



# THE SIKH

## MANIFESTO

2024 - 2029



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Around 150 MPs will not be standing at the General Election on 4 July and a similar number of sitting MPs are predicted to lose their seats and be replaced. We will therefore, unfortunately be losing some MPs, mainly through retirement, that have understood and taken up issues for the Sikh community.

However, it also means that nearly 50% of MPs will be new and younger than those replaced. Many may not fully understand and appreciate the specific issues of concern to Sikhs in the UK. The Sikh Manifesto tries to address this knowledge gap and is a valuable briefing document for all MPs elected on 4 July that have hundreds, thousands or tens of thousands of Sikh constituents who increasingly have greater expectations of those they elect.

The introduction to this third edition of the Sikh Manifesto, therefore, explains what the Sikh Manifesto is, its purpose, and the achievements since it was first introduced by the Sikh Network in January 2015. It also highlights that there could be as many as **one million Sikh voters** on 4 July and why the Sikh vote matters. The tone of the third edition is very much influenced by the fact that the country has experienced unprecedented political turmoil and challenges since December 2019, and that we may have a Labour government for the first time since the Sikh Manifesto was first introduced almost a decade ago.

Sikhs in the UK, in some respects, are no different to the wider public in terms of concerns about the economy, interest rates and the cost of living crisis, the state of the health service, concerns about immigration and defence, the quality of education, climate change, housing, law and order, and policing etc. The Sikh Manifesto therefore, deliberately focuses on specific issues of interest and concern to Sikhs in the UK, that individual politicians, political parties and the UK Government should address. It is also ironic the Sikh Manifesto is being released when Sikhs across the globe are marking the 40th anniversary of the 1984 Sikh Genocide that remains the most traumatic point in modern day Sikh history.

Each of the ten sections set out key priorities, supported by useful background information. There are two to four key priorities in each section to help focus the minds of politicians, the UK Government and the Sikh community. In total there are over 25 key priorities where the Sikh community is looking for actions over the next 5 years from either MPs, political parties, party leaders or the UK Government, and other decision makers.

It is now widely noted that the worldwide Sikh Diaspora is facing transnational repression, demonisation, and political interference by the Indian government. Whilst much of the recent publicity has focused on the US, Canada and Australia, the large British Sikh community has increasingly been questioning UK Government policy for at least four decades. Policy that appeases the Indian government and provides opportunities for political interference.

Sikhs in the UK are third or fourth generation and many have lost trust in politicians and the UK Government, who have far too often been pressured or blackmailed by the Indian government and compromised Sikhs for the so-called wider national interests of Britain. This has become stark with the attitude and actions of the right wing BJP Indian government over the last decade that has been pushing the Hindutva agenda across the globe. Their recent re-election moves India one step closer to a one-party state.

In some areas the third edition of the Sikh Manifesto differs substantially from its previous editions. This is a result of recent developments and a changing attitude of British Sikhs who rightly demand as British citizens that the UK Government put their needs as a minority and role model community ahead of relations and a trade agreement with the right-wing Indian government.

**This General Election presents a fantastic opportunity for the incoming UK Government, advisers and officials to have a paradigm shift in the relationship with Sikh community organisations and to restore Sikh community confidence. Political leaders need to have the vision and understanding to recognise Sikhs have so much more to offer.**

*In summary, the Sikh Manifesto:*

- is an invaluable briefing document for all British politicians, political parties and for the Sikh community to use over the next five years;
- provides a much better understanding of the specific issues currently impacting on Sikhs in the UK;
- is an essential resource that raises awareness and encourages Sikhs to engage with politicians;
- sets out areas where Sikhs in the UK want to see actions and progress; and
- provides a concrete basis for MPs and the Government to regularly provide feedback to the Sikh community.

## INTRODUCTION

### What is the Sikh Manifesto?

The Sikh Manifesto provides UK politicians, political parties and the wider public with a comprehensive understanding of the specific and evolving challenges currently impacting Sikhs in the UK, due to their unique origins and history, way of life, and distinct religious needs and identity.

The third edition of the 10-point Sikh Manifesto, which builds on the first two editions from January 2015 and November 2019 is unlike manifestos of the political parties. **The Sikh Manifesto is a valuable briefing document for all British politicians and for the Sikh community to use over the next five years.**

The third edition of the Sikh Manifesto has been put together by a dedicated Sikh Network team. The contents of the Sikh Manifesto are based on a consensus of what constitutes the most important areas where Sikhs in the UK have specific concerns and progress is required. All politicians, Gurdwaras, Sikh organisations and the Sikh community should be able to relate to all or many of the issues set out in the Sikh Manifesto.

### Purpose of the Sikh Manifesto

The Sikh Manifesto is an essential resource that raises awareness and encourages the Sikh community – Gurdwaras, Sikh organisations and individual Sikhs to engage with politicians. It empowers and facilitates Sikhs in the UK to engage with politicians and the UK political system and create partnerships with democratic institutions.

In the run up to the General Election on 4 July 2024, the Sikh Manifesto provides the opportunity to educate and test the thinking of all election candidates and their political parties. Equipped with this knowledge, candidates and their parties cannot viably plead ignorance to issues that specifically concern Sikhs in the UK. The Sikh Manifesto also provides the basis for intellectual discourse with politicians seeking Sikh votes.

In the five years following the General Election, the Sikh Manifesto will allow elected MPs to regularly provide feedback to the Sikh community and local Sikh constituents on specific actions and progress they have made as their elected representatives, notably on the issues set out in the Sikh Manifesto. Many Sikh families are well into their third and fourth generations and are tired of MPs singing the praises of the Sikh community and paying them lip-service. Instead, they want to see actions and progress on the issues in the Sikh Manifesto over the next 5 years.

### History of the Sikh Manifesto

The first edition of the Sikh Manifesto was launched by the Sikh Network in January 2015 and was welcomed by party leaders, described by the media as a 'game-changer', and was widely viewed as a crucial development reflecting the political maturity of British Sikhs. At that time we had fixed term Parliaments for 5 years and knew when subsequent general election would take place. However, since then we have had snap elections called by different Prime Ministers at short notice in June 2017, December 2019, and now on 4 July 2024.

A new edition of the Sikh Manifesto was therefore not produced for the June 2017 snap election as all the issues of the first edition remained relevant, although the Sikh

Federation (UK) published a five-point plan to help focus the minds of politicians. The second edition of the Sikh Manifesto was produced by the Sikh Network for the December 2019 General Election.



### Achievements following the first edition of the Sikh Manifesto (January 2015)

It is important to keep in mind some of the key achievements and developments linked to the Sikh Manifesto. Below are some of the successes following the first edition.

#### Better representation when two Sikh MPs were elected in the snap election in June 2017

History was made in June 2017 with the election of Preet Kaur Gill, the first Sikh woman MP and Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi, the first turban wearing Sikh MP. Both enthusiastically supported and recognised the benefits of the Sikh Manifesto. Their election and contributions in taking forward Sikh issues quickly won them respect and established them within the Sikh community on the global stage.

#### The legal right of Sikhs to possess, carry, and use a large Kirpan

Preet Kaur Gill successfully worked with representatives of the Sikh Federation (UK) in a cross-party approach to successfully persuade the Home Secretary, Sajid Javid and Home Office Minister, Victoria Atkins to amend the Offensive Weapons Bill that could have had serious unintended consequences by outlawing the possession of the large Kirpan. This was a significant victory for the Sikh community. It also provided an opportunity to change legislation replacing the narrow phrase of 'ceremonies' to the wider phrase of 'religious reasons' with regards to the possession, carrying and use of the Sikh Kirpan.

#### Draft Code of Practice on the Sikh identity produced and waiting to be launched

A draft Code of Practice for the five Kakaars and Dastaar (Sikh turban) was drafted with direct input from half a dozen Sikh organisations, with the process being facilitated by the Sikh Network. The draft was shared with around a dozen government departments and other public bodies to check for factual accuracies or any omissions to produce a final draft. Home Office Ministers and the Chief Executive of the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) agreed to write the foreword and attend the launch event.

#### Memorials and monuments to recognise Sikh Sacrifices in the First World War

Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi took the lead in getting the UK Government in January 2018 to support and agree to fund a monument in central London. A site next to Admiralty Arch near Trafalgar Square was allocated for a monument with two Sikh soldiers from the First and Second World Wars. Sikhs are expecting to witness the unveiling of the monument in the next two years.

The Lions of the Great War memorial opposite Guru Nanak Gurdwara, Smethwick was unveiled in November 2018, the Sikh Remembrance Garden in Bristol opened in April 2019 and a monument to Sikh soldiers was unveiled in Huddersfield in November 2019. Subsequently another monument to Sikh soldiers was unveiled in Leicester in October 2022.

### Labour Party manifesto commitments

The Labour Party in its manifesto for the June 2017 General Election specifically committed to hold an independent public inquiry into the actions of the UK Government in advising and assisting in the 1984 Sikh Genocide, and the restrictions the UK Government imposed on British Sikhs in the 1980s. This was repeated in the manifesto for the December 2019 General Election. **It would be fitting for an inquiry to be announced in 2024, to mark the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Operation Bluestar, the Indian army attack on Sri Harmandir Sahib, Amritsar.**

Prior to the June 2017 snap election, the Sikh Federation (UK) produced a five-point plan highlighting four of the Sikh Manifesto items and a demand for a full apology for the Jallianwala Bagh massacre to the worldwide Sikh community from the British Prime Minister for the Jallianwala Bagh massacre on the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary on 13 April 2019.

When the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary came, Theresa May as PM expressed in Parliament deep regret at what happened, the suffering caused and also described the massacre as a shameful scar, but fell short of an apology. **The Labour Party put on record a future Labour Prime Minister would make a full apology to the worldwide Sikh community.**



### Unprecedented political turmoil and other challenges

Before looking at some of the successes and developments since the last General Election in December 2019 it is only right to reflect on the unprecedented political turmoil and other challenges that have occurred. It has been a period of significant political instability with numerous changes in the government at the very top, including three different Prime Ministers, five Home Secretaries, and four different Foreign Secretaries.

We have had the covid pandemic that caused extraordinary disruption, the controversy of Partygate, Brexit, the Ukraine

War and its impact on energy prices, the disastrous Liz Truss/Kwasi Kwarteng mini-budget, and more recently the impact of the Gaza Israel conflict.

It has therefore been an extremely turbulent political period that has frustrated progress on some of the issues in the Sikh Manifesto as the UK Government and official opposition have either been pre-occupied by upheaval or too heavily influenced by the Indian government with respect to curtailing legitimate Sikh community activities in exchange for a trade deal.

Some of the areas where the government has spectacularly failed the Sikh community and where the official opposition could have done more are summarised below and referenced further in the manifesto.

- Extremely poor UK Government engagement with Sikh community organisations (see Section 1)
- Demonisation of British Sikhs to appease India (see Section 1)
- Indian government interference in UK politics (see Section 1)
- Sikh ethnic classification in the Census 2021 for accurate count and future monitoring (see Section 2)
- Home Secretary frustrating the launch of the Code of Practice promoting and safeguarding the Sikh identity (see Section 3)
- Unacceptable, offensive and xenophobic actions by Ministers, their advisers and civil servants towards the Sikh community (see Section 4)
- Ministers and the police deliberately sitting on resources earmarked for Anti-Sikh hate crimes for over six and half years and when criticised diverting these resources to an internal Sikh police staff association in August 2023 (see Section 4)
- Leading UK politicians incapable of publicly calling out transnational repression by the Indian government targeting Sikh activists in the UK (see Section 6)
- The government lacking the strength and courage to follow its own policy and call for the immediate release and return of British national Jagtar Singh Johal back to the UK, who has been tortured and in arbitrarily detention since November 2017 (see section 7)

### Emergences of new issues

Despite the Sikh Manifesto new issues, often involving the Indian government, sometimes emerge that require and receive an immediate political response from lobbied MPs. For example:

- when Jagtar Singh Johal was abducted, tortured and falsely imprisoned in November 2017;
- the massive farmers protest in India in 2020-2021 - the largest protest in world history that has restarted in recent months; and
- transnational repression by the Indian government, including assassinations in the last 12 months targeting Sikh activists in the Diaspora.

To their credit individual MPs speak out, but the UK Government and official opposition are often silent or too slow to respond. This must change. There is a need for



courage and proactivity to publicly condemn the Indian government on these high profile matters.



### **Backdrop to releasing this Sikh Manifesto before the General Election on 4 July 2024**

When the last Sikh Manifesto was released for the December 2019 General Election it coincided with the 550<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Parkash of Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji, the founder and first Guru of the Sikhs. He taught Sikhs to achieve a fair, just and thriving society for all. The introduction therefore rightly emphasised his timeless teachings of gender equality, rejection of the caste system, respect for diversity, social justice and the wellbeing of all.

The backdrop this time is very different as Sikhs are at a political crossroad having lost trust in politicians and many have been working for the last 12-18 months on the assumption that there is likely to be a Labour Government after 14 years. The hope is an incoming government will take a decisive stand with UK Sikhs. It is widely perceived that those in senior positions in the government have demonstrated prejudice and bias towards the Sikh community by consciously deciding to demonise and target the Sikh minority to appease the Indian government.

### **Opportunity for the incoming Government to make a paradigm shift in governmental relationship with Sikh community organisations**

For the last 14 years there has been a Conservative Government, including throughout the period of the existence of the first and second editions of the Sikh Manifesto. Virtually all political commentators, opinion polls and recent by election results suggest there is likely to be a Labour Government after the General Election.

After the General Election there will be an excellent opportunity for a fresh approach towards building a more progressive relationship between Ministers, advisers, officials and Sikh community organisations to restore Sikh community confidence that has deteriorated since December 2019 and is at an all-time low.

### **Successes and positive developments following the second edition of the Sikh Manifesto (November 2019)**

Despite the unprecedented political turmoil there has been progress on several issues in the Sikh Manifesto, including in discussions with Shadow Cabinet Members. These are summarised below and expanded further in several sections of the manifesto.

- An expected large increase in the number of Labour Sikh MPs elected on 4 July from two to at least fourteen, including several additional turban wearing Sikhs (see Section 1)
- The possibility of a new harmonisation standard mandating public bodies to collect good quality data on Sikhs (see Section 2)
- A greater appreciation and understanding of why it is important to have a Statutory Code of Practice for the five Kakaars and Dastaar (see Section 3)
- Keir Starmer promising to recognise and address Anti-Sikh hate crimes alongside Islamophobia and Antisemitism (see Section 4)
- Keir Starmer being able to use his influence if he becomes PM to call for and secure Jagtar Singh Johal's immediate release and return to his family in Scotland (see section 7)
- Expectation that if Labour form the next government it will commence in the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary year an independent judge-led public inquiry into the actions of the UK Government in relation to the 1984 Sikh Genocide and its' motivations for anti-Sikh measures in the 1980s (see Section 8)

### **Amendments to the third edition of the Sikh Manifesto**

There have also been several substantive changes reflected in the third edition of the Sikh Manifesto as a result of developments since December 2019. These are summarised below and expanded mainly in sections 5 and 6 of the manifesto.

- There is a need for better education about Sikhi and Sikh history in mainstream schools to address prejudice and bullying of Sikh children (see Section 5)
- Historic Sikh artefacts in museums, galleries and libraries in the UK must be safeguarded and kept in the UK with an export ban (see Section 5)
- Historic Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji manuscripts and other Gurmukhi religious manuscripts currently kept in museums and libraries must be returned to UK Sikh religious institutions (see Section 5)
- The UK Government, in promoting freedom of religion and belief across the globe, must urgently work with other countries to address the global threat of Hindu extremism (Hindutva) (see Section 6)
- The UK Government working with other western nations needs to confront transnational repression and political interference by the Indian government targeting its opponents in the Diaspora, including Sikh activists in the UK (see Section 6)
- A recognition of a new generation of Sikh political prisoners with the likes of Bhai Amritpal Singh who has been imprisoned, but has remarkably just been elected

in a landslide victory as an MP in Panjab in June 2024 (see Section 7)

- Greater focus on the UK Government understanding the concept of Sikh sovereignty and acknowledging the successful existence of a Sikh homeland; its annexation by Britain in 1849, an act that would now be viewed as illegal under international law and the June 2024 election results from Panjab that show the demand for the Sikhs to regain their homeland is very much alive with the people of Panjab (see expanded Section 10)

### **How many Sikh voters will there be on General Election day on 4 July 2024**

This seems a very simple but important question for the Sikh community, political parties and candidates that needs to be tackled head on in the Sikh Manifesto. Candidates rightly also want to know how many Sikh voters there are in their constituency. However, the answer is far from straightforward.

