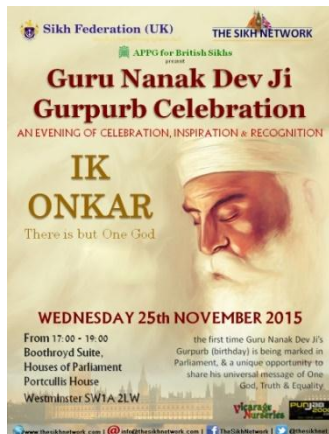


# quarterly

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

**The Sikh Network presents its third quarterly newsletter following the 2015 General Election. Priorities have been decided, a work programme agreed and progress is being monitored on each of the 10-points in the Sikh Manifesto.**

## First Gurburb celebration in UK Parliament



MPs from across the political spectrum joined Sikhs to celebrate Guru Nanak Dev Ji's Gurburb on 25 November. The event was an opportunity to educate politicians about Sikhi. Several MPs spoke at the event, including Rob Marris MP, the Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for British Sikhs, Tom Watson MP the Deputy Leader of the Labour Party and Alison Thewliss MP representing the Scottish National Party. Preet Kaur Gill was the

keynote speaker and spoke passionately about the life of Guru Nanak Dev Ji and students from the Khalsa Secondary Academy further elaborated on his teachings. The event also allowed several to talk about the contributions Sikhs have made to British life. The event was also attended by religious representatives from the Christian and Muslim communities — notably David Walker (Bishop of Manchester) and Ibrahim Mogra (Assistant Secretary General of the Muslim Council of Britain). The historic event was the first of its kind in which Sikhs celebrated Guru Nanak Dev Ji's Gurburb within the UK Parliament.

The event ended fittingly with an award ceremony recognising specific contributions. All award winners were visibly moved at being recognised at the first Guru Nanak Dev Ji's Gurburb event in Parliament.



## Will Charandeep Singh become the first Amritdhari British Parliamentarian?



The 2016 Scottish Parliament election is to be held on 5 May 2016 and will elect 129 members to the Scottish Parliament. At the 2011 election the Scottish National Party (SNP) had 69 seats, Labour 37 seats, Conservatives 15 seats and others 8 seats. In 2011 the SNP had 44% of the vote and this increased to 50% at the

General Election in May 2015. Despite Jeremy Corbyn becoming the

leader of the Labour Party the majority of opinion polls since he became leader suggest the SNP percentage vote will be around 50% and may even increase. The SNP seems destined to win with an overall majority. Charandeep Singh, who is also the General Secretary at Glasgow Central Gurdwara, and joined the meeting we organised with Nicola Sturgeon prior to the General Election to discuss the Sikh Manifesto has been selected as one of the 96 SNP regional candidates and is contesting in Glasgow where he stands a decent chance of being elected.

## Progress on separate Sikh ethnic group tick box in the 2021 Census

On 19 November 2015 the ONS published: *The 2021 Census: initial view on content for England and Wales* following the consultation that ended on 27 August 2015. It stated: "Some respondents had views on additional ethnicity categories that should be included in the 2021 Census. In particular, there were requests for new response categories within the existing questions including Sikh, Jewish, Roma and extension of the White-Other category within ethnic group."



The APPG for British Sikhs and the Sikh Federation (UK) met with senior staff at ONS in January to discuss the full response to be published in Spring 2016, initial thoughts on the 2017 test and where further work will be necessary.

## Atam Academy gets go ahead to become the 12th Sikh educational establishment in the UK

The Atam Academy is the first Sikh faith all-through school to open in East London. Just over 3 years ago, a small group led by the Sikh Network's Mankamal Singh had the desire to set up a Sikh faith school to serve East London.

With limited knowledge and resources, they reached out to other like-minded individuals with the same aspirations and drive to deliver something beneficial for the local community. After two hard years they were able to submit an application to the Department for Education (DfE) under the free school scheme and in October 2014 the Atam Academy was given the go ahead.

The next challenge was to identify and secure a suitable site which would eventually accommodate 1,260 pupils and 100 members of staff. Facing many setbacks, a site was eventually found and recently the opening for September 2016 was announced.



The school, which is underpinned by the teachings of the Sikh Gurus, is set to open in a temporary site with the full school build being completed by September 2018.

### **Thousands take to the streets to protest against UK visit by Indian PM Narendra Modi**



The Sikh Network played its part in supporting the lobby and demonstrations against India's human rights record that were conducted in London on 12 and 13 November. The Sikh Network was joined by the Sikh Federation (UK),

Awaaz Network, South Asia Solidarity Group, Southall Black Sisters, Dalit Solidarity Network UK, Indian Muslim Federation, Indian Workers Association, Muslim Parliament, and Voice of Dalit International.

