. carry out the largest and most diverse independent survey of British Sikhs;
2. encourage wide use of the data to facilitate better engagement on issues affecting British Sikh; and
3. ensure the data constitutes a key input into government policy making.

The survey was open for a period of around 10 weeks from late May until early August 2016. There were a total of 4,559 responses. The UK Sikh Survey 2016 was a combination of self-selection and targeting of groups i.e. the elderly or non-digital population, that are more difficult to reach through self-selection to ensure a better cross section of the community was covered.