All are agreed the only practical starting point is the results from the optional religion question in the Census 2021. According to the Census in March 2021 Sikhs numbered 535,517, with 520,092 in England, 10,988 in Scotland, 4,048 in Wales, and 389 in Northern Ireland.

This was a 24% increase on the figure of 432,439 from 2011. Candidates will be delighted to know the analysis of the 535,517 Sikhs is available by constituency.

However, Section 2 of the Sikh Manifesto makes reference to incomplete and poor quality data on religion from the Census 2021 which presents a major dilemma for Sikhs, political parties and candidates. The total number of Sikhs often quoted is simply from the optional religion question. However, 29.4 million or 44% of the total population in the UK in March 2021 either ticked "no religion" or did not answer the optional religious question. This 29.4 million will



definitely include Sikhs and possibly a higher proportion than those that may be linked to other faiths given some of the additional intricacies that many assume of calling oneself a Sikh. Simply adjusting the 535,517 on a pro-rata basis that could be conservative, estimates suggests the approximate total number of Sikhs in March 2021 could have been around 955,000.

To get to the approximate total population of Sikhs more than three years later on 4 July 2024 also requires an uplift for the general increase in the Sikh population based on past trends (around 75,000). The final adjustment is for the massive increase in international Sikh students, their spouses/dependents and work visas issued to Sikhs from India in the last 3 years (assumed to be in the region of 175,000). This would suggest an estimated total Sikh population on election day of around 1.2 million or 1 million Sikh voters adjusting for under 18s.

**Why the one million Sikh vote matters is explained on page 31.**

### **Sri Akal Takht Sahib: Symbol of political sovereignty for Sikhs**





## SECTION 1: MORE EFFECTIVE REPRESENTATION OF SIKH ISSUES IN PARLIAMENT

*More effective representation in Parliament of issues that are important to the Sikh community, including an increase in visible Sikh representation in the House of Commons and House of Lords. Parliament must better reflect the diversity of the communities it represents.*

### KEY PRIORITIES:

#### 1.1 MPs with large numbers of Sikh constituents need to raise the profile of issues that are important to the Sikh community in the UK and as a global community

Around 165 MPs that are elected on 4 July will have a large number of Sikh constituents. Therefore, these MPs should have an onus to raise all issues of importance to the British Sikh community, including those in this Sikh Manifesto, effectively in Parliament and with the UK Government.

There are 15 constituencies that have over 10,000 Sikh constituents, 20 constituencies with 5,000-10,000 Sikh constituents and around 130 constituencies with 1,000-5,000 Sikh constituents. Most also have Gurdwaras (Sikh places of worship) in the constituency. MPs elected in these 165 or so constituencies are expected to take up issues included in the Sikh Manifesto and provide regular feedback on progress and actions direct to the local Sikh community.

#### 1.2 MPs need to become members and support the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for British Sikhs

MPs with large numbers of Sikh constituents are expected to become members of the APPG for British Sikhs and support events organised by the group. Ministers, Parliamentary Private Secretaries or those in Shadow Ministerial positions with large numbers of Sikh constituents that may be unable to become office bearers or members of the APPG are expected to support APPG events and issues taken up by the group.

#### 1.3 Political parties need to remove barriers to encourage more Sikhs to become MPs across the political spectrum and provide better support when Sikh MPs are faced with threats to their safety

There are currently only two sitting Sikh MPs - the first Sikh female MP, Preet Kaur Gill and the first turban wearing MP, Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi. Both were elected for Labour in the 2017 snap election. All other main political parties have no Sikh MPs in their ranks, this is unlikely to change on 4 July 2024.

These two MPs have become excellent role models and internationally recognised as they have rightly led on many Sikh related issues. They have however, unacceptably, become targets for hate and intimidation, including death threats. Sikh MPs will be seen as representing their minority Sikh community in Parliament, in addition to their constituency and need to be better protected. They should be supported from the full range of threats they face, including from foreign governments for simply doing their job. The two existing Sikh MPs take a principled stand and condemn violation of human rights which is an important part of the UK's democratic process that must be safeguarded.

The other main political parties working with the Sikh community need to self-evaluate over the next five years. They should address the barriers that exist in preventing Sikhs becoming MPs in their parties. From a Sikh community perspective it would be much better in the medium and long term if all the main political parties had Sikh MPs, like in Canada. Only then could Sikhs argue as a community they are appropriately well represented in politics.

#### 1.4 Need for well-respected Sikh peers who will make a positive contribution in the House of Lords

When the last General Election took place in December 2019 there were only four Sikh members of the House of Lords (three Conservatives and one cross-bencher). There are now six Sikh peers. We have the first Labour Sikh peer who took his seat on the red benches in November 2022 and another Conservative Sikh who became a peer in July 2023, but recently resigned to become a cross-bencher.



### BACKGROUND

The factors that affect Sikh political representation in the House of Commons are complex and relate to many different dimensions: socio-economic integration and inequalities. In addition to demographic and spatial distribution of Sikhs, the attitudes of the electorate, the participation and voting behaviour of minorities, and the selection procedures and policies of political parties. The Labour Party and Sikhs active in the party have moved in the right direction in recent times, but the other political parties have much more work to do.

Sikh representation in the House of Lords is largely in the hands of the next Prime Minister and other party leaders who make political nominations. However, they need to move away from a tick box exercise and tokenistic approach to show greater courage in selecting those who have the best skills and qualities to make a significant and positive contribution.

The aforementioned four key priorities for more effective representation of Sikh issues in Parliament require action in three specific areas:

#### MPs with large numbers of Sikh constituents need to work better together to address issues of importance to the Sikh community

In the last decade the Sikh Manifesto has become very well established and many who will be elected on 4 July 2024 will



make local promises on many of the issues included. However, there is still too much reliance on a small number of stalwart MPs to represent the Sikh community and in recent years the burden has increasingly been on the two Sikh MPs supported by a small number of other MPs from across the political spectrum. This must change as all MPs, especially those with a large number of Sikh constituents should recognise their responsibility towards those they represent.



If there are 14 Labour Sikh MPs after 4 July 2024, based on current predictions, they must come together to provide each other with support and work together to help deliver on the range of issues in the Sikh Manifesto. This should not mean the non-Sikh MPs can take a back seat. The rules for the number of office bearers for APPGs have changed and the APPG for British Sikhs will need to be reconstituted. This will provide an opportunity to have a new and improved operating model for the APPG that will involve greater and wider participation to take forward agreed priorities.

Sikhs are encouraged to hold all their elected MPs, irrespective of background and political party, to account and have an expectation for them to raise issues important to the community. There should not be an over reliance on Sikh MPs to take up Sikh issues. Sikh constituents and Gurdwaras should also hold regular update meetings with their MPs so they can share their actions and feedback on issues raised.

**The UK Government needs to immediately return to effective engagement with Sikh community organisations and stop the demonisation of British Sikhs to appease India**

Since the last General Election in December 2019 the Conservatives have made a series of mistakes in terms of Sikh community engagement. Initially, they watered down and eventually abandoned the Sikh roundtable approach with Sikh community organisations that operated for several years. There were two main reasons for this. On the one hand organisations were rightly challenging the Government on a range of issues, including Anti-Sikh hate crimes, Offensive Weapons Bill and the case of Jagtar Singh Johal. On the other hand, they were under pressure from the Indian authorities to only engage with pro-India individuals and organisations.

During the Covid pandemic the Conservatives made a major blunder in May 2020, in terms of Sikh community engagement. They unilaterally appointed a Sikh who they called a 'faith leader', like the Archbishop of Canterbury or Chief Rabbi, to the Places of Worship Taskforce. However, the appointment was not a fully practising Sikh and had no experience or involvement in the management or running of Gurdwaras.

To the Conservative government's annoyance, the Sikh community pressure led to his embarrassing resignation from the Taskforce within a week. To compound matters, the Conservative government refused to officially appoint a Sikh representative to the Taskforce. This resulted in some very insensitive, ignorant and discriminatory policies and rules affecting Sikhs and Gurdwaras.

During the pandemic the Conservative government and officials decided to hand-pick those from the Sikh community it wished to engage with and in effect has operated an unofficial 'blacklist' of Sikh community organisations. Those hand-picked were either pro-India or pro-Conservative individuals and organisations with little or no credibility who simply toe the government line.

The relationship between the Conservative government and Sikh community has continued to deteriorate in the last three years with actions and statements aimed at demonising Sikh community activists to appease the Indian authorities. This included the botched extradition of three British born Sikhs from the West Midlands in September 2021. Alongside, the Home Secretary, Priti Patel making deeply offensive comments in November 2021 by incorrectly referring to the risk of Sikh 'extremism' and under Rishi Sunak the more recent reference to 'Pro Khalistan Extremism (PKE)' in reports and statements to appease the Indian government. Tom Tugendhat, the Security Minister, confirmed in writing PKE was a low or non-existent risk, with little or no evidence.

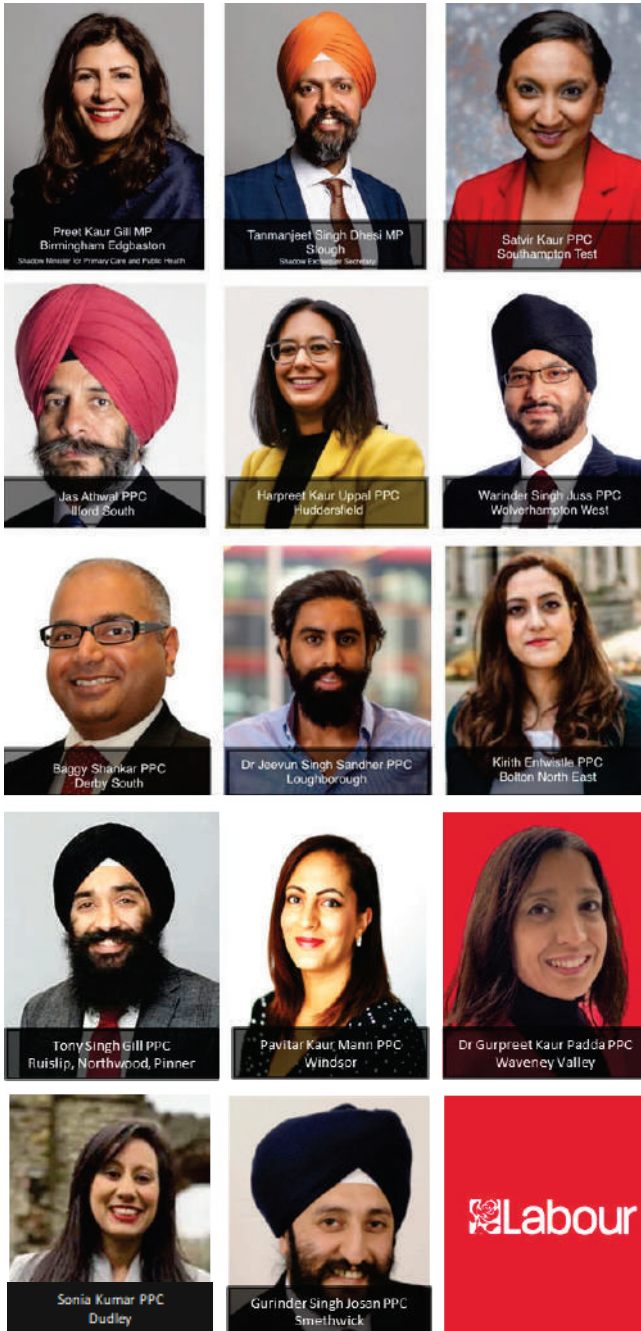
On the assumption there is a Labour government, Labour MPs need to ensure the UK Government bring an end to the unofficial blacklisting of Sikh community organisations. The incoming government must reverse the Conservatives decision to demonise British Sikh community activists to appease the Indian authorities, and work directly with authentic, well-established and grass roots representative organisations with a genuine mandate from the community.

**Increase the number and quality of Sikhs in both Houses of Parliament**

Political parties should have a good understanding of the make-up of their membership and clear policies to show how they are trying to ensure Parliament represents the people it serves. They should also ensure equality of opportunity. Britain's diverse multi-cultural society, including the Sikh community, should be sufficiently reflected in the make-up of its Parliament. This is vital for good governance of the nation as it will promote social cohesion and equal political rights of all its citizens.

The Labour Party has recognised the importance and advantage of Sikh representation. For the General Election on 4 July 2024 they have selected, Sikhs in eight existing Labour seats (Birmingham Edgbaston, Slough, Ilford South, Huddersfield, Southampton Test, Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner, Warley and Derby South). Alongside, Sikhs for six seats they are expected to win (Wolverhampton South West,

Windsor, Loughborough, Waveney Valley, Dudley and Bolton North East). The Labour Party is expected to form the next government and is predicted to have at least 14 Sikh MPs after 4 July 2024. There are Sikh candidates for Labour and Conservatives in other seats that could also win.



Representational politics is however only the first step. The two existing Labour Sikh MPs in many ways have made the paths for Sikh MPs who follow easier, by working tirelessly for their constituents and party in shadow Ministerial roles. To their immense credit they have been on the right side of Sikh issues that has helped not only their political careers, but also given them huge satisfaction for the difference they are making. The Sikh community in the UK and across the globe watches their interventions and the work they do fearlessly representing Sikhs. We have had Sikh MPs before, but they are either proved irrelevant or more or less faded out because they failed to effectively represent the Sikh community.

This is an opportunity for the new Sikh MPs to also make a difference to the Sikh community. They will be judged to be a success by the Sikh community if they, like the two existing Sikh MPs, also address the full range of Sikh community issues irrespective of threats and intimidation they will face as minority community representatives.

Representation in the House of Lords is largely in the hands of the political parties and their leaders. Sikhs remain under-represented with only six peers in the House of Lords with two of them more or less in their nineties, while other minorities like Jews, Muslims and Hindus are far better represented with numbers in double figures.

The Labour leadership recognise they only have one Sikh peer. Assuming Labour win the General Election on 4 July 2024, Keir Starmer as the new Prime Minister is expected to increase the number of Labour peers and will be mindful to increase Sikh representation in the House of Lords, including having the opportunity to address and learn from recent controversial decisions.

It is important that the Sikh community's feelings and concerns are understood and not ignored when considering important representational appointments. The selection process must be impartial and not influenced by pressure from another country like India who have vested political interests in nominations and appointments.

In this respect, the last minute and unprecedented withdrawal of a nomination to the Lords of a well-qualified, respected and fully practising (*Amritdhari*) Sikh by the Labour Party after all clearances and approvals in December 2020 remains a cause of much concern amongst leading British Sikhs.

The Sikh community expect Sikhs nominated for peerages by party leaders to have impeccable records of behaviour, be well-respected within the Sikh community and possess the skills, professional background and attributes to be able to make a positive contribution. Those appointed should be role models and send a positive signal to the Sikh community.

The expected increase in turban wearing Sikh MPs is very welcome and provides a visible and positive image of the community and the values it represents. In this respect, it is important that 'Amritdhari' or fully practising Sikhs are not overlooked or discriminated against. Appointment of Amritdhari Sikhs in the House of Lords would be a historic first for the UK Parliament and send a positive signal regarding the Sikh identity.

**Labour is predicted to have at least 14 Sikh MPs after 4 July 2024!**



## SECTION 2: SYSTEMATIC COLLECTION AND USE OF DATA ON SIKHS BY PUBLIC BODIES

*Parliamentarians must ensure public bodies systematically collect credible data on Sikhs, not only as a religion, but also an ethnicity. This is essential to address equal opportunities and anti-discrimination. Public bodies must be mandated to collect and use this data to support decision-making on improvements to services, allocation of resources, and meet their duties under Equalities legislation. Without collecting and using this data on Sikhs, significant gaps will remain in administrative data, and Sikhs will become invisible to decision makers.*

### KEY PRIORITIES:

#### 2.1 MPs need to ensure the harmonisation standard for ethnicity being developed by the Government Statistical Service mandates public bodies to collect good quality data on Sikhs.

The Sikh Federation (UK) with the backing of over 150 Gurdwaras and Sikh organisations took legal action to argue that the Cabinet Office and Office for National Statistics (ONS) were acting unlawfully by denying Sikhs the option of a Sikh ethnic tick box in the last census. Although the Cabinet Office and the ONS avoided the inclusion of a Sikh ethnic tick box option in the census by providing a write in option it did not stop accusations of unfairness and discrimination as regards Sikhs.