On 12 November, protestors organised outside Downing Street as Narendra Modi met with David Cameron, and on 13 November at Wembley Stadium. The rally drew attention to Narendra Modi's involvement in the anti-Muslim pogrom in Gujarat in 2002, his support of Hindu extremism and his marginalisation of minorities in India. These charges were couched in the context of India's abysmal human rights record and to raise awareness about the plight of minorities in India.

### **Sikh Network hosts art exhibition for political prisoners**

A successful art exhibition was inspired by 365 days of Bapu Surat Singh's hunger strike to release Sikh political prisoners who have already served their sentences took place at Guru Nanak Gurdwara Smethwick on 16th & 17th January 2016.



Around 40 pieces of artwork and 20 poems in Punjabi and English from artists and poets from around the world were showcased at the 2 day event.

A panel of artists including 'Sumanjit Kaur Johal (SUM), Jasdeep Samra, Jyoti Dhanjal (J.S. Dhanjal Art), Prabhjot Singh (Prabolous), Harjinder Singh (Infamous Arts) and Rajinder Tattal (Pentacularartist) who all took part in a Q & A. They gave insights into the concept behind their art works, the challenges artists face and offered useful advice to emerging Sikh artists.

Each of the artists expressed their understanding of the struggle through beautiful pieces of art, which was proof that Bapu Surat Singh's hunger for freedom has touched people from all walks of life. The exhibition allowed many who may not regularly follow Sikh affairs to connect to this humanitarian cause with such passion & creativity.

### **Religious discrimination in Belgium and France**

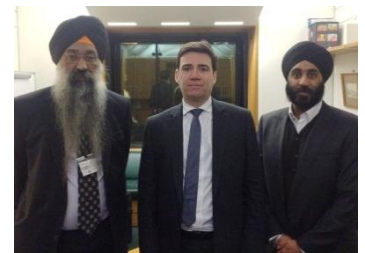
The Sikh Network team have been actively working with the European Network Against Racism (ENAR) and European Network on Religion & Belief (ENORB) regarding religious discrimination. They have met staff members of the Belgian equivalent of the Equality and Human Rights Commission (members of Equinet) and of one of the Belgian trade unions.

Recently the French President François Hollande visited India for Republic Day celebrations, and Ranjit Singh, the Directeur des Affaires Publiques of the Conseil Représentatif des Sikhs de France issued a statement on the situation Sikhs find themselves in France.

The APPG for British Sikhs is considering what might be done to bring some UK diplomatic pressure to bear on the sovereign countries of France and Belgium, bearing in mind that they are fellow EU member states.

### **Meeting with Shadow Home Secretary to discuss key issues**

We met with Andy Burnham MP, shadow Home Secretary to discuss a range of issues affecting the Sikh community. This included the need for an independent public inquiry into UK Government actions against Sikhs in the mid-1980s, the case of



Paramjeet Singh, the Narendra Modi dossier and police action against Sikh protesters in London prior to Narendra Modi's visit. Future meetings will be considering other relevant issues in the Sikh Manifesto i.e. monitoring of hate crime, encouraging public bodies and the media to abandon the use of the term 'Asian' for reasons of political correctness and the need for a Statutory Code of Practice on the 5Ks and Sikh turban

### **Campaign to release UK Resident facing extradition following arrest in Portugal**

Paramjeet Singh was arrested in Portugal on 18 December. A high profile #SaveParamjeetSingh political and media campaign has highlighted the issue of disappearances, torture, asylum, Interpol Red Notices etc. Work has taken place at the UN (visit to Geneva on 4 January), EU (lobbying of MEPs and petition), UK (lobbying of MPs, Ministers and Shadow Ministers) and building links with organisations such as Free Trials International. Considerable media publicity on ITV, BBC, regional newspapers, Portuguese newspapers etc.

### **Sikh Network advisor recognised in New Year Queen's honours list**

A key advisor and member of the Sikh Network and contributor to the Sikh Manifesto, Gurmukh Singh was awarded an OBE by the Queen in her 2016 New Years honours list. Gurmukh Singh has dedicated many years of his life to serving the Sikh community with many organisations through selfless sewa. Gurmukh Singh was also awarded a Lifetime achievement award by the Sikh Federation (UK) at the Guru Nanak Dev Ji Gurburb event.

### **Forthcoming Events:**

- **FAITH & POLITICS –**  
Self Determination & Akal Takht Sahib – 7 February
- **1 Year Anniversary of Sikh Manifesto – February**
- **Women & Politics London Event (EYSikhs) – March**

