

WORLD SIKH NEWS

Persecution is the first law of society because it is always easier to suppress criticism than to meet it.
—Howard Mumford Jones

25 years. Time to think through

It becomes a very interesting scenario when our men connected with the administration of the religion pick up a pen and dabble in the world of the words. Akal Takht jathedar Giani Joginder Singh Vedanti has penned his eye witness account of Operation Bluestar. One would have hoped that having been at the helm of the Sikh religious affairs, Jathedar Vedanti, whenever he would pick up the quill, will have a far wider view of the happenings of the June of 1984. The WSN has a view on such descriptions of the army attack on Sri Darbar Sahib, Sri Akal Takht Sahib and the Sikh sangat, heritage and aspirations.

Our readership is well aware of this, and we need not belabor the point.

That our religious and political leadership has developed a rather strange kind of fault-line is a sad fact of contemporary history and we need to pay attention to this. Why is it that the 25th anniversary of an attack of the magnitude and significance of Saka Akal Takht is to be commemorated year after year only by a few religious organisations?

Why is it that we never see other political parties interested in debating, discussing and observing the anniversary of such a sad chapter in the history of the Sikhs, Punjab and India? We can understand that some of our red flag waving comrades do not particularly like to come visiting the gurdwaras or the Akal Takht, but why don't we see them even gathering at some Marxism studies centre to try and engage with this episode of history and attempt to understand the aspirations or otherwise of the brave community?

The Congress government then led by Indira Gandhi was guilty of the most perverse subversion of all notions of law, justice and Constitution and led the Indian Army troops against the centre of the Sikh religion, but what is wrong with the men and women in the Congress party today that they do not even make a pretense of issuing a statement paying homage to at least the most innocent devotees who were killed in their hundreds, if not thousands, in the firing and artillery balls?


Does Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's heart not melt at thinking about the fate of those whose mere fault was that they thought the world's self-proclaimed largest democracy may allow them the right to pay obeisance at Sri Darbar Sahib, a shrine raised by a Guru whose martyrdom anniversary fell in June and who had given his life for ideals that this country professes to follow?

Why, for God's sake, why do not we see Prakash Singh Badal or Sukhbir Singh Badal or the army of Dhindsas, Brahampuras, Bhunders, Tota Singhs, and all those Singhs in Badal's party and ministry at least visiting the Takht Sahib where people threw all they had into a morcha because they believed that the men who were calling them to action meant their words?

It may be Messers Badals' prerogative to utter or not the name of Sant Bhindranwale, and it is of course the prerogative of the quom to ask why, but how have a they become so shameless as to blatantly stay away from such a poignant day as the 25th anniversary of Operation Bluestar?

From where do they strength to do so?

From you and me. From all of us. From the people who vote them to power. From the system that favours those who shun the cause of the people. From an entrenched brahmanical power structure system where the elite will not question the elitism of others. So the BJP and the Congress will not drag them in the people's courtyards during electioneering, and we have long stopped asking questions.

And pray why should it only be an occasion for the Sikh community to ruminate about? Is the rest of the country not concerned with Op Bluestar? Or has it given up on the Sikhs? And pray! Don't we know the answer? 

Sending a Message, Loud & Clear

WSN Bureau

A historic gathering of an estimated 15,000 Sikhs held a demonstration and rally in central London on Sunday, June 7, and demanded that the UN establish, 25 years after the holocaust, a criminal court to investigate and punish those guilty of the notorious Indian army attack on the Golden Temple in Amritsar in June 1984 in which thousands of innocent Sikh worshippers were killed.

In what will be a wake up call for those in Delhi who claim to have seen off the struggle for an independent Sikh state in Indian-controlled Punjab, the gathering also gave enthusiastic support for a Sikh homeland.

Speeches, banners, placards and a masive show of hands called for the right of self-determination in international law. There was a clear underlining of the Sikh nation's aspiration for freedom within its homeland along with a desire to see a resolution of the Kashmir conflict.

Leaders of the Federation of Sikh Organisations, UK later delivered a memorandum to 10 Downing Street calling for the UK Government to take a lead on international intervention on behalf of the Sikhs.

The call for an international criminal court extends to dealing with those who carried subsequent atrocities, including the genocide in Delhi and elsewhere in November 1984 when some 20,000 Sikhs were butchered in just three days following Indira Gandhi's assassination. The level of anger at the continued impunity afforded by the Indian state to the guilty was clearly visible among the Sikh protestors and speakers at rallies in Hyde Park and Trafalgar Square.