Sikhs in England and Wales were encouraged, in response to the ethnicity question in the Census 2021, to reject the 19 ethnic tick box options provided, tick "Other" and write "Sikh" to signal a high level of dissatisfaction with the ONS's existing ethnicity tick box options. As a show of protest nearly 100,000 Sikhs chose this option in England and Wales. Ironically, the number protesting was greater than the total number in two of the ethnic groups recognised in the Census.

In Scotland, the Census was one year later, and the Scottish government, in recognition of Sikhs being a legally recognised ethnic group, included a "prompt" in the Census Order and census questionnaire for Sikhs to tick "Other" and write "Sikh" as their ethnicity. The headline results were recently published on 21 May 2024. The religion question showed a 21% increase in the number of Sikhs in Scotland to just under 11,000, but the analysis of how many Sikhs ticked "Other" and wrote "Sikh" in response to the ethnicity question has not yet been made available.

The combination of the legal challenge, the sheer scale of the number of Sikhs who rejected the ethnicity tick box options in the last census, continued pressure on the ONS by MPs belonging to the APPG for British Sikhs, and the significant gaps in administrative data on Sikhs has made senior ONS officials appreciate the need for the harmonisation standards to be strengthened so public bodies collect good quality data on Sikhs. MPs must maintain pressure on the ONS to ensure Sikhs do not become invisible to decision makers and ensure the harmonisation standard for ethnicity being developed by the Government Statistical Service mandates public bodies to collect good quality data on Sikhs.

#### 2.2 The next government must decide whether to rely on administrative data and abandon the 10-year Census. The alternative to the Census has not been tested and the risk of Sikhs becoming completely invisible to decision makers is alarming.

For Sikhs, the pending decision by the next government on whether to rely on administrative data and abandon the Census that has been conducted every 10 years since 1801 is closely linked to the decision on the harmonisation standard for ethnicity. If public bodies are mandated to collect good quality data on Sikhs and this is quickly implemented there is scope to use a combination of administrative data supported by specific surveys.

### BACKGROUND

Data is fundamental to decision makers and can be used to improve the effectiveness of policy interventions. It is essential for the Government to develop the infrastructure to enable the right information to be available to the right government bodies at the right time. Government cannot ignore the need to have good quality data on Sikhs that needs to be systematically collected and used by public bodies.

#### Sikhs are a legally recognised ethnic group

In 1983, the *Mandla v Dowell-Lee* case saw the House of Lords use a set of criteria from the Race Relations Act (1976) (since subsumed into the Equality Act 2010) to define Sikhs as a distinct ethnic group. The criteria used stated that to be a distinct ethnic group, the said group needs to have a long shared history which the group consciously keeps as distinct from other groups and has its own culture and traditions. Supplementary criteria concerning language, geographical origins, literature, and history of persecution were also used to come to the conclusion that Sikhs are a distinct ethnic group. The "ethnicity group" definition by the House of Lords is in line with the traditional description of Sikhs as a distinct "Qaum" in Panjabi, and as approved by Sri Akaal Takht Sahib, the highest Sikh theo-temporal authority.

It is often cited that 'what gets counted gets done'. The default position of policy-makers is to understand the ethnic breakdown. The harmonisation standard for ethnicity under development provides an opportunity for the ONS and the government to acknowledge the legal position of Sikhs as a recognised ethnic group. Being categorised as an ethnic group is critical in guiding public bodies on data that needs to be collected and monitored. Ethnicity data is used as the key barometer for public service planning and allocation of resources.

### Incomplete and poor-quality data on religion presents a major dilemma for Sikhs

The Sikh community has been a lone voice in warning all faiths and Parliamentarians of the dangers of the optional religious question in the Census and the way it has been asked since it was first introduced in 2001. We have now successfully demonstrated the optional religious question, its format and responses in the Census 2021 make it virtually useless for many decision makers, especially those interested in getting an accurate picture of the total number of Sikhs and where they live.

Successive governments and Parliamentarians when recommending and approving the Census Order have allowed the ONS in 2001, 2011 and 2021 to perversely have the first option as “no religion” to an optional religious question. The Sikh Federation (UK) predicted the largest response to the religion question in the Census 2021 would be those using the first option of “no religion”.

This was a mistake and came home to roost when the ONS released census results in November 2022 for England and Wales when 25.8 million or 43.2% either ticked “no religion” or did not answer the optional religious question. Similarly, the data just released for Scotland on 21 May 2024 shows 3.2 million or a staggering 58.1% either ticked “no religion” or did not answer the optional religious question.

The flaws in the way the ONS has asked the optional religious question in the census since 2001 has in effect permanently allowed public bodies to deprioritise inequalities on the basis of religion. Public bodies argue that because of the major data gap on religion at a national level, and limited data collected on religion at a local level, it is impossible to make overall policy decisions on discrimination on the basis of religion.

Based on those who declared their religion when responding to the religious question, Sikhs saw a 24% increase in England and Wales (21% increase in Scotland) in the Census 2021 as Sikh community organisations campaigned to encourage Sikhs to declare their religion as “Sikh”. In comparison, Jews only saw a 2% increase. Both Sikhs and Jews are legally recognised ethnic groups and public bodies could be legally challenged if these two groups are not fully considered when making decisions.

As a proxy, if you simply adjust figures for the optional religion question on a pro rata basis for those who chose the first option of no religion or did not answer the religion question, it suggests the number of people with a Sikh ethnicity in England and Wales (and Scotland) in March 2021 (or March 2022 in Scotland) may have been around 955,000. This is higher than 13 of 19 ethnic groups recognised in the Census. The Cabinet Office and ONS are unable to identify the number of Sikhs who may have ticked “no religion” or not answered the religious question leaving a huge, and possibly permanent, data gap.

There are different degrees to which Sikhs practice their faith that leads some to argue despite the campaign to encourage Sikhs to declare their religion as “Sikh” that the total population for Sikhs may be much higher as more Sikhs as a proportion may not readily tick Sikh as their religion. For example, Preet Kaur Gill is the MP for Birmingham Edgbaston and the Census 2021 data indicates she had 4,556 Sikhs in her constituency. However, in April 2024 she met Emma Rourke, the Deputy National Statistician and told her she had access to voter lists and other confidential local

information that indicates there may be as many as 8,000 Sikh households in her Birmingham, Edgbaston constituency. It is widely accepted that Sikhs are much more likely to be living in multi-family or multi-generational households with dependent children. Therefore, if you make a conservative estimate that the average Sikh household size is 2.5 (the UK average is 2.36) this would suggest the Census 2021 data hugely understates the number of Sikhs living in Birmingham, Edgbaston.

### 40,000 public bodies need to monitor Sikhs as a distinct ethnic group



Public bodies are not fully aware of the extent of barriers that Sikhs face as a distinct religio-ethnic community. British Sikhs face obstacles, for example, in securing employment, progressing into senior jobs, and accessing healthcare, due to their specific needs. It is also difficult to analyse the full contribution of Sikhs, as a community, to economic growth in different sectors. The ONS itself recognises that there is evidence to suggest that Sikhs are experiencing significant disadvantage in several areas of life including employment, housing, health and education. Sikhs are particularly concerned with ensuring accurate data on the Sikh community to inform policies and funding at the local level.

Public bodies monitor ethnicity across all services, whereas statistics for different religions are rarely used for this purpose as there is a massive problem with completeness of data. Separate Sikh ethnic monitoring should be the basis for government policy and decisions: for allocation of resources and community development programmes through central government departments and agencies, and locally delivered services.

Recent discussions with the Department of Health and Social Care and those responsible for social housing in the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities have highlighted data gaps to decision makers as regards the Sikh community. Similarly, NHS Blood and Transplant (NHSBT) has confirmed it is unable to confirm the number of Sikhs requiring donors or the number of Sikh donors available, despite having leaflets and promotional materials specifically tailored for the Sikh community. The NHSBT is making life and death decisions about Sikhs without this basic organ donor information. Therefore, specific campaigns designed to target and benefit minority communities could be totally excluding the Sikh community as they are failing to collect relevant data on Sikhs.





## SECTION 3: PROMOTING A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF THE SIKH IDENTITY AND SIKH WAY OF LIFE

*A draft Code of Practice has been produced by Sikh organisations, in consultation, with government bodies to reflect current laws and best practice. The draft Code takes account of the Offensive Weapons Act 2019 and the publication of the statutory guidance supporting the Act. This was first published in April 2022 and specifically covers the Sikh Kirpan. The next UK Government need to work with Sikh community organisations to introduce and promote a Statutory Code of Practice for the five Kakaars (articles of faith) and Dastaar (Sikh turban) to reduce discrimination against Sikhs in the workplace and public spaces.*

### KEY PRIORITIES:

#### 3.1 UK Government to introduce and promote a Statutory Code of Practice for the five Kakaars and Dastaar in the next Parliament

A Statutory Code of Practice is the authoritative, comprehensive and technical guide to the detail of the law. It is invaluable to Human Resource (HR) departments, lawyers, courts and tribunals, everyone who needs to understand the law in depth or to apply it in practice.

It has proved impossible in recent years to get officials and the Conservative government in the post-Brexit era to introduce a Statutory Code of Practice for the five Kakaars and Dastaar. With frequent changes in relevant Ministers the Conservative government lost interest in launching and endorsing updated non-statutory guidance since the last General Election. Sikhs have therefore continued to experience unnecessary discrimination. This has included high profile cases of Sikh children in schools, patients in hospitals and those taking part in jury service to name a few.

The ask is for the new UK Government to introduce and promote a Statutory Code of Practice for the five Kakaars and Dastaar in the next Parliament. If there is a Labour Government, it plans to introduce a new Race Equality Act that the Statutory Code of Practice will complement. The introduction will need to be supported by a campaign to promote the Code and raise awareness. It is hoped the Statutory Code of Practice will help reduce discrimination of Sikhs in the workplace and public spaces.

#### 3.2 Non-statutory guidance for Sikhs and non-Sikhs on Gurdwara protocols, respect and understanding of Sikh religious practices

The second phase of the project will be to work with the government and the APPG for British Sikhs to produce non-statutory guidance on a range of issues including: protocols when visiting Gurdwaras, appropriate terminology so as not to cause offence, respect for Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji and Sikh religious ceremonies and practices.

### BACKGROUND

The Sikh identity derives from the five Kakaars and the Dastaar. Each of the five Kakaars have great significance for the Sikhs as these are the five articles of Sikh faith together with the Sikh turban. Fully practising Sikhs, the Amritdhari Sikhs, keep all Kakaars and the turban, while most keep one or more Kakaars but with great faith. Nearly all Sikhs aspire towards the Amritdhari status over the course of their life and

grow their understanding of the Sikh way of life. Wider understanding of Sikh Kakaars is an important step towards acceptance and integration of Sikhs in public life.

Sikhs have always faced discrimination because of their visible identity, but more and more Sikhs, especially younger Sikhs have over the last 25 years since the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the creation of the Khalsa in April 1999 adopted the five Kakaars and Dastaar. Following 9/11 and heightened security the challenges to the Sikh identity across the globe have increased. In the UK, Sikhs continue to experience problems and discrimination with several of the five Kakaars, the Kesh, Kara and Kirpan as well as the Dastaar.

### Sikhs are protected from racial as well as religious discrimination

Sikhs are both an ethnic and a religious group, so they are protected from racial as well as religious discrimination. This principle was decided by the House of Lords (the *Mandla v Dowell-Lee* case [1983] 2 AC 548). There are numerous different pieces of legislation that protect Sikhs from discrimination. These include general equalities and anti-discrimination legislation, i.e. Equality Act 2010 and Human Rights Act 1998, and some specific legislation that provides for the wearing of the five Kakaars and Dastaar, such as the Offensive Weapons Act 2019.

The lack of understanding of the above pieces of legislation and the rights of Sikhs to practise their religion has inadvertently led to tensions between the rights of individuals and the rights of organisations and institutions. A number of organisations working with the Sikh community have case studies, to demonstrate where Sikhs have been discriminated against. There have been a number of cases, such as the case of *Watkins-Singh v Aberdare Girls' High School*, where the courts recognised the right of a Sikh child to wear a Kara at school.

After 9/11, Sikhs in the UK have had increased difficulties, especially regarding the wearing of the Kirpan with a much greater focus on security. These difficulties arose in the workplace and even public spaces, such as supermarkets and shopping centres. A number of buildings operated by government and the private sector also introduced restrictions. Sikhs continue to experience discrimination related to wearing the Kara in schools and the workplace.

### A Statutory Code of Practice for the five Kakaars and Dastaar is long overdue

The need for a Statutory Code of Practice for the five Kakaars and Dastaar was first raised in Parliament in 2005 following increased difficulties for Sikhs following the 9/11 attack and heightened security measures. In 2010, the EHRC produced non-statutory 'Guidance on the wearing of Sikh Articles of Faith in the workplace and public spaces'. This was a helpful step forward in official recognition of the Sikh religious identity in the UK. Whilst the guidance has provided clarity and promoted greater understanding it has not prevented Sikhs from repeatedly experiencing discrimination.

### Lack of progress since the December 2019 General Election

The former Government Equalities Office had suggested the guidance first developed by the EHRC should be updated for new legislation and this could be released and endorsed by the government. The EHRC was approached and confirmed that they did not have the resources to update the guidance,



but would support the Sikh community after the guidance was updated.

The draft Code of Practice for the five Kakaars and Dastaar was therefore drafted with direct input from half a dozen Sikh organisations, facilitated by the Sikh Network. The draft was then circulated to around 25 recognised Sikh organisations, such as the Sikh Missionary Society UK, for comment before being shared with around a dozen government departments and other public bodies to check for factual accuracies or any omissions to produce a final draft.

The initial delay in launching the draft Code of Practice for the five Kakaars and Dastaar was the need to wait for the Statutory Guidance for the Offensive Weapons Act 2019 that made specific and important references to the small and larger Sikh Kirpan. This guidance was eventually issued by the government in April 2022 and updated in July 2022.

Senior Ministers, like Sajid Javid who were very supportive moved on and were replaced by Ministers like Priti Patel who showed little or no interest in launching and endorsing updated non-statutory guidance. Sikhs have therefore continued to experience unnecessary discrimination in many sectors, including education, health and social care, criminal justice system, hospitality, tourist attractions and in other public places.

A Statutory Code of Practice for the five Kakaars and Dastaar is long overdue. It can cover all existing pieces of legislation that allow Sikhs to practice their faith in the workplace and public spaces. This will raise awareness of the rights of Sikhs to practise and follow their faith within the UK legal framework. It will also provide useful information for balancing the needs of individuals and service users with those of employers and public service providers, including contractors they employ to provide security.

#### **Non-statutory guidance for Sikhs and non-Sikhs on Gurdwara protocols, use of appropriate terminology, respect and understanding of Sikh religious ceremonies and practices**

Many non-Sikhs visit the Gurdwara and participate in Guru Ka Langar (free food kitchen). It is estimated over 10,000 free meals are served to non-Sikhs each week or more than half a million each year. There are also times when representatives of various public bodies may need to visit a

Gurdwara and should be aware of the various protocols that must be observed.

Official, non-statutory guidelines developed between the UK Government, the APPG for British Sikhs and the Sikh community would be helpful in raising awareness and avoiding any difficulties. The guidelines could cover etiquette to be observed when visiting the Gurdwara and would include the following points:

- Those unable to enter a Gurdwara as they are under the influence of alcohol or drugs, or are in possession of cigarettes or tobacco;
- What you need to do when entering the Gurdwara;
- How to respect Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji (the Sikh holy scriptures);
- Participating in Guru Ka Langar; and
- A dress code on wearing modest clothes in a Gurdwara.

Another area that will be covered by the guidance that has caused immense confusion is the distinction between the Anand Karaj (the Sikh religious wedding ceremony that can only be between two Sikhs) and interfaith marriage that is one of personal choice and nothing to do with the Sikh faith.

It has become clear that non-Sikhs, especially decision makers need to fully understand and appreciate the significance and respect that must be shown to the Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji and other Sikh scriptures.



The Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji contains the compositions of the Sikh Gurus and other saints and poets of diverse social and faith backgrounds who united with God. The verses or bani are considered by Sikhs to be the divinely inspired word of God and therefore revered by Sikhs as the Living Guru. The Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji spans 1,430 pages (referred to as ang or limbs) and there are very strict protocols around its respect that must be understood.

Other manuscripts written by the tenth Sikh Guru known as Sri Dasam Granth Ji, and other manuscripts of Sikh writings such as Gutka Sahibs are also respectfully treated with strict protocols.

Increasingly, politicians and officials are becoming more familiar with using correct terminology, such as Kakaars, Kirpan, Dastaar and Sri Harmandir Sahib Ji. However, a guide of correct terminology will be produced as part of the non-statutory guidance, so reference is correctly made to Gurdwaras, Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji and other phrases so no offence is caused to Sikhs through ignorance.



