

Ms Gaitri Issar Kumar

High Commissioner to the United Kingdom
High Commission of India
India House, London
WC2B 4NA

Sunday, 19th December 2021

Dear High Commissioner:

Sachkhand Sri Harmandir Sahib, also known as Darbar Sahib or The Golden Temple Amritsar, is the holiest shrine of the Sikhs. Yesterday, an individual committed an act of sacrilege by jumping into the sacred area that has been exclusively designated for Sri Guru Granth Sahib Jee. If the perpetrator of this act had not been apprehended by the SGPC personnel immediately, the degree of desecration might have been much worse.

The desecration of Sri Guru Granth Sahib Jee has become a regular occurrence in Punjab since at least 2015. Since then, Sikhs have seen no legal remedy to this. The state government and agencies have failed to bring the matter to justice. There is no deterrence for criminals carrying out these acts. Many of these crimes have been linked to the 'Dera Sacha Sauda' whose leader is currently in an Indian prison for murder.

Owing to the failure of the state, Sikhs have drawn inspiration from their fierce heritage in responding to these acts. The aftermath of the sacrilege yesterday which resulted in the perpetrator's death is a result of people's hopelessness towards the state's competency.

In other parts of the country, communal riots and public lynching occur for many issues, including cow slaughter. Sikh teachings prohibit the reckless use of violence against the innocent; otherwise, the state would have descended into chaos long ago. Yet, a section of India's mainstream media and 'troll accounts' allegedly linked to the BJP's IT cell continue to malign Sikhs. This alienates Sikhs both in and outside India and gives us a sense of 'othering'.

I am disappointed with the (lack of) response by the Government of India. An immediate condemnation of the incident was the least that should have been done. It would have put an end to the conspiracists attributing this as a decisive scheme to divide Hindu-Sikh unity post the community cohesion from the recent *Kisaani Andolan*.

The four doors of Sri Harmandir Sahib invite all of humanity to take benefit from the teachings of Sri Guru Granth Sahib. An attack of this nature at this shrine is an attack against humanity.

I understand that the Government of India and Indian media has been concerned with emerging separatist sentiment in Sikhs in the West. The incidents of sacrilege only increase the frustration of Sikhs in the West as they feel their faith is not even secure in their place of origin.

Considering this, I strongly urge you to raise the following with your colleagues in India:

1. The Government of India should condemn the attack at Sri Harmandir Sahib at the highest level. It is customary for heads of state to express their sentiments on matters of national importance, almost immediately or as quickly as possible.
2. The security of Sikh Gurdwaras in India and the prevention of desecration against Sri Guru Granth Sahib Jee is given priority, and a national security plan is introduced. If the Border Security Force can be deployed in Punjab to tackle external threats, the

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central government should take seriously the sanctity of religious shrines that are threatened by home-grown terrorism.

3. Punjab's current and past state governments and all involved agencies should be held accountable via a public inquiry to consider their role and failure in tackling these incidents.
4. The media and internet are adequately monitored and censored to tackle anti-Sikh hate rhetoric and communal tensions.
5. The Indian government uses the following working definition of terrorism, same as one widely used by Western nations as well as the United Nations, proposed by Schmid and Jongman in 1988:

*"Terrorism is an anxiety-inspiring method of **repeated** violent action, employed by (semi-) clandestine individual, **group** or state actors, for idiosyncratic, criminal or **political reasons**, whereby the **direct targets of violence are not the main targets**. The immediate human victims of violence are generally chosen randomly (targets of opportunity) **or selectively (representative or symbolic targets)** from a target population, and serve as message generators.*

The repeated acts of sacrilege of Sri Guru Granth Sahib Jee should be classified as terrorist acts and dealt with appropriately. **'Dera Sacha Sauda' should be identified and treated as a terrorist group.**

I appreciate many of your efforts towards Sikhs, including the retracting of the controversial farming bills, the reopening of the Kartarpur Corridor, and the rescue of Sikhs and sacred manuscripts of Sri Guru Granth Sahib Jee from Afghanistan.

Veer Savarkar, the political ideologue of India's ruling party, concluded that faiths with *punya-bhoomi* (Holyland) in India will always be connected to India. Like all Sikhs, we, the Sikhs of the United Kingdom, have immense devotion towards Sachkhand Sri Harmandir Sahib, Amritsar. Undoubtedly, you will be aware that Amritsar's status as a 'holy city' has been a central theme in Sikh activism for decades. Yesterday's sacrilege has reopened the wounds of the Sikh Community around the world.

A common theme amongst Sikhs is that the proximity of the elections has some part to play in the escalation and increased frequency of these incidents. People feel these incidents give rise to communal tensions and play in favour of certain political parties in India. Ultimately, the government's indifference towards the issue of sacrilege of Sri Guru Granth Sahib is a dangerous policy. The Indian National Congress made the same mistakes in the regime of Indira Gandhi. I urge you to act differently and take note of the above suggestions.

Your response would be most appreciated.

Yours Faithfully

Sukhjeevan Singh

Giani Sukhjeevan Singh