Reputed human rights bodies such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have for many years condemned India's refusal to punish the guilty, even where the evidence of their crimes is readily available; they and other human rights defenders have formally complained to the UN Human Rights Council about India's policy of impunity.

Speakers at Trafalgar Square included Fabian Hamilton, MP who castigated the attack on the Golden Temple in June 1984 as an appalling crime, the memory of which cannot be erased with the passage of time. John Spellar, MP regretted that after 25 years there had been no redress for the victims of the systematic atrocities. Jean Lambert, MEP spoke of the need to give due recognition to peoples who legitimately pursue their rights in



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the face of state terrorism.

Sikh leaders, including some who had travelled from Punjab to be there, urged the international community to discharge its responsibility and hold India to account for the abuses which have led to the deaths of 200,000 Sikhs over the last 25 years. They spoke of India's denial of Sikh political, religious, cultural, economic and territorial rights as well as the illegal appropriation of Punjab's river waters by India. The gathering honoured the memory of all Sikhs who had lost their lives in the conflict by observing one minute's silence.

At a special event at the House of Commons earlier in the week leading Parliamentarians joined Sikhs in commemorating the horrific events of 25 years ago. At that meeting Lord Ahmed, John McDonnell MP, John Spellar MP, Rob Marris MP and others, after hearing an account of the impunity afforded by India to the guilty given by Brad Adams (Asia Director, Human Rights Watch)

called for the UK Government to impose travel bans on those Indian politicians and security officials widely suspected of directing or carrying out atrocities against the Sikhs. It is clear that the Sikhs have not forgotten the trauma of the genocide and intend to make the guilty face justice notwithstanding India's refusal to punish them.

Sikhs also made clear at that event in Westminster their commitment to resolve the Indo-Sikh conflict by exercising their right to national self-determination in the form of a sovereign Sikh state of Khalistan. The meeting was addressed by Navkiran Singh, a leading human rights lawyer from Punjab, who condemned India's policy of impunity for past crimes as well as highlighted continuing abuses. In particular he called for an end to the ongoing criminalisation of Sikh leaders who peaceably call for Sikh political rights to be respected - 19 were charged with sedition last month for simply saluting the Sikh national flag.

Third US Sikh-Catholic Dialogue Retreat

WSN Bureau

Representatives of the World Sikh Council - America Region (WSC-AR) and the US Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) met May 29-31, 2009 at St. Therese's Retreat Center in Columbus, Ohio for a three-day Sikh-Catholic bilateral national interreligious retreat.

The objective of the retreat was for the Sikh and Catholic communities to further deepen dialogue and trust among the two communities. The theme was "The Nature of God: Convergences, Divergences, and Our Spiritual Paths."

The Sikh and Catholic delegations were comprised of about 8 representatives from each community with about one third of the participants being young adults (age 35 and younger).

The Catholic delegation was headed by Rev. Canon Francis Tiso, Associate Director

of USCCB's Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs. The Sikh delegation was led by Dr. Tarunjit Singh, Chair of the Interfaith Committee of WSC-AR.

The retreat began on Friday, May 29, with a presentation on the Catholic belief in God by Rev. Francis Tiso and Father Philip Simo. The next day, Mr. Kuldeep Singh, founding former Chairperson of WSC-AR, shared an overview of the concept of God in the Sikh faith. This was followed by presentation by young adults Mr. Neil Sloan (Catholic) and Mr. Savraj Singh (Sikh) on how each faith honors God in everyday life. Sikhs and Catholics prayed together from their faiths during the retreat. The Interfaith Association of Central Ohio hosted a mutifaith dinner on Saturday evening in honor of the Sikh-Catholic bilateral dia-

logue. On Sunday morning, the Sikh and Catholic young adults led in a shared worship service.

"Sikhs believe that God cannot be divided into more than one," he said. "But as Catholics do, we too believe God is everywhere, in everything, without beginning or end, is merciful and forgiving, so we have all this in common" said Mr. Kuldeep Singh. "We found that both of our faith traditions have a similar sort of caution talking about God - the idea that words can't fully express his nature, that 'God is greater than ...' This is one thing the discussion brought out in a number of insightful moments. "We are both monotheistic religions, sharing that in common with the Muslim and Jewish traditions, Sikhs and Catholics both believe in the transcendence and the eternal nature of God," said Rev. Francis Tiso.