## SECTION 4: HATE CRIMES TARGETING SIKHS AND SIKH RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS

*The next UK Government will need to formally recognise “Anti-Sikh hate” that became a worldwide phenomenon after 9/11 and view it in a similar fashion to Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. “Anti-Sikh hate” is widespread and based on ignorance and mis-information about the Sikh identity and Sikh way of life. Politicians, parts of government and civil servants need to understand why some of their actions towards Sikhs are increasingly viewed as offensive, xenophobic and unacceptable. These two issues must be addressed before addressing the massive under-reporting of Sikh hate crimes and how “Anti-Sikh hate” can be confronted.*

### KEY PRIORITIES:

#### 4.1 Recognition of “Anti-Sikh hate” in a similar fashion to Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia

“Anti-Sikh hate” is hostility to, hatred of, or prejudice against Sikhs and the Sikh way of life. In part, it stems from mistaken identity or ignorance, but it is exacerbated by extremely poor media reporting that sometimes confuses Sikhs with Muslims. At other times it is institutionalised, deliberate and pre-meditated from those that are part of the establishment and who wish to control the Sikh minority from asserting their rights or prevent them from criticising or exposing government.

The UK Government has to date intentionally been almost entirely focused on Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia and deliberately ignoring “Anti-Sikh hate”. In April 2022, Keir Starmer, the Labour Leader in a video message promised a Labour Government would recognise Anti-Sikh hate crimes alongside Islamophobia and Antisemitism.

#### 4.2 Actions of politicians, parts of government and civil servants towards Sikhs increasingly viewed as offensive, xenophobic and unacceptable

There are numerous examples from recent years where Ministers, parts of the government and civil servants have taken unnecessary negative actions towards Sikh community representatives for raising legitimate concerns that at best can be described as offensive and unacceptable. These actions demonstrate a prejudice that must be seen as “Anti-Sikh hate”. There have however, also been exceptions where Ministers have appreciated the issues raised and responded with positive actions to try and solve problems. Unfortunately, some civil servants’ xenophobic views and attitudes have dominated preventing progress on several key areas of concern.

After the General Election there will be an opportunity for an urgent paradigm shift in the relationship between Ministers, officials, and Sikh community representatives to restore Sikh community confidence that has deteriorated since December 2019 and is at an all-time low.

#### 4.3 Addressing the massive under-reporting of Sikh hate crimes and how “Anti-Sikh hate” can be confronted

Surveys conducted by Sikh organisations in the last decade have shown between 20% to 30% of Sikhs had experienced a hate crime in the last 12 months. These surveys suggest Sikhs may experience over 100,000 hate crimes a year. However, Home Office reported hate crime data suggests

only a very tiny fraction, 1 in 300, are reported and registered as Sikh hate crimes by the police.

### BACKGROUND

The phenomenon of attacks and hate towards Sikhs has become a huge issue worldwide since the 9/11 terror attack, especially for Sikh men with turbans and beards. Whenever a terror incident takes place those that look different are often subject to racism. If an incident occurs in the UK there is a spike in hate crimes and Sikh Gurdwaras have also been targeted. The colour of a persons’ skin is one important aspect, but when you combine this with uncut hair i.e. beard and a turban, Sikh men have become targets through what has rightly or wrongly become known as “mistaken identity”.

#### “Anti-Sikh hate” has not been adequately acknowledged by the UK Government

Sikhs were barely mentioned in the government’s plan for tackling hate crime, [Action Against Hate](#), published in July 2016 that focused on Islamophobia, Antisemitism and attacks against Christians. Subsequently, it emerged later in the year that 10 Downing Street had removed from the plan a case study of the attempted beheading of a Sikh dentist in a racially-motivated machete revenge attack by far-right extremist, Zack Davies for the murder of Lee Rigby by Islamic extremists. This hate crime, like many others against Sikhs was recorded as a hate crime against Muslims, leaving the Sikh victims and Sikh community widely ignored in hate crime data and policies.

The government was criticised by several Sikh organisations and the Minister responsible for faith repeatedly promised Sikh representatives that the refreshed hate crime action plan to be issued two years later would not make the same mistake. However, the Minister was left embarrassed when more senior Ministers advised by officials decided to repeat the mistake by focusing simply on Islamophobia and Anti-Semitism.

#### Term and official definition of hate crimes against Sikhs

The lack of an official term for hate crimes committed against Sikhs and subsequent lack of definition of such a term is a contributing factor to why this type of crime goes largely unnoticed, unreported and unrecorded. In October 2020, the [APPG for British Sikhs published a report on Anti-Sikh hate crimes](#) and through consultation with the Sikh community proposed a term that would clearly describe hate crime against Sikhs and suggested an official definition that could be recognised and adopted by government and relevant institutions so these crimes could be appropriately identified, reported, recorded, monitored and prevented.



### A REPORT INTO ANTI-SIKH HATE CRIMES

The official term proposed to describe hate crimes against Sikhs was “**Anti-Sikh hate**”. This is the term used in the Hate

Crime Operational Guidance issued by the College of Policing. This term is also used in the US to identify racist or religious incidents or crimes against Sikhs, Sikh articles of faith, the Sikh way of life and Sikh institutions.

The suggested official definition was “Anti-Sikh hate”, which is any incident or crime that is perceived by the victim or any other person to be religiously or racially motivated by hostility, hatred or prejudice against Sikhs or those perceived to be Sikh people, Gurdwaras, organisations or property. According to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), hostility can be “ill-will, spite, contempt, prejudice, unfriendliness, antagonism, resentment and dislike”.

The Hate Crime Operational Guidance for the police states: “Anti-Sikh hate crime takes place where a recordable crime is committed and the victim perceives it is motivated (wholly or partially) by anti-Sikh hostility. Victims may, therefore, perceive crimes targeting them to be either a religious hate crime or a racist crime, even when the victim is secular or non-practising.”

**Sikh hate crimes being reported by the Home Office have almost tripled in the last five years without any government support for Sikh community organisations encouraging Sikhs to increase reporting to the police**

The most recent hate crime data published by the Home Office in November 2023 shows ‘religiously aggravated’ hate crimes reported against Sikhs have almost tripled in the last 5 years. The increased reporting of hate crimes has been achieved by Sikh community organisations like the Sikh Network, Sikh Council UK and the Sikh Federation (UK) raising awareness and encouraging reporting to the police.

There has been no input or resources dedicated by government for Sikh community organisations to get Sikhs to increase reporting of hate crimes. This contrasts with millions provided to Tell Mamma to increase hate crime reporting linked to Islamophobia and the Community Security Trust (CST) to increase hate crime reporting linked to Anti-Semitism.

**Government disappointingly sat on resources earmarked for Anti-Sikh hate crimes for over six and half years and when criticised, diverted these resources to police rather than community led initiatives**

Following considerable pressure in January 2017 the government appeared to be making its first effort at correcting the lack of attention to Sikh hate crime reporting. Sajid Javid as the Communities Secretary announced that the government would be funding a programme aimed at improving the reporting of hate crimes against Sikhs and Hindus with a proportion of the £375,000 grant allocated to True Vision, the police’s online portal for reporting hate crimes.

Almost four years later the funds allocated remained unused. The APPG therefore, proposed in November 2020 that the Sikh Network, in partnership with the Sikh Council UK, following on from their successful work in raising awareness within the Sikh community of the importance of reporting hate crimes, to act as a third-party reporting partner for Anti-Sikh hate. This community-based proposal was designed to allow the Sikh community open and wide access to report any incident at local reporting centres based in Gurdwaras, in a private and friendly environment.

However, this proposal was ignored and in August 2023 True Vision working with the National Sikh Police Association UK (an internal body to represent Sikh police officers) set up SikhGuard. This was a contemptuous move and ignored the needs of the community. The UK Sikh Survey has reported that 85% of Sikhs who had experienced a hate crime did not report it; 8 out of 10 said it was because it was a waste of time or they expected no positive outcome. This highlighted the huge lack of confidence and faith in the police, Crown Prosecution Service and wider authorities to investigate, record and successfully prosecute Anti-Sikh hate.

The APPG proposal recognised the lack of faith in the police and authorities. The community also faces other obstacles and challenges in reporting hate crimes, these vary from self-pride to a complete lack of knowledge and understanding of the reporting process. These issues need to be tackled from within the community.

The Sikh Network and Sikh Council UK were proposing to set up a UK-wide network of reporting centres within 15 Sikh Gurdwaras. The proposal also provided the police and authorities with a standardised format of reporting hate crimes against Sikhs, recognising the significant gap between the data held by the police and authorities on reported and investigated Anti-Sikh hate and the number of hate incidents/crimes that are actually experienced by Sikhs and reported/unreported.

Information gathered from the Sikh community on reported hate crimes suggests 95% may be invisible or missing from police data categorised as ‘religiously aggravated’ crimes against ‘Sikhs’. The majority of Anti-Sikh hate crimes are almost certainly lost in the race hate crime numbers that account for 70% of all reported hate crimes. Police contacts have suggested that religion is not a mandatory field in terms of crime reporting standards set by the Home Office for police forces.

In addition, some religious hate crimes against Sikh individuals, Gurdwaras, organisations and property are almost certainly being reported under Muslim hate crimes based on the perceived religion of the victim by the offender rather than the victim’s actual religion or race.

*“If anti-Muslim graffiti is sprayed on a religious temple of another faith, this would be recorded as an offence of racially or religiously aggravated criminal damage and flagged by the respective police force as a religious hate crime against Muslims.” Hate crime, England & Wales 2019-20*

**Urgent need for a Sikh community led body to report Anti-Sikh hate to the police.**

The APPG report made clear:

- Anti-Sikh hate is on the rise
- There is huge amount of under reporting of Anti-Sikh hate
- There is significant lack of visibility on Anti-Sikh hate crimes reported because hate crimes against Sikhs are recognised under at least 3 different categories (Race, Religion: Sikh and Religion: Muslim)

When we look to other high-risk hate crime groups, namely Muslims and Jews this points to the need for a competent Sikh community led body with adequate funding, monitoring capabilities, and third-party reporting status to report Anti-Sikh hate to the police. The body can act as a go-between for victims who are unable or unwilling to report to the police directly.



## SECTION 5: IMPROVED EDUCATION ABOUT SIKHI, SIKH HISTORY AND SAFEGUARDING SIKH HISTORICAL ARTEFACTS IN THE UK

*The Department for Education (DfE), local government and other local education bodies need to work together to improve education in mainstream schools about Sikhi and Sikh history from an Anglo-Sikh perspective. The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) needs to protect over 1,000 historic Sikh artefacts in museums, galleries and libraries in the UK. However, recognising the need to show respect and not cause offence to Sikhs, historic Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji manuscripts and other Gurmukhi religious manuscripts currently kept in museums and libraries must be returned to UK Sikh religious institutions.*

### KEY PRIORITIES:

#### **5.1 There needs to be a focus on improved education in schools about Sikhi and Sikh history, this will assist in the fight against prejudice and bullying of Sikh children**

In schools, there is a lack of awareness about who Sikhs are and their contribution, which filters down to the school playground. To tackle prejudice and bullying of Sikh children it is essential to improve the coverage of Sikhi (the Sikh faith) in a national Religious Education (RE) syllabus. RE coverage of Sikhi is currently arbitrary and is very much dependent on an individual teacher's interest. There is also an opportunity to look more broadly at education and also improve coverage of Anglo-Sikh history and the contribution of Sikhs.

A school's RE syllabus is determined locally, either through a funding agreement for academies or an agreed Standing Advisory Council on RE (SACRE) syllabus for local authority-maintained schools. The DfE does not specify what an RE curriculum should consist of, how it should be taught or how many hours it should be taught for. Schools are left to their own accord to ensure that the teaching and practices of the principal religions represented in the UK are taken into account as part of their RE curriculum.

However, there are difficulties with the SACRE process in properly representing the interests of minority religions. Abrahamic faiths get more representation across the UK. Moreover, the increase in academies across England and Wales (over 80% of secondary schools and over 40% of primary schools) means that Local Authority and SACRE influence is ever diminishing.

#### **5.2 There needs to be universal recognition of major Sikh religious festivals and occasions in schools as part of a drive towards accurate and comprehensive representation of the Sikh faith in school curricula**

A rise in the recognition of important religious festivals under the Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) agenda in schools has been very welcome. However, major Sikh festivals are often missed or overlooked. It is clear there is an inconsistent policy to cover the Sikh festivals and importantly to allow parents and families the option to take the day off for religious observance.

#### **5.3 There are understood to be over 1,000 historic Sikh artefacts in museums, galleries and libraries in the UK that need to be safeguarded and protected in the UK which can then be used for educational purposes**

#### **5.4 Historic Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji manuscripts and other Gurmukhi religious manuscripts currently kept in museums and libraries must be returned to UK Sikh religious institutions**

DCMS needs to co-ordinate full documentation of all Sikh artefacts kept in museums, galleries and libraries. This will help identify all Sikh artefacts that should be kept in the UK and be used to educate and promote the rich Sikh heritage. However, all Gurmukhi Sikh religious manuscripts identified should be immediately returned to UK Sikh religious institutions for safekeeping and to uphold strict Sikh religious protocols (as indicated in Section 3). The documentation would also help establish a register of historic artefacts for items of importance to Sikh history where there should be an export ban ensuring their protection for generations to come.

### BACKGROUND

#### **There needs to be better education about Sikhi and Sikh history in mainstream schools**

Over the past decade the Sikh community has experienced an increase in the targeted bullying of Sikh children. The British Sikh community recognise that this is not a new phenomenon, as many parents themselves have already been through racist bullying a generation ago. Nevertheless, the Sikh community are now third to fourth generation British born, yet it is felt that very little has changed in respect of bullying.

Improved coverage of Sikhi in the Religious Education (RE) syllabus and coverage of Anglo-Sikh history, highlighting the contribution and understanding of Sikhs will help tackle bullying of Sikh children and in the long term fight issues of prejudice and racism towards Sikhs in wider society.

#### **MPs need to encourage DfE to improve the education system to better represent the Sikh faith and Sikh way of life in schools**

The Sikh community would like to see accurate and comprehensive representation of the Sikh faith and Sikh way of life in UK schools by:

- 1) Developing a national RE curriculum to provide in-depth coverage of Sikh beliefs, history, and practices. Ensuring all students at both primary and secondary school receive a good understanding of the religion;
- 2) Ensuring that resources such as textbooks, digital materials, and expert-led workshops are vetted and approved by Sikh educational organisations to prevent misrepresentation;
- 3) Providing funded training sessions and resources to help teachers accurately convey Sikh teachings and cultural practices;
- 4) Ensuring that the Sikh faith is taught with the same depth and respect as other world religions to foster a balanced understanding among students; and
- 5) Educating students about the impact of hate crimes and the importance of respect for all religions to help reduce incidents of hate against Sikh children.

The Sikh community firmly believes in the importance of RE, it develops children's knowledge of the values and traditions of others in the UK, foster understanding among different

faiths and cultures. It is also important in enabling schools to meet their legal duty to promote young people's spiritual, moral and cultural development. The lack of awareness of the Sikh faith is causing Sikh children to be discriminated against and many face bullying for their religious attire. This also causes severe harm to the mental health of Sikh children.

RE is taught as part of the basic curriculum rather than the national curriculum. The teaching of RE is compulsory from Key Stage 1, starting age 5, and continues up to age 18 in all state-funded schools in England. Education is a devolved matter, so devolved administrations make their own decisions on it.

Sikhs believe that an investment in the national curriculum and better national resources will bolster integration and inclusion. Preparing future generations in the shaping of mainstream opinions on not just Sikh philosophy, history, culture and practices in policy but also other minority religions.

### **Sikh artefacts in museums, galleries and libraries in the UK need to be kept in the UK**

There is no single UK catalogue or register of historically important Sikh artefacts. However, there are understood to be over 1,000 historic Sikh artefacts in museums, galleries and libraries across the UK. Many were acquired in the mid-nineteenth century, during or shortly after the First Anglo-Sikh War (1845 to 1846). These artefacts belonged to the Sikh Kingdom. They are of significant historic value to Sikhs globally and to Britain, and include:

- Victoria and Albert (V&A) Museum: approx. 250 items, with the most significant being Maharaja Ranjit Singh's throne and an Order of Merit Medal. The wider collection includes a significant number of contemporaneous portraits of key figures relating to Ranjit Singh's reign;
- National Army Museum: contains almost 1,000 Sikh artefacts, including 'company paintings' of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and Maharaja Duleep Singh;
- Royal Armouries: almost 100 objects including a 9lb howitzer gun and personal armour believed to have belonged to Maharaja Ranjit Singh; and
- British Library: an ornamental letter of credence from the King of France, Louis-Philippe, to Maharaja Ranjit Singh; and up to 100 other items documenting contemporaneous accounts of the Sikh Kingdom.

The Imperial War Museum, the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst, and the British Museum all possess their own collections.

The issue of promoting and keeping Sikh artefacts in Britain was raised in the UK Parliament more than two decades ago following a celebration and appreciation of Sikh heritage at the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the creation of the Khalsa in 1999.

There is a risk that some of these items could be sent to India (and potentially Pakistan) due to the ever growing demands for British museums to repatriate culturally significant artefacts. The issue of repatriation is increasingly featuring in UK-India relations. The Koh-i-Noor diamond is becoming a contentious and politicised flash-point, with an Indian politician declaring "the issue is not just about ownership; it's

about the dignity and the self-respect of people who have been subjugated by colonial rule."

The Indian government has reportedly submitted an extensive list of items to the UK Government that should be repatriated. In January 2023, a Glasgow Museum became the first UK institution to return seven items to India held in Scotland since the nineteenth century. Legislative changes have also been put in place that will accelerate the repatriation process. The Charities Act 2022 allows, for the first time, national museums the authority to return historic artefacts for 'reasons of morality'.

### **There are two main compelling reasons why historic Sikh artefacts should not be sent to India or Pakistan:**

- 1) Sikh history belongs to the global community of Sikhs and needs to be more accessible to those living and visiting Britain, including in several Sikh museums in Derby, Leicester and Northampton: Sikhs are a diaspora community, that have settled in countries across the globe. If Sikhs had their own homeland, they would have a claim to these items. Prior to the British annexation of the Sikh Kingdom in 1849, Sikh artefacts belonged to the Sikh nation and have never belonged to India or Pakistan. Britain is in effect holding these priceless objects in trust until a Sikh state could make an exclusive or moral claim.
- 2) Sikh artefacts have been destroyed in India and Pakistan: from the mid-19th century onwards, British institutions have preserved and cared for Sikh artefacts whilst ensuring they remain accessible to the public. Conversely, since the independence of India and Pakistan, there has been a steady rate of destruction of historical sites and artefacts throughout those countries.

Whilst this destruction was often the result of general neglect, Sikh heritage has suffered from bouts of targeted destruction and violence. The most tragic example being the burning down of the Sikh Reference Library in Amritsar in June 1984 whilst under Indian Army control. This act of vandalism is equivalent to the destruction of the Vatican Library, or the destruction of every major English historical document including The Domesday Book, Magna Carta, and The Petition of Right and beyond, in a single act. In the interest of historic preservation, historic Sikh artefacts in Britain should remain and be accessible in Britain.





## SECTION 6: FREEDOM OF RELIGION, THE GLOBAL RISE OF HINDU EXTREMISM AND TRANSNATIONAL REPRESSION BY THE INDIAN GOVERNMENT

The UK Government is committed to promoting freedom of religion and political tolerance across the globe. It must therefore work with other governments to urgently address the global rise of Hindu extremism (Hindutva) being promoted by the right wing Indian government because it represents a major threat to global stability. In the UK, the government needs to confront Hindu nationalist groups promoting extremism and targeting religious minorities, women, Dalits and those critical of the policies and actions of the right wing Indian government. Transnational repression and political interference abroad by the Indian government is one of the biggest challenges facing Western governments and intelligence agencies. It requires a robust response because it involves extreme actions such as the assassinations of Sikh activists in the Diaspora.

### KEY PRIORITIES:

**6.1 MPs need to encourage the UK Government to work with Sikh community organisations to promote freedom of religion and belief across the globe as this is at the heart of Sikh religious teachings**

The Sikh religion and way of life promotes religious freedom. Sikhs believe that all people have the right to follow their own paths without condemnation or coercion from others. Sikhism stands for social justice, human liberty, equality, freedom of conscience, ethical living and gender equality.

There is therefore an opportunity for Sikh community representatives to work with the new UK Government to promote religious freedoms of all and also to specifically address the secular extremism and religious discrimination Sikhs are facing across the globe, whether it be in France, Belgium or India.

In the UK, we have developed successful solutions for Sikhs to freely practice their faith in educational establishments, at work and in public spaces. The UK Government should work with Sikh representatives in the UK to encourage and influence other countries, especially those with less established Sikh communities to explore how similar approaches could be adopted.

## 6.2 MPs need to urge the UK Government to work with other countries to urgently address the global rise of Hindu extremism (Hindutva)

The global rise of the extreme right wing Hindutva ideology of the Indian government and the concerted effort to make India into a Hindu Rashtra (Hindu state) with escalating violence and discrimination across the country against religious minorities, women and Dalits has reached alarming levels. The weak or non-existent response from the Indian government against the perpetrators has created an atmosphere of widespread impunity and there is evidence of regime complicity.

Hindutva forces desire to turn India into an exclusionist Hindu theocracy and have been increasingly trying to appropriate the Sikh faith for their narrow ends. They frequently distort historical facts, incorrectly portray the Sikh Gurus as defenders of the Hindu religion and opponents of Muslims, and Sikhs as defenders of India. The RSS consider

Islam and Christianity as foreign religions and Sikhism and Buddhism as part of the Hindu fold in their plans for assimilation.

**6.3 The UK Government and intelligence agencies need to work with their partners in the Five Eyes nations and other western countries to confront the threat of transnational repression and political interference by the Indian government that is targeting its opponents in the Diaspora**

Transnational repression by the Indian government targeting Sikh organisations and activists in the UK is nothing new and has been taking place for at least 40 years. The nature and scale of repression permitted or supported by the UK Government to silence Sikh dissent from the UK has been relentless, but has received greater public exposure in the last 12 months with assassinations and plots to kill Sikh activists in the US, UK and Canada.

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), is an independent bipartisan agency that annually releases policy recommendations to the U.S. government on international religious freedom. In its 2024 [report](#) it highlighted that the Indian authorities are increasingly engaged in acts of transnational repression targeting religious minorities abroad. In a December 2023 hearing, members of the U.S. Congress reiterated concern about India's involvement in acts of transnational repression.

## BACKGROUND

Throughout India's history since partition, the central government or state governments have encouraged mob violence against religious minorities. Most notably, we have witnessed the Sikh Genocide in November 1984, the extrajudicial killing of thousands of Sikhs in the ten years that followed, and the Gujarat massacre of Muslims in 2002. Investigations and prosecutions of those involved in large-scale violence have been ineffective or absent.

The Supreme Court of India and fact-finding commissions have noted common characteristics and causes of such violence, including incitement of violence against religious minorities by politicians or religious leaders. Crimes remain unsolved and there has been no proper due process, accountability or justice for victims of largescale attacks.



## British Sikhs can work with the UK Government to lead the way on Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB)

ForB is a human right which is guaranteed under international law. Article 18 of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in 1948, states that 'everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion'. The UK government is committed to defending ForB for all and promoting respect between different religious and non-religious communities.

Where FoRB is under attack, often other basic rights are threatened too. This can involve denials of freedom of expression, detention without trial, impunity for attacks on property and people, banning religious assemblies, and unlawful killings. The Sikh faith and way of life are focused around tolerance and respect for all others. Freedom of religion and freedom of speech are cornerstones of the Sikh way of life.

Almost 350 years ago the Ninth Sikh Guru, Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji and his followers stood against religious intolerance and sacrificed their lives defending religious freedoms for all against the rulers in Delhi. The same, if not bigger challenge, is presented today by those running India and their right wing Hindutva ideology.

#### India's worrying shift from a democracy to an autocracy



Independent human rights organisations and prestigious newspapers in the US, UK and France have highlighted India's rapid democratic backsliding. Governments across the globe are increasingly worried the democratic credentials of India have been systematically destroyed, leading to genuine fears about the security and stability of India after its most recent elections.

The independence of key institutions like the judiciary, media, and progressive civil society associations, has been increasingly undermined. The relentless attacks using state machinery and a captive media against critical voices, whether in opposition parties or in civil society, including journalists, lawyers and activists, has not gone unnoticed, despite the massive lobbying machinery of the Hindutva regime.

The draconian response to the BBC documentary - India: The Modi question is a case in point. The closure in India of Amnesty International and Oxfam and the attack on Greenpeace, on what appear to be political grounds, has caused shock waves internationally. Trust in the regulatory institutions governing the market and the economy has also been shaken after the Adani scandal. India has slipped precipitously on every index of democracy and freedoms.

The USCIRF 2024 report recommended that 12 countries designated in 2023 by the U.S. State Department of "particular concern" be named again on the 2024 list, including China and Russia. This year's report also added five new countries: Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Nigeria, Vietnam and India.

USCIRF's report on India said, "The government, led by [Narendra Modi's ruling] Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), reinforced discriminatory nationalist policies, perpetuated hateful rhetoric and failed to address communal violence." It said that this violence "disproportionately" affects Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Dalits, Jews and Adivasis, or indigenous peoples. In addition to recommending that the U.S. government designate India as a Country of Particular Concern, it recommended sanctions against those responsible for religious freedom violations.

#### Transnational repression and political interference by the Indian government targeting Sikh activists

In September 2023, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau made a dramatic statement in the Canadian Parliament alleging there was credible intelligence that the Indian government was involved in the assassination of Canadian Sikh leader Hardeep Singh Nijjar three months earlier.

Two months later, it emerged the US authorities had foiled an assassination plot to kill a US Sikh attorney at the same time. The unsealed indictment revealed the direct involvement of the Indian government in the US and Canadian plots. Arrests have recently been made in Canada and a two-month Washington Post investigation named those who directed operations from India, with the trail leading directly to Narendra Modi and Ajit Doval, his National Security Adviser.

The US Department of Justice unsealed indictment from 29 November 2023 mentions plans for "two or three jobs" (assassinations of Sikh activists in the Diaspora) every month. Sikh activists in the UK have reported matters to the police and others have received warnings from police and the intelligence services.

#### Transnational repression targeting Sikh activists in the UK

Sikh activists in the UK have also been a target of transnational repression. Death threats were made against Avtar Singh Khanda, a young Sikh who was hounded by Indian media. On 14 April 2023, two months before he died, he put out a video on social media setting out the pressure being exerted on him by the Indian authorities and the targeting and harassment of his family in India.

Former Indian army major and a leading nationalist commentator, who is affiliated with the Indian ruling party, Gaurav Arya, directly threatened Avtar in a video uploaded to Arya's YouTube channel on 18 April 2023 where he stated: "*Khanda, son, you are finished...the NIA [National Investigation Agency] will eliminate him.*"

Avtar Singh Khanda was actively campaigning for the right to self-determination for the Sikhs and highlighting human rights violations and injustices against the Sikhs in India when he mysteriously died on 15 June 2023. He died under suspicious circumstances three days before the assassination of Hardeep Singh Nijjar in Canada.





The West Midlands Police has been exposed by the Guardian for the bungled and inadequate police investigation into his death, and the coroner has been criticised for failing to carry out an autopsy. There is a legal campaign in the UK for an inquest and Independent Inquiry into his death. **MPs representing Sikh constituents should support the calls for an inquest and inquiry into the death of Avtar Singh Khanda.**

Counter terror police from London, the West Midlands and other police forces told Sikh representatives in a meeting on 27 June 2023 after the mysterious death of Avtar Singh Khanda and the assassination of Hardeep Singh Nijjar that they were deeply concerned with the activities of India's National Investigation Agency (NIA) in the UK. The police suggested they were concerned that the NIA were sharing video footage and still photographs of 45 Sikh protesters in London from 19 March 2023 on social media. They suggested this may amount to "hostile activities" by a foreign government and could be deemed criminal activity and "state repression".

The NIA visit to the UK in May 2023 was followed by the NIA extraordinarily and outrageously issuing a "hit list" of 20 Sikhs in the Diaspora on an Indian television broadcast in Britain on Sky 710 on 10 July 2023 that is currently being investigated by the West Midlands Police. This included at least six Sikhs from the UK and unbelievably at the end of the footage the NIA claimed to have killed Hardeep Singh Nijjar and Avtar Singh Khanda.

Many believe the authorities in the UK quietly raised concerns with the Indian authorities following letters from UK MPs about the NIA hit list and their claims to the killings was broadcast on television. However, in a tit-for tat response, the NIA raided the family homes and harassed families of around 40 UK Sikhs in early August in a display of intimidation. This included the homes and family of the Chair and Vice Chair of the Sikh Federation (UK). Their homes were searched for seven hours and their families summoned to the NIA court on 3 and 7 August 2023 in Delhi where they

were simply shown photographs of the 45 protesters from 19 March 2023 in London knowing full well the Chair and Vice Chair of the Sikh Federation (UK) had no involvement in that protest.

The Sikh Federation (UK) has produced a detailed submission to go to the Foreign Affairs Select Committee and Security Minister after the General Election on India's transnational repression targeting Sikh activists in the UK.



Some Sikh activists from the UK and elsewhere have been detained at ports or the border under Schedule 7 of the Terrorism Act 2000. Some have had to give DNA; devices have been taken and individuals interrogated for several hours with the focus on the Indian government's transnational repression of Sikh activists. Questions have focused on the death of Avtar Singh Khanda and the assassination of Hardeep Singh Nijjar. Often those stopped have been travelling with their families or friends and all have been hugely inconvenienced by these disruptive and intrusive tactics. Schedule 7 is being mis-used to intimidate Sikh activists and gather intelligence. Sikhs are considering court action as the use appears discriminatory.

## SECTION 7: RELEASE OF JAGTAR SINGH JOHAL AND PERMANENT AND UNCONDITIONAL RELEASE OF OTHER SIKH POLITICAL PRISONERS FROM INDIAN JAILS

*The new UK Government must use all powers available, including action through the United Nations, to secure the immediate release and return to the UK of Jagtar Singh Johal. A 37-year-old British national who in November 2017 was abducted and tortured by Indian police and has been in arbitrary detention in an Indian jail awaiting trial with no substantial evidence presented against him in nearly 350 court appearances. The UK Government also need to work with other countries to urge the Indian authorities to action the permanent and unconditional release of all Sikh political prisoners that have been held in Indian jails. Many for over 30 years, for their resistance to the state-sponsored Sikh Genocide of 1984 and ongoing opposition to the Indian government.*

### KEY PRIORITIES:

#### 7.1 Release and return to the UK of British national Jagtar Singh Johal

It is unacceptable that Jagtar Singh Johal as a British national continues to be held in arbitrary detention in an Indian jail since November 2017. The UK Government has not followed its own policy of calling for the release of any British national held arbitrarily in another country. MPs elected in the General Election need to join Jagtar's MP elected from West Dunbartonshire and the APPG for British Sikhs in pressuring the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and the Indian authorities to secure Jagtar's immediate release so he can be reunited with his wife and family in Scotland.

Keir Starmer, the Labour Leader, who is expected to become the next Prime Minister has met Jagtar's family and personally supported them by challenging the Conservative Prime Minister to intervene. As the new Prime Minister he will have an opportunity to use his influence to call for and secure Jagtar's immediate release.

#### 7.2 Permanent and unconditional release of all Sikh political prisoners being held in Indian jails

Sikh political prisoners held in Indian jails is an issue that Sikhs have been raising with MPs and the UK Government for nearly 40 years starting with the 'Jodhpur detainees' (Sikh pilgrims and preachers held for years after the Indian Army attack on the Golden Temple in June 1984). The most notable historic case of an individual Sikh political prisoner is that of Professor Devinderpal Singh Bhullar who was deported from Germany in 1995. Human rights groups successfully argued his deportation was a violation of Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights and a higher German court ruled he should not have been deported to India.

Many Sikh political prisoners have completed their sentences, but they remain in Indian jails. Whilst the Indian authorities hold them for political reasons and the present Modi-led BJP government has used them as political pawns. In an attempt to silence Sikh voices in the diaspora who have actively been calling for justice and Sikh independence. Over the last 15 years, the Indian authorities have regularly arrested Sikh activists and created a new generation of Sikh

political prisoners. The last major crackdown was in March 2023 when over 1,000 Sikh activists were rounded up and detained in Punjab.

### BACKGROUND

The issue of Sikh political prisoners is one that the Sikh community across the globe has been raising for decades. The case of Jagtar Singh Johal, a young British national, Sikh activist that no one had heard of until November 2017 has highlighted the plight of all Sikh political prisoners. He was abducted and suffered third degree torture by Indian police and remains arbitrarily imprisoned without conviction.

India's rapidly sliding position at global level as a "democracy," set out in Section 6, combined with the appalling treatment of Jagtar Singh Johal and other British Sikh nationals visiting India in the last few years has seriously damaged India's reputation on the international stage. Many feel there is a complete breakdown of rule of law in India and the Indian government does not respect the rule of law in other countries where Sikhs live. This has impacted on some Sikhs choosing not to even visit India where they have their extended families. This should be a matter of grave concern for Western countries with increasing Sikh populations.

#### Historic injustices against Sikh political prisoners

The 'Jodhpur detainees' were 375 unarmed men, women and children who survived Operation Blue Star and were outrageously charged with 'waging war against the State'. Most of the Jodhpur detainees were pilgrims offering prayers on the anniversary of the martyrdom of the fifth Sikh Guru and were first held in a military camp in Amritsar. Then moved to Nabha jail and finally shifted to Jodhpur jail this included pilgrims who were injured that were first taken to hospital.

They were eventually released in three batches, between March 1989 and July 1991 with their only crime being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Many of the detainees who survived and were physically and mentally able went to the courts alleging 'wrongful detention and torture'. In April 2017 more than three decades later, the courts ruled the arrests were 'illegal' and granted compensation to 40 detainees who had appealed and were still alive, with over 100 having died. The Amritsar District and Sessions Judge stated 'the event underlies the human rights violations by troops during the operation'.

#### The infamous case of Professor Devinderpal Singh Bhullar



Long-standing MPs will be familiar with the case of Professor Devinderpal Singh Bhullar. After he was illegally deported from Germany in 1995 he was arrested as soon as he landed in Delhi, tortured and imprisoned without trial for five years.



In 2001 he was sentenced to death in a highly controversial judgement where the presiding judge ruled he was innocent. The European Parliament and Amnesty International joined the campaign to stop his execution. Following a 13-year campaign his death penalty was finally commuted in 2014 in part, as he was suffering from schizophrenia. Despite suffering from schizophrenia, hypertension and arthritis for many years his latest application for release was rejected in January 2024 and he has now been in prison approaching 30 years. Prisoners like him remain in Indian jails and at best are released for short periods on parole for a few weeks but then forced to return to prison.

### The case of British national, Jagtar Singh Johal



On 4 November 2017, British citizen Jagtar Singh Johal (Jaggi) was hooded and abducted from the streets of Punjab, India by plain clothed police officers in broad daylight. This happened whilst Jaggi was shopping with his wife, the couple had only been married a few weeks earlier. For the first ten days Jagtar's exact location was unknown. He was being held in a remote police station. The UK Government was also not informed about Jagtar's whereabouts during this period.

During this time, Jaggi was subject to third degree torture, which included beatings, electrocution, and having his legs stretched beyond their limits. Police officers also threatened to douse him in petrol and set him alight. The following is an excerpt from a hand-written letter by Jagtar explaining the torture he was subject to:

*"Electric shocks were administered by placing the crocodile clips on my ear lobes, nipples and private parts. Multiple shocks were given each day... I was left unable to walk and had to be carried out of the interrogation room. Since then I have had problems urinating."*

Within days of his abduction senior officials in Punjab held a press conference declaring that Jagtar was guilty of being involved in "targeted killings". The Indian authorities labelled Jagtar guilty prior to any trial taking place and subjected him to a "trial by media".

More than six and half years later he has not been convicted and his trials are repeatedly delayed. There have been nearly 350 hearings, in which no evidence has been produced

against Jagtar. He has been granted bail in two cases and denied access to his family via video calls, despite courts orders granting the same. Despite claims of having evidence against Jaggi, the Indian authorities have continuously delayed proceedings as they are still looking for evidence.

The Sikh community has played an active role in creating an international awareness **#FreeJaggiNow** campaign working with organisations like Redress and Reprieve. Thousands of letters have been sent to over 250 MPs. The campaign has seen supporters from around the globe, including members of the APPG for British Sikhs and politicians from Canada commenting on the issues raised in Jagtar's case. Jagtar's MP Martin Docherty-Hughes has since November 2017 used every opportunity to raise his case in Parliament and meet with Ministers to keep up the pressure.

Within days of launching the campaign, the case of Jagtar Singh Johal was discussed in Parliament. The former Prime Minister, Theresa May commented on the case and the then Foreign Minister, Rory Stewart, took the stance that if a British national had been tortured then Britain would take "extreme action". However, since then the UK Government has been unsuccessful in intervening or ensuring Jagtar's release from prison.

Jagtar has been arbitrarily held for six and half years and his basic human rights as a British national have been violated by the Indian authorities. His family has seen and engaged with five different Foreign Secretaries and four Prime Ministers, all failing to secure the release of a British national.

This raises much wider issues and all MPs with Sikh constituents must pressure the new UK Government after the General Election to intervene and work with other countries and the United Nations which has taken up his case. This would be to ensure that Jagtar is released and returned to the UK as soon as possible.

### A new generation of Sikh political prisoners

In September 2022, Bhai Amritpal Singh who returned to Punjab a month earlier having lived in Dubai for a decade became a fully practising Amritdhari Sikh. He immediately started a popular campaign which combated Punjab's drug and alcohol epidemic, promoted reverse migration back to Punjab, encouraged others to adopt the Sikh identity and peacefully advocated the need for a sovereign Sikh state, Khalistan.



He opened a drug rehabilitation facility and his popularity grew due to his willingness to tackle social issues head-on when previous governments have failed to solve these issues. His efforts received praise from Sikh religious authorities.

On 18 March 2023, the Punjab state government, acting in coordination with the central government, worried about the popularity of Bhai Amritpal Singh launched an intense crackdown involving tens of thousands of police and paramilitary on Sikh activists across Punjab and in an attempt to arrest Bhai Amritpal Singh. However, in a massive embarrassment the Indian authorities failed to arrest Bhai Amritpal Singh. He was officially declared an absconder under the draconian National Security Act (NSA).

Mobile internet services in Punjab were suspended and text messaging services were disabled during the weekend, until the afternoon of 21 March, affecting 27 million people. In some districts, the restrictions were extended until 23 March. Gatherings of more than four people were prohibited under Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code. The Indian government also forced Twitter to withhold 122 accounts linked to Amritpal Singh and his organisation Waris Punjab De (Heirs of Punjab).

There were road blocks across the Punjab and an estimated 1,000 Sikh activists were rounded up and arrested in around 48 hours. There was widespread criticism of the police and paramilitary crackdown ordered by the state and central government.

After 11 days on 29 March 2023, Bhai Amritpal Singh released a video and on 23 April 2023, he gave himself up at a Gurdwara as he believed he had committed no crime. Indian authorities were concerned about the potential of an uprising in Punjab. Bhai Amritpal Singh was sent to Dibrugarh central jail in Assam, with eight other associates including a British resident. These arrests created a new generation of Sikh political prisoners. Bhai Amritpal Singh was married to British national, Kirandeep Kaur, on 10 February 2023 and she has been prevented by the Indian authorities from visiting her family in Britain.

### Permanent and unconditional release of all Sikh political prisoners being held in Indian jails

Sikh political prisoners who resisted the state-sponsored Sikh Genocide in 1984 and campaigned for a Sikh homeland still languish in Indian jails and some have been held for over 30 years. Although many of the Sikh political prisoners have long completed the sentences handed down to them, they remain in Indian jails whilst the Indian authorities hold them with no legal basis other than for political reasons.

Many Sikh organisations have been advocating for the release of Sikh political prisoners and in recent years there have also been several high-profile campaigns and hunger strikes. There are currently dozens of high-profile Sikh political prisoners, including one on death row held in various states across India. The list is maintained by leading human rights lawyers in India and does not include youth detained in recent years for advocating for a Sikh homeland.

By continuing to detain Sikh political prisoners that have completed their sentences this becomes a violation of the individual's human rights. The UK Government should be challenged by MPs to intervene and ensure their release. It is imperative that the UK Government work with other countries to take a firm stand on the permanent and unconditional release of all Sikh political prisoners.

Since the Sikh struggle for independence from India began in the 1980's, many Sikh political prisoners have been languishing in Indian prisons even after having completed their sentences with some spanning more than three decades. To illegally and forcefully keep political prisoners behind bars even after they have long served their sentences is in violation of India's own constitution and internationally recognized human rights norms.



**Jathedar Bhai Jagtar Singh Ji Hawara**

Charged for assassinating Beantia 'Butcher', the then Chief Minister of Punjab, after which Indian state terrorism was raised. In the Sikh history of 2015, 300,000+ Sikhs unanimously elected Bhai Singh as the Jathedar of Sikh's highest seat of political authority, Sri Akaal Takht Sarbajit, in jail since 1985.



**Bhai Gurdeep Singh Ji Khera**

Since his arrest in 1990, Bhai Singh has spent the past 33 years in solitary confinement. To date, Bhai Singh has served 22 years in Solari Jail, nine in Tihar Jail and from 2012 onwards he has been Solitary Jail. Imprisoned under TADA, Bhai Singh is still behind bars despite having finished his sentence.



**Prof. Bhai Davinderpal Singh Ji Bhullar**

While a Professor of Engineering in Punjab's IIT, College in Ludhiana, many of Prof. Bhullar's students were disappointed by Indian state authorities, he was marked towards a path of justice. To arrest Bhai Singh, his father and uncle were targeted to death. Although innocent, has been in jail since 1985.



**Bhai Parmjit Singh Ji Bheera**

Bhai Singh was charged for assassinating Beantia 'Butcher', the then Chief Minister of Punjab, under which extensive genocidal policies and programs were unleashed to systematically kill Sikh youth with state-sponsored impunity. He has been in Chandigarh's Burel Jail since 1985.



**Bhai Shamsher Singh Ji Khalsa**

Bhai Singh was charged for assassinating Beantia 'Butcher', the then Chief Minister of Punjab, under which extensive genocidal policies and programs were unleashed to systematically kill Sikh youth to quell the Sikh movement for independence. Has been in Chandigarh's Burel Jail since 1985.



**Bhai Gurmeet Singh Ji 'Engineer'**

Bhai Singh was charged for assassinating Beantia 'Butcher', the then Chief Minister of Punjab, under which extensive genocidal policies and programs were unleashed to systematically kill Sikh youth to quell the Sikh movement for independence. Has been in Chandigarh's Burel Jail since 1985.



**Bhai Balwant Singh Ji Rajoana**

Bhai Rajoana was also charged for assassinating Beantia 'Butcher', the then Chief Minister of Punjab, under which extensive genocidal policies and programs were unleashed to systematically kill Sikh youth to quell the Sikh movement for independence. Has been in Chandigarh's Burel Jail since 1985.



**Bhai Jagtar Singh Ji Tara**

Bhai Tara was also a convicted in the assassination of Beantia 'Butcher' under whom extensive genocidal policies and programs were unleashed to systematically kill Sikh youth with impunity. He has been in Chandigarh's Burel Jail since 1985.



**Bhai Lakhwinder Singh Ji**

Bhai Singh was co-accused in the assassination of Beantia 'Butcher', the then Chief Minister of Punjab, who was charged by the Indian state to provide impunity to police authorities for thousands of extrajudicial murders of Sikh youth. Has been in Chandigarh's Burel Jail since 1985.



**Bhai Jagtar Singh Ji Johal (Jaggi)**

Since November of 2017, despite being a British national, Bhai Johal has been illegally detained without charge by Indian authorities. He was arrested because of his realizing documentation, in the form of websites like [www.sikhliberty.com](http://www.sikhliberty.com), of human rights violations that Sikhs endured in India.



**Bhai Arwinder Singh Ji Nawanshehar**

In February of 2009, Bhai Singh was sentenced to life imprisonment under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA). Bhai Singh alongside other Sikhs were booked under Section 121 (keeping an agent in India), even though arrest was recovered from their work books on the Khanda struggle.



**Bhai Surjit Singh Ji Gurdaspur**

In February 2020, Bhai Singh, alongside Anwar and Ranjit Singh were sentenced to life imprisonment under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA). In an unprecedented case, the Indian State was arrested for the crime of the mere possession of books on the Khanda struggle and Sikh history.



**Bhai Ranjit Singh Ji Kaithal**

Bhai Singh, alongside Anwar and Ranjit Singh were sentenced to life imprisonment under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA). They were also booked under Section 121 (keeping an agent in India) even though all that was recovered from them were Sikh history books.



**Bhai Gurmukh Singh Ji Rode**

Bhai Gurmukh Singh, a Sikh of 20th century's greatest Sikh, Sant Gurm Singh Ji Bhindranwale, Bhai Singh Ji's grandfather was arrested enough by state authorities to have him implicated in fabricated cases. Despite being innocent, he has been in jail since 2013.





## SECTION 8: INDEPENDENT PUBLIC INQUIRY INTO THE ACTIONS OF THE UK GOVERNMENT AND ITS MOTIVATIONS FOR ANTI-SIKH MEASURES IN THE 1980S IN THE UK PRE AND POST THE 1984 SIKH GENOCIDE

*An independent judge-led public inquiry is required to investigate the UK Government's advice and assistance to the Indian authorities in planning a military attack on the Sikhs' holiest shrine in Amritsar in June 1984. There is a need for the inquiry to restore wider community confidence by establishing the facts and acknowledging the mistakes that were made in giving controversial advice and assistance in secrecy. The inquiry would also investigate the range of anti-Sikh measures taken in the UK in the 1980s pre and post the 1984 Sikh Genocide to restrict the democratic freedoms of the minority British Sikh community.*

### KEY PRIORITIES:

**8.1 An independent judge led public inquiry is necessary to establish the facts, restore community confidence and learn from the mistakes that were made in giving military advice and assistance in the Indian army assault on the Sikhs' holiest shrine in Amritsar in June 1984**



The details of the specific military advice given has still not been revealed. The Conservative Government has refused all requests to make the SAS officer's report public suggesting there is something to hide. An independent judge-led inquiry will establish the reasons, including commercial interests, for the actions of the UK Government in providing advice and assistance to the Indian authorities in planning a military attack on Sri Harmandir Sahib (often referred to as the Golden Temple Complex) that led to the massacre of thousands of innocent Sikh pilgrims.

The Labour Party included this commitment in its main manifestos for both the June 2017 snap election, and the December 2019 general election. Meetings and exchanges have taken place with David Lammy, the Shadow Foreign Secretary and Yvette Cooper, the Shadow Home Secretary to ensure Labour remain committed to a public inquiry. It

has been suggested the British Sikh community will be expecting the public inquiry to start within 100 days of a Labour Government coming to power or in the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary year with the appointment of a judge to lead the inquiry.

**8.2 The independent judge led public inquiry must also investigate the range of anti-Sikh measures taken in the UK in the 1980s pre and post the 1984 Sikh Genocide to restrict the democratic freedoms of Sikhs in the UK**

The Sikh Federation (UK) in November 2017 published the "[Sacrificing Sikhs](#)" investigative report based on around half the papers that the government has been prepared to release to date. The report indicated some of the anti-Sikh measures the UK Government took in the 1980s. A Freedom of Information tribunal ruled against the Cabinet Office in June 2018 and declared a very high public interest. It concluded that the internal review by the Cabinet Secretary ordered by David Cameron in January 2014 was rushed and limited in scope. The tribunal considered the Sacrificing Sikhs report and the ruling against the Cabinet Office provided further evidence of the need for an independent judge led public inquiry that should also look into anti-Sikh measures.

### BACKGROUND

In January 2014, top secret government papers were accidentally released to the National Archives under the 30-year rule. They revealed that a British special forces officer visited Amritsar in February 1984 to advise the Indian army ahead of an attack on Sri Harmandir Sahib and the surrounding complex in which thousands of pilgrims were massacred.

The then Prime Minister David Cameron hastily commissioned an in-house review by his Cabinet Secretary which claimed that the British advice was an isolated incident that had limited impact on the subsequent attack. The Sikh Federation (UK) raised serious concerns on limitations of the in-house review before it was published and presented to Parliament in February 2014. Interestingly, Lord Cameron as Foreign Secretary speaking in the House of Lords in April 2024 stated Operation Blue Star was 'wrong' which by implication indicates the UK assistance in 1984 was not only unethical, but criminal.

The period of the review conducted by Sir Jeremy Heywood was intentionally selected for the period December 1983 to June 1984 to allow it to overlook a considerable amount of context which clearly demonstrates the paramount importance of arms sales to India in the build-up to Operation Blue Star. In February 2014, Heywood downplayed the situation and concluded that the "military advice was a one-off", a position repeated by Number 10. This has now been shown to be untrue as the in-house review was not as rigorous or thorough as claimed, and Parliament and the wider public have been misled.

**Sacrificing Sikhs investigative report based on the government's own papers**

There were inherent limitations with the in-house review as it was deliberately rushed and too narrowly focused. The Conservative government that has been in power since 2014 is understandably reluctant to investigate Britain's role in India's repression of Sikhs in the 1980s. The "[Sacrificing Sikhs](#)" report produced by Phil Miller for the Sikh Federation (UK), provides evidence that raises serious concerns about the veracity of the UK Government's official narrative. This report is not an attempt to 're-write history' rather, it is the

Conservative government itself, through its ongoing censorship, who seems to be distorting and manipulating history to suit its own ends.

Despite warnings a year earlier of disastrous consequences and a “blood bath”, Margaret Thatcher sent an SAS officer to advise on attacking the Sikhs’ holiest site. In April 1983 the British High Commissioner Sir Robert Wade-Gery warned the UK government of the disastrous consequences of “any attempt by the government to use force to enter the Golden Temple precincts.” Yet within a year of a warning of a “blood bath”, Margaret Thatcher had sent a special forces officer to advise the Indian army on how to attack the holy site and demonstrated Britain’s complete lack of sensitivity and its support for a military solution.

Furthermore, the review conducted by Sir Jeremy Heywood was incomplete and rushed despite claims that many thousands of files had been reviewed. The FCO files released on 20 July 2017 show in correspondence from March 1985 that the British Army advised the Chief of Army Staff of the Indian Army, General Vaidya who planned Operation Blue Star in June 1984. The March 1985 letter shows he received a confidential briefing from the British Army earlier in 1984 about counterinsurgency and internal security equipment to help deal with domestic unrest from Sikhs in Punjab. This was deliberately missed by Heywood in his review.

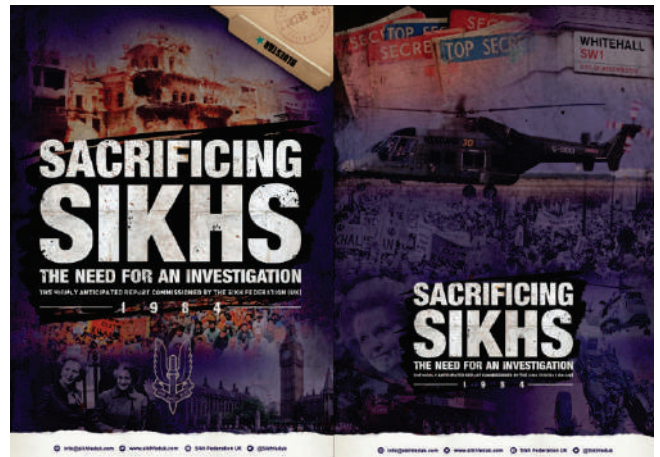
The legacy of British involvement was not limited to 1984 however. The conclusions reached in the report inevitably diverge from the official narrative, precisely because it considers facts that the government wanted to remain hidden at the time, and still does to this day. Extensive research by the Sikh Federation (UK) has found that British involvement in India’s repression of Sikhs in 1984 went much further than the UK government has ever officially acknowledged. Merely scratching the surface on the issue, the narrow investigation window offered by David Cameron and Sir Jeremy Heywood highlights the extent of the cover up.

Repressive measures against Sikhs were carried out in the UK to appease the Indian government and secure arms deals. The Indian government made astonishing requests of Britain. For example, the Indian government asked Britain, unsuccessfully, to intern all UK Gurdwara presidents in early June 1984. In a meeting on 8 June 1984, none other than M K Rasgotra, the Indian Foreign Secretary implied to the British High Commission in Delhi that British police should shoot dead Sikh protestors in London. However, other repressive measures were carried out to appease the Indian government, such as extensive Special Branch surveillance of peaceful Sikh protests, banning religious marches and demonstrations, measures to disrupt a Sikh Sports tournament, an extradition treaty and deporting a Sikh activist who went on to be tortured in India.

Further concerns arise in respect of the aid budget being utilised by the government to subsidise defence sales to India. There are extensive documents that show the efforts to persuade India to sign a contract with Westland helicopters and the use of aid money. There is also evidence to suggest that India was influencing day to day television programming being produced in the UK. In October 1983, the Foreign Office at a meeting with Thames Television dissuaded one of the program’s producers from including India in a documentary on abusive regimes.

Following coverage of Indira Gandhi’s assassination, the BBC Chairman responded to pressure from Margaret Thatcher, giving the BBC’s assistant director-general “strict

instructions” on “special clearance” needed “from him” on who could broadcast on the BBC. A week after the assassination, on 8 November, the BBC Director-General wrote a letter to the Indian High Commissioner, apologising for broadcasting an interview signalling that the free expression of Sikhs in the UK had been curtailed and that the British press was muzzled or at best controlled by the state on behalf of a foreign power in respect of Indian affairs during the period.



The in-house review also stated no other form of UK military assistance, such as equipment or training, was given to the Indian authorities in relation to Operation Blue Star. This was repeated several times by the Foreign Secretary, William Hague in Parliament. This has also been proved not to be true.

It is important there is an independent judge led public inquiry to get to the truth, however painful, of what happened in the 1980s. The inquiry will send a positive signal to the law-abiding British Sikh community, the wider public and Parliamentarians so all can learn from it and ensure it never happens again.

As seen in section 6 of the Sikh Manifesto the experience of the Sikh community in the UK with regards to the respecting of their rights has been regressive over the past 5 years, with the Indian government making outrageous demands and applying extreme pressure. The next government must show courage and strength to stand up to this pressure, reverse this trend and defend the rights of British Sikhs.

### **Freedom of Information tribunal ruling against the Cabinet Office**

The Cabinet Office has withheld vital records examined in the Heywood review. A Freedom of Information request for these records was first submitted on 30 December 2014. There were considerable and unacceptable delays by the Cabinet Office at each stage of the process and an appeal to the Information Tribunal with a three-day hearing was eventually held in March 2018. In June 2018 the tribunal ruled:

*That there was “a high public interest” in disclosure – partly in response to the “strength of feeling of the Sikh community in the UK and beyond” – and set aside objections from the Foreign Office, which said declassification could adversely affect the UK’s relations with India.*

*More than 40 years after the event there remains a reluctance to release relevant information that will expose the UK and Indian governments.*



## SECTION 9 – INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION OF THE 1984 SIKH GENOCIDE AND UN-LED INQUIRY

*The UK Government should officially recognise the following acts, individually and collectively, as the 1984 Sikh Genocide:*

- *the attack on Sri Harmandir Sahib and the mass killings of thousands of Sikh worshippers in June 1984;*
- *the killings and disappearances of tens of thousands of Sikhs across the Sikh homeland in the months that followed the attack on Sri Harmandir Sahib; and*
- *the systematic and deliberate killing of innocent Sikhs in cities across northern India in November 1984.*

*The Central Bureau of Investigations (CBI), Supreme Court of India and Indian Ministers have referred to killings of Sikhs in November 1984 as "crimes against humanity" and a genocide. The UK Government should work with other UN members to achieve backing for a UN-led inquiry into the 1984 Sikh Genocide. Successive governments in India have failed and are incapable of delivering justice.*

### KEY PRIORITIES

#### 9.1 UK Government recognition of the 1984 Sikh Genocide

The UK Government needs to officially recognise the following acts as the 1984 Sikh Genocide: the events of June 1984, the subsequent extra-judicial killings of thousands of Sikhs across Punjab and the systematic and deliberate killings of innocent Sikhs in November 1984. According to the 2011 WikiLeaks, the United States was convinced of Indian National Congress' complicity in the 1984 Sikh Genocide. They called it "opportunism" and "hatred" by the Congress government, of Sikhs.

#### 9.2 UN-led inquiry into the 1984 Sikh Genocide

The UK Government needs to work with other countries to support and obtain backing for a UN-led inquiry into the 1984 Sikh Genocide. The UN inquiry should be like the UN Security Council International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) which addressed the crimes committed during the Rwanda Genocide. In the meantime, the UK Government needs to back relevant UN rapporteurs and independent experts to carry out investigations into the torture, disappearances, false encounters, extra-judicial executions and police deployment of criminals, goons, gangsters and smugglers to impersonate Sikh 'militants', widely known as the 'Black Cats'. The current ruling party of India, the BJP has demonstrated since it came to power a decade ago, a lack of desire to establish the truth and provide justice to the victims of this massacre.

### BACKGROUND

The term genocide was coined in 1943 by the Jewish-Polish lawyer Raphael Lemkin who combined the Greek word 'genos' (race or tribe) with the Latin word 'cide' (to kill).

**Genocide - The intentional action to destroy a people (usually defined as an ethnic, national, racial, or religious group) in whole or in part.**

Article Two of the UN Convention on Genocide 1948, defines genocide as 'any of the following acts committed with the

intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group, as such':

- Killing members of the group;
- Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its' physical destruction in whole or in part;
- Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; or
- Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

Using the above definition, the following acts, individually and collectively, in 1984 amount to Sikh Genocide:



#### 1. Operation Blue Star

Operation Blue Star, as defined by the Indian authorities, began on 1 June 1984. Up to 150,000 Indian army troops were sent to the northern Indian state of Punjab, the Sikh homeland, equipped with helicopter gunships and tanks. Punjab was cut off from the rest of the world. 24-hour curfews were imposed, all telephone and telex lines cut, all Indian journalists were expelled and orders to shoot on site were widely carried out. As the Christian Science Monitor stated on 8 June 1984 'the whole of Punjab, with its 5,000 villages and 50 major cities, was turned into a concentration camp'.

Over 125 other Sikh shrines were simultaneously attacked on the false pretext of apprehending 'a handful of militants' lodged inside the Sri Harmandir Sahib or Golden Temple Complex in Amritsar. The Indian army unleashed a terror, unprecedented in post-independence India. Tanks let loose a barrage of highly explosive shells, which destroyed the Akal Takht, the temporal seat of the Sikhs. The timing chosen for the attack was when Sikhs were marking the Martyrdom of the Fifth Guru, Guru Arjan Dev Ji when it was known tens of thousands of pilgrims would be in Amritsar. Thousands of innocent Sikh pilgrims – men, women and children were killed, some shot at point blank range with their hands tied behind their backs with their turbans. An estimated ten thousand pilgrims never returned to claim their shoes.

#### 2. Operation Woodrose

The Indian military operation that followed Operation Blue Star resulted in tens of thousands of Sikhs, overwhelmingly young men, being detained for interrogation and subsequently tortured and many killed. According to Dr. Sangat Singh, from the Joint Intelligence Committee, approximately 100,000 youth between 15-35 years old, were taken into custody within the first four to six weeks of the operation and that many of them were not heard of again. This targeted Sikh ethnic cleansing and elimination programme was the basis of the mass extra judicial killings



and fake encounters strategy of the Indian police, which continued up to the mid 1990's.

Wikileaks revealed that the US Embassy in Delhi wrote in December 2005 of the existence of "Black Cats". It stated Mohammad Izhar Alam, the Additional Director General of Punjab Police "assembled a large, personal paramilitary force, 150 men known as "Black Cats" or "Alam Sena" (Alam's Army). The group had reach throughout Punjab and is alleged to have had carte blanche in carrying out possibly thousands of staged encounter killings."

### **3. November 1984 systematic killings of innocent Sikhs across India**

The systematic and deliberate killings of an estimated 30,000 Sikhs (most burnt alive) in November 1984 in 18 states and over 130 cities across India. Sikhs on public roads were burnt alive, dragged out from trains and lynched on the railway platforms and set on fire. Property worth millions was looted and destroyed. Hundreds of Sikh women were gang raped by goons, police officers and civil administrators. Small children were ruthlessly killed by pulling their legs apart while their mothers were being raped. More than 300,000 Sikhs were displaced and rendered homeless. Hundreds of Gurdwaras and our living Guru, Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji was burnt and desecrated in a systematic and planned way across India.

In 2011, Human Rights Watch reported that the Government of India had "yet to prosecute those responsible for the mass killings", despite the 10 separate commissions appointed to investigate this atrocity, some even naming and implicating senior Congress politicians. The Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh in late December 2014 referred to what happened to the Sikhs in November 1984 as a 'genocide' and that 'justice would be meted out to the victims only when the perpetrators of the crime are punished' and 'that until these persons are punished, victims will not get relief'.

The Delhi High Court in its December 2018 judgement, while convicting former Congress MP Sajjan Kumar had held that the massacre of Sikhs in November 1984 amounted to "crimes against humanity". Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley said this was a "vindication of justice" and the Delhi High Court's judgment is an "extremely welcome development". "For many of us who are witnesses, it was perhaps the worst kind of genocide that we ever saw. Congress governments in that period repeatedly indulged in cover-up exercises."

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) equated the 1984 Sikh massacre with the Genocide of Jews by Nazis in evidence it filed in the Supreme Court in March 2019 in the same case. In May 2019 Prime Minister Narendra Modi referring to the killing of Sikhs in November 1984 stated that it was a "big, horrendous genocide". He continued: "Congress has several blemishes, but one blemish which would not go even after 50 generations is of the 1984 massacre." These legal and political admissions should make it easier for the new UK Government and MPs to refer to the killings of Sikhs in 1984 as the 1984 Sikh Genocide.

40 years later there have been no independent inquiries in India into what happened in June 1984 or what followed. India's judicial system and ten commissions have failed to bring justice to the victims of November 1984. After 40 years many of the organisers and perpetrators of the genocide roam free, in addition they have been promoted and hold

positions of power. A UN-led inquiry is needed into the atrocities committed by the Indian authorities in 1984.

For over 40 years UN rapporteurs and independent experts as well as Amnesty International have been denied access to Punjab to investigate widespread allegations of torture, disappearances, false encounters and extra-judicial executions. If India wishes to be taken seriously at the UN it must remove such restrictions, improve its human rights record and sign and ratify a range of UN conventions.

40 years on from these tragic incidents, although the pain of injustice is still strong with Sikhs across the globe, there is also a genuine hope of restitution and reconciliation, so that future Sikh generations can move forward and live without fear and with freedom.

As in many international examples of political or racial conflicts where peaceful resolutions have been successful, the first step has always been international admission of the truth by the country concerned. The release of all political prisoners who in some cases have been incarcerated for over 30 years and a general amnesty for those that have cases pending. This is where the UK Government and the international community have a responsibility to find viable solutions following the precedents set elsewhere.

### **Recent approaches to the United Nations**

The Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect were approached last year by the international Sikh community to gather information on the 1984 Sikh Genocide as we approach the 40th anniversary. It was suggested the Special Advisers verify the facts surrounding the 1984 Sikh Genocide in India that has been recognised by the current Indian government and its highest courts and to make an assessment whether there is risk of a reoccurrence on the back of mass arrests of Sikh activists across Panjab in March 2023.

India has not signed or ratified the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC), but the current Indian government and courts have gone on record to refer to the 1984 Sikh Genocide since 2014. BJP politicians, including Narendra Modi have again used the term 'genocide' in the national elections that have just taken place in India this year.

It has been suggested the Special Advisers liaise with the ICC to get the 1984 Sikh Genocide acknowledged by members states of the UN using statements made by the Indian government and courts in the last decade. On the back of transnational repression by the Indian government targeting Sikh activists in the Diaspora the UK Government working with the US, Canada, Australia France, Germany, Italy and others have a greater priority to take up the matter of the 1984 Sikh Genocide at the United Nations.



## SECTION 10: APPLICATION OF SELF-DETERMINATION TO THE SIKHS

*The UK Government and MPs must accept that the general principle of self-determination is a basic human right, and international law allows for Sikhs to exercise this right. The UK Government must join other countries to challenge India at the UN to withdraw its 'reservation' around territorial integrity arguing that self-determination does not apply to people within India.*

*The UK Government has a historical and moral responsibility to support the Sikhs' right to self-determination. India's discrimination and widespread human rights violations against Sikhs since 1947 indicates the territorial integrity argument does not apply. The UK Government has a greater responsibility towards resolving the conflict Sikhs have in the Indian sub-continent given Britain annexed the Sikh Kingdom in 1849, and had direct responsibility over the disastrous 1947 Partition by drawing a line through the Sikh homeland.*

### KEY PRIORITIES

#### 10.1 Principle of self-determination and its applicability to Sikhs

The UK Government and MPs must accept that the general principle of self-determination is a basic human right and that it applies to Sikhs. There needs to be acknowledgement of the Anglo-Sikh friendship treaties and appreciation of the loyalty of Sikhs for 100 years following annexation of the Sikh Kingdom, including the huge contribution and sacrifices in the two World Wars. In addition, the UK Government presided over discussions prior to the creation of India and Pakistan in 1947, which included the specific offer of a separate Sikh homeland and a ten-year agreement of military assistance and support for the Sikh administration.

The UK Government has a historic and moral responsibility towards the Sikhs to help, through diplomatic means, resolve a conflict that continues. Whilst not committing itself to any outcome, the UK Government should acknowledge international law that allows for Sikhs to exercise the right to self-determination. The application of self-determination in a particular context has always been the outcome of democratic and political processes. Its assertion as a claimable right is of legal significance, although demands for its application remain in the political realm.

#### 10.2 India must withdraw its reservation against the right to self-determination

The UK Government must join France, Germany, the Netherlands and Pakistan to challenge India at the UN to withdraw its 'reservation' that self-determination does not apply to the people of India. It has lost the right to rely on the territorial integrity argument by oppressing people within its territory, including the minority Sikh community, and has failed to respect the political and human rights of Sikhs.

#### 10.3 Acknowledgement of the successful existence of a Sikh homeland, annexed by Britain in 1849

The Sikhs first secured political power in the form of an independent state in 1710 CE. Sikh rule was established by Banda Singh Bahadur between the Sutlej river and the Yamuna river. He initiated a new Sikh calendar, struck coinage in the names of Guru Nanak Dev Ji and Guru Gobind Singh Ji and practised the Sikh teachings of equality for all and respect for the religious beliefs and practices of others.

He raised the status of the downtrodden and conferred property rights to farmers giving an important historical context to the current farmers protest in India.

The larger sovereign Sikh state or empire was established in 1799 CE, under the leadership of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and was recognised by all the world powers and existed for 50 years. The Sikh Kingdom at its peak spanned a total of over 520,000 square kilometres, more than twice the size of the UK. The footprint of the empire extended to the Khyber Pass in the west, Kashmir in the north, Sindh in the south and Tibet in the east. The population of the Sikh Kingdom was 12 million and it was the twelfth most populous state in the world. In comparison, the population at that time in the UK was 10.5 million, USA 5.5 million, Canada 300,000 and Australia only around 5,000.

It is vitally important to note the Sikh Kingdom was annexed by the British in 1849 following the Second Anglo-Sikh War. It was a unilateral act of forcible acquisition and the territory of the Sikh Kingdom was never given or sold through treaty. International law regards annexation as an illegal act.

### BACKGROUND

#### Origins of Sikh sovereignty and why Sikhs satisfy the definition of a people or a nation

The concept of Sikh sovereignty is not new and can be traced back to the Sikh Gurus. Sikh aspirations to sovereignty were established by the Sixth Sikh Guru, Guru Hargobind Sahib Ji when he constructed the Akaal Takht, the Throne of the Immortal in Amritsar. This will always be the highest political institution of the Sikhs and the place from which the spiritual and temporal concerns of the Sikh community will be acted upon.

The Tenth Sikh Guru, Guru Gobind Singh Ji, then created the sovereign and autonomous Khalsa in 1699 and the phrase '*Raj Karega Khalsa*' became part of Sikh thinking and ideology. The phrase is part of the daily Ardaas (prayer) of every Sikh across the globe. This also explains the origins of the word Khalistan, the Land of the [Pure] Khalsa, to describe a Sikh homeland.



As well as being recognised as a people or a nation by others, the Sikhs, crucially in the context of the criterion of self-identification, see themselves as such. Whilst Sikhs are clear about their nationhood it needs world powers to understand and appreciate Sikh history and why Sikhs will continue to strive to re-establish their homeland.

#### Acceptance of the general principle of self determination

International law makes clear all people have the right to self-determination. It is a basic human right founded in international law on which other human rights depend. The UN Human Rights Committee has stressed that the right to self-determination is fundamental to the protection of individual rights. All nations belonging to the UN are obliged to respect this right. States like India, that have failed to fully

recognise the principle of self-determination cannot invoke the principle of territorial integrity.

**India should be persuaded to withdraw its 'reservation' that self-determination does not apply to the people of India**

On ratifying the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in 1966, India made a 'reservation' to the effect that the right to self-determination pertains only to 'peoples under foreign domination'. France, Germany, the Netherlands and Pakistan objected in 1966 to the 'reservation' claiming self-determination applies to all people; but India insisted on making that 'reservation'. France, one of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council fundamentally objected to India's reservation about self-determination arguing it was inconsistent with human rights under the United Nations Charter.

Subsequently, the UN Human Rights Committee has stated in its review of India's compliance with Article 1, which deals with self-determination, that it 'invites the State party [India] to review these 'reservations' and declarations with a view to withdrawing them, to ensure progress in the implementation of the rights...' India has not made any such withdrawal. India's position is contrary to the law of self-determination. Whilst India may have an expedient interpretation of the law to suit its own needs, it is nevertheless bound by international law and the international community must insist that the law is upheld.

Neither the Indian Constitution nor any statute expressly defines the right to self-determination or explains the position of India on the right to self-determination. While remaining silent on the issue, India's constitutional and statutory position does not prohibit the possibility of claims for the right to self-determination and secession of territories from India. Despite the absence of any specific reference to this right in the Constitution or in statutes, it cannot be argued that this right cannot be claimed. On the contrary, there is a clear possibility of claiming the right to self-determination, and the Supreme Court of India has ruled in favour of the possibility of cession of territory by India.

**India has lost the territorial integrity argument**

A part of the general limitation on the right to self-determination is the specific limitation of territorial integrity. The 1970 Declaration of Principles of International Law provides that the right to self-determination shall not 'be construed as authorising or encouraging any action which would dismember or impair, totally or in part, the territorial integrity or political unity of sovereign and independent States'. This limitation is an extension of the desire in most societies to create a social and legal system which is relatively stable.

However, the territorial integrity limitation cannot be asserted in all situations. The Declaration of Principles of International Law provides that only 'States conducting themselves in compliance with the principle of equal rights and self-determination of people' can rely on this limitation.

The 'territorial integrity' objection to groups seeking to exercise self-determination by means of secession is only arguable if a state has not oppressed the peoples living within it and where those peoples have had their political and

human rights respected in the constitutional set-up in that state.

The level of oppression of the Sikhs in Punjab and elsewhere in India (especially during the period 1984 to 1995) has been severe. The systematic violations of "individual" human rights such as genocide and other crimes against humanity, such as extra-judicial killings, disappearances, torture, rape and illegal detention has left Sikhs traumatised. Observers of the Sikh situation will be aware that the 'territorial integrity' objection cannot be afforded to India.

**Britain's historic and moral responsibility towards the Sikhs**

The Anglo-Sikh relationship has existed for well over 200 years and based on a number of friendship treaties. The British rulers of India studied Sikh religious history and their proud military tradition, which won the respect of the British military commanders, politicians and scholars alike. Sikh soldiers demonstrated their loyalty and courage whether it was the Indian Mutiny in 1857 or the Battle of Saragarhi in 1897. Hundreds of thousands of Sikhs answered the call of Britain and the Allies in both World Wars with over 83,000 turban-wearing Sikhs sacrificing their lives, with over 109,000 wounded.

The Sikhs played a leading role in the struggle for independence from the British. They made sacrifices wholly out of proportion to their demographic strength (the Sikhs made up less than 2% of the Indian population). Out of 2,125 killed, 1,550 (73%) were Sikhs, out of 2,646 deported for life to the Andaman Islands, 2,147 (80%) were Sikhs and out of 127 sent to the gallows, 92 (80%) were Sikhs. The Sikhs were therefore the third party with whom the British negotiated the transfer of power in 1947 and Clement Attlee the Labour Prime Minister, offered a separate Sikh homeland and a ten-year agreement of military assistance and support for the Sikh administration.

The Sikh leadership at the time accepted promises and solemn assurances made by the leaders of India, but the latter reneged on these promises. When India adopted its first Constitution and was declared a Republic on 26 January 1950 Sikhs refused to sign, accept or endorse the Constitution, contending it did not have any legal safeguards for the culture, language and religion of the Sikhs. Sikhs have therefore never signed up to India's constitution.

**Internal v External self-determination**



The right to self-determination can take a variety of forms, from autonomy over most policies and laws in a region or part of a state; to a people having exclusive control over only certain aspects of policy; such as education, social and/or



cultural matters. The type of arrangements applicable to any given situation will usually depend on the constitutional order of the state concerned.

The right to self-determination does not imply that independence, or secession from an independent state, is the only, or even the necessary and appropriate, means of exercising the right. There may be other structures or arrangements that satisfy the demands of those who exercise the right of self-determination.

The Sikhs have, since 1947, made substantial efforts aimed at securing 'internal self-determination' within India. That is a matter which has been recorded in a great deal of literature. The Sikh demands for autonomy or internal self-determination were not only rejected by the Indian state; Indian politicians responded by criminalising Sikh aspirations and trying to neutralise them by using force (state terrorism), eventually on a massive scale.

India incorrectly labels self-determination activists as extremists. In the last twelve months India's transnational repression targeting Sikh activists on foreign soil that has made international headlines is making Western nations, like the US, Canada, UK and Australia rethink their future relationship with India as there has been a major breakdown of trust.

Experts on self-determination assert that when internal self-determination is violently rejected and crushed with state terror, the oppressed peoples or nations have little option but to seek remedy via external self-determination. The international law formulation on self-determination underpins that view. That is the basis on which the Sikhs themselves have raised the demand to re-establish an independent Sikh state.

The classic mechanism for implementing the right to self-determination is the use of a plebiscite. This was seen in the original UN resolutions on Kashmir in 1948 and the more recent UN-led independence process for East Timor or the referendum in Scotland. The Sikhs have not, of course, been offered the opportunity, but it is interesting to note that the former UK Indian High Commissioner, Kuldeep Nayar has admitted that if, after the horrors of 1984, the Sikhs were given a plebiscite they would have gone for an independent state. In the Lok Sabha elections in 1989 those directly linked to the Khalistan movement, including those being held in Indian jails took 10 of the 13 seats in Panjab.

Despite the Indian government claiming there is no demand for a Sikh homeland from people living in Panjab they will find it impossible to hide from the fact that in Lok Sabha elections in June 2024, 40 years after the events of June 1984, the people have elected Bhai Amritpal Singh and Sarabjit Singh Khalsa.

Remarkably, Bhai Amritpal Singh has won his seat as an MP while lodged in a jail in Assam since April 2023 who the India authorities see as the number one enemy of the state. He has repeated what happened 35 years ago in 1989. Similarly Sarabjit Singh Khalsa, the son of Indira Gandhi's bodyguard who killed her on 31 October 1984 in revenge for the events of June 1984 has also been elected 35 years after his mother and grandfather were elected in 1989.

This suggests despite the Indian authorities human rights violations, mass arrests and media control the freedom struggle for Sikh independence is very much alive and supported by the people of Panjab.



### WHY THE 1 MILLION SIKH VOTE MATTERS

*When it comes to the Sikh vote, the starting point for MPs and political parties is the size and distribution of the Sikh community. As explained, there may be as many as **one million Sikh voters**. The Sikh Federation (UK), in its efforts to make the Sikh vote count, has in the lead up to the General Election started to encourage Sikh voter registration, use of postal votes, and the need for ID when casting votes.*

The Electoral Commission, specific surveys, and Sikh community intelligence suggests that **Sikh voter turnout at a General Election, at around 85%, is much higher than most other communities**. The very existence of the Sikh Manifesto as a resource is a reason why we predict Sikhs will be active in engaging with politicians and turn out to vote on 4 July more than any other community.

Political parties are concerned going into the General Election on 4 July 2024 that the overall turnout may be lower than previous general elections as there is much disillusionment, upset and apathy about the quality of leadership and the state of British politics. The main political parties would be wise not to ignore Sikh issues and the impact of the Sikh vote especially when they are aware there will be significant protest votes.

The one million Sikh vote this time round therefore matters much more. Candidates and political parties making commitments and promises around the Sikh Manifesto and failing to deliver when in power or opposition will have to answer to the Sikh voters who place their trust in them.

The Sikh vote cannot be taken for granted and subject to different dynamics within each community. On the back of the handling of the Israel Gaza conflict independent Muslim candidates are standing in a number of seats with large Muslim populations. Labour, who are hoping to form the next government, after the protest vote in local elections had hoped to build trust, but the snap election combined with the controversial selection of some candidates in recent weeks is expected to damage the Labour vote in some constituencies.

**It is vitally important for political parties to have in place policies and commitments to address high profile issues of concern to the Sikh community to secure the Sikh vote.**

The Sikh Federation (UK) has produced and shared analysis of over 80 constituencies where the estimated Sikh vote of one million matters the most going into the General Election on 4 July 2024. These are split into 44 target seats for Labour or ones the Conservatives must retain and 38 target seats for the Conservatives or ones Labour must retain.

Constituency	Conservative majority
1. Uxbridge and South Ruislip	495
2. Stoke-on-Trent Central	670
3. Gedling	679
4. Chingford & Woodford Green	1,262
5. West Bromwich East	1,593
6. Wolverhampton South West	1,661
7. Birmingham Northfield	1,640
8. Warrington South	2,010
9. Derby North	2,540
10. Peterborough	2,580
11. West Bromwich West	3,799
12. Wolverhampton North East	4,080

13. Reading West	4,117
14. Wycombe	4,212
15. Watford	4,433
16. Northampton South	4,697
17. Southampton Itchen	4,498
18. Stockton South	5,260
19. Broxtowe	5,331
20. Northampton North	5,507
21. Milton Keynes North	6,255
22. Scunthorpe	6,451
23. South Swindon	6,625
24. Hitchin and Harpenden	6,896
25. Milton Keynes South	6,944
26. Loughborough	7,169
27. Rushcliffe	7,643
28. Harrow East	8,170
29. Crawley	8,360
30. Romsey & Southampton North	10,872
31. Telford	10,941
32. Dudley North	11,553
33. Walsall North	11,995
34. Bexleyheath and Crayford	13,103
35. Nuneaton	13,144
36. Stourbridge	13,571
37. Rugby	13,447
38. Stafford	14,377
39. Gillingham and Rainham	15,119
40. Gravesham	15,581
41. Beaconsfield	15,712
42. North Swindon	16,171
43. Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner	16,394
44. Harborough	17,278

Constituency	Labour majority
1. Bedford	145
2. Coventry North West	208
3. Dagenham and Rainham	293
4. Coventry South	401
5. Warwick and Leamington	789
6. Wolverhampton South East	1,235
7. Walsall South	3,456
8. Erith and Thamesmead	3,758
9. Leicester West	4,212
10. Nottingham North	4,490
11. Huddersfield	4,937
12. Ilford North	5,218
13. Leeds East	5,531
14. Birmingham, Edgbaston	5,614
15. Reading East	5,924
16. Leicester East	6,019
17. Derby South	6,019
18. Southampton Test	6,213
19. Coventry North East	7,692
20. Feltham and Heston	7,859
21. Luton South	8,756
22. Luton North	9,247
23. Hayes and Harlington	9,261
24. Brentford and Isleworth	10,514
25. Birmingham, Yardley	10,659
26. Warley	11,511
27. Ealing North	12,269
28. Birmingham, Selly Oak	12,414
29. Nottingham South	12,568
30. Ealing Central and Acton	13,300
31. Slough	13,640
32. Birmingham, Perry Barr	15,317
33. Barking	15,427
34. Ealing Southall	16,084
35. Leeds North East	17,089
36. Bradford East	18,144
37. Leicester South	22,675
38. Ilford South	24,101



## How to use the Sikh Manifesto

	Individuals	Gurdwara / Organisation	MP or PPC
1 Encourage each Sikh voter to register online by 18 June 2024 deadline, you will need your National Insurance No. & postal address	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2 All read share and become familiar with the Sikh Manifesto	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
3 Make sure each of the main candidates has a hard copy or pdf version of the Sikh Manifesto	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4 Invite the main candidates to the Gurdwara to discuss the Sikh Manifesto	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5 Ask each of the main candidates to clarify the <u>position of their party</u> with respect to the 10-points in the Sikh Manifesto	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
6 Ask each of the main candidates to clarify their <u>personal position</u> with respect to the 10-points in the Sikh Manifesto	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
7 Invite local media to give your views on the party and candidate that is likely to best serve the local Sikh community.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8 Ask each candidate to make public statements via video or social media to their manifesto commitments	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
9 Track the commitments made by the candidates and share with the Sikh Network	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10 Encourage all Sikhs to turn out to Vote and have your say	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Keep us posted at: [info@thesikhnetwork.com](mailto:info@thesikhnetwork.com)



# THE SIKH MANIFESTO

2024 - 2029

3RD EDITION

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