

**ANNUAL REPORT OF THE SIKH ADVISORY BOARD  
FOR THE PERIOD NOVEMBER 2009 – OCTOBER 2010**

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**Appointment of Board Members**

1. The composition of the Sikh Advisory Board (“the Board”) remained unchanged for the year. The following members served as appointed by the Minister for Community Development, Youth & Sports (“MCYS”) for the period from November 2008 to October 2011.

<u>Name</u>	<u>Institution</u>
Mr Amarjit Singh	Government Representative
Mr Darshan Singh Bajaj	Sri Guru Nanak Sat Sang Sabha
Mr Habhajan Singh	Government Representative
Mr Harbhajan Singh	Sri Guru Nanak Sat Sang Sabha
Mr Harjit Singh	Pardesi Khalsa Dharmak Diwan
Mr Jodh Singh	Khalsa Jiwan Sudhar Sabha
Dr Narinder Kaur	Government Representative
Mr Pritpal Singh	Khalsa Dharmak Sabha
Mr Ranjit Singh	Sri Guru Singh Sabha
Mr Rashbar Singh	Gurdwara Sahib Yishun
Mr Santa Singh	Pardesi Khalsa Dharmak Diwan
Mr Sarban Singh	Central Sikh Gurdwara Board
Mr Sukhbir Singh	Sri Guru Singh Sabha
Mr Sukhbir Singh S/O SS	Khalsa Dharmak Sabha
Mr Surjit Singh	Government Representative

**Meetings of the Board in 2010**

2. As agreed at the inaugural meeting of the Board in 2008, the Board met quarterly on the 2 February 2010, 4 May 2010, 3 August 2010 and 2 November 2010.

**Meeting with the Prime Minister (PM)**

3. At the invitation of the Prime Minister, 7 Sikh leaders met him over lunch on 20 January 2010 at the Istana. They were the Chairman and Secretary of the Board and the heads of 5 Sikh institutions. The Minister for Law and the then 2<sup>nd</sup> Minister for Home Affairs, Mr. Shanmugam and MP Inderjit Singh were also present. The following issues were discussed with the PM:
- a. The reaction of the Sikh community in Singapore to recent racial/religious demonstrations and incidents in Malaysia relating to the use of the term “Allah” to refer to God in their own religious literature and translated texts, and the vandalizing of a gurdawara in connection with the same. The PM was informed that Sikhs in Singapore looked at these incidents

objectively and rationally and did not allow these events in Malaysia to affect their outlook of other communities in Singapore. It was also noted that the incidents in Malaysia appeared to be politically motivated. The PM and Minister were informed that the Sikh scriptures (the Holy Guru Granth Sahib) specifically mentioned the word Allah a number of times, although Sikhs did not refer to God as "Allah".

- b. Need for a better understanding and knowledge of the Sikh religion in Government offices and among civil servants. It was pointed out that a few senior civil servants had shown a lack of knowledge of the basic tenets of the Sikh religion including, notably and worryingly, a school principal who required a Sikh student to remove his facial hair as a condition for continued attendance at school. The PM was informed of other cases that suggested a lack of understanding and appreciation in our schools of the various communities' religions and value systems. The PM was also appraised of the recent kirpan incident (see "The Kirpan Issue" below) and informed that the Board was working closely with the Immigration and Checkpoint Authority (ICA) and Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) officials to establish a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for their uniformed staff on the handling of such cases.
- c. Recent incidents of teasing of Sikhs wearing turbans in Singapore. PM expressed surprise and stated that he had many Sikh friends wearing a turban and having facial hair who had not encountered problems while serving in the army. The PM felt that these recent incidents were isolated but gave the assurance that the authorities would investigate and deal firmly with any matter that touched on racial and religious sensitivities of the various communities living in Singapore.
- d. Allotting a piece of land for a Sikh temple in the western part of Singapore where there was no Sikh temples at present. PM indicated that the authorities would look favorably into this matter.
- e. Sikh concerns about aggressive and sometimes insensitive proselytizing by religious organizations in Singapore, especially by some Christians groups attempting to convert Sikhs to their religion. PM said that he was aware of the situation but that there was not much that the government could do as all Singaporeans were free to practice and propagate their religion. However, he assured the Sikh leaders that where laws were infringed by any religious group or where insensitive or disparaging remarks were made about other religions, the government would step in and take appropriate action as required.
- f. The outstanding request by the Central Sikh Gurdwara Board (CSGB) for an increase in the quota for workers from India to work in their premises. PM said that the matter would be looked into to see how best to satisfy the needs of the CSGB.

4. The community leaders were very appreciative of the PM's and Minister Shanmugam's attention and the genuine concern they displayed for the Sikh community, and their willingness to assist where possible.

#### **Major Issues Addressed by the Board in 2009/10**

##### 5. The Kirpan Issue

- 5.1 A family of amritdhari (baptized) Sikhs carrying the kirpan on their body was stopped at Woodlands Checkpoint by ICA officials who deemed the kirpan to be an offensive weapon. The matter was escalated to the Board. The Board and MP Inderjit Singh held a series of discussions with officials from the ICA and the Police to agree on the right of Sikhs to carry the kirpan and to then decide on the size and dimensions of the kirpan. Based on these discussions, it was affirmed that a Sikh had the right to carry the kirpan, which, inclusive of the handle, should not exceed 9 inches.
- 5.2 The Board then wrote to the Sikh institutions in Singapore and requested their respective temple management to advise and counsel their congregations that they should declare their kirpans at the various immigration checkpoints to the ICA's staff or, in the case of those attending public events, to the Police if it was required. The Sikh institutions were informed that the Police had assured the Board that in the event the kirpan was not allowed to be carried into a public event venue and had to be retained, the Police or the security personnel concerned would keep the kirpan respectfully in a clean plastic docket. Sikh institutions were also requested to advise amritdhari Sikhs in their congregation and their granthis (temple workers) to wear their kirpan under their clothes to make it inconspicuous and non-threatening to other Singaporeans.
- 5.3 In a further development later, there were 2 postings, firstly on the STOMP website and subsequently in the New Paper of Sikhs wearing the kirpan over their clothing in MRT trains instead of underneath them. The persons who posted the photographs questioned why Sikhs were allowed to carry offensive weapons that alarmed others. After the second posting on 31<sup>st</sup> October 2010, the Board requested all Sikh institutions to make announcements to their congregations on the sensitiveness of carrying the kirpan openly in public places. It was also suggested that pictorial representation on the proper way of wearing the kirpan in public (ie.under the clothing) should be put up on the notice boards of temples and institutions. The Board's letter to the Sikh institutions is at Appendix I.
- 5.4 On 6 November 2010, a number of ill-informed comments appeared on the Stomp website questioning whether the kirpan should be allowed to be

carried by Sikhs in public. The Board then wrote to the Stomp editor to explain the significance of the wearing of the kirpan by Sikhs (Appendix II).

6. National Environment Authority's (NEA) meeting with community representatives on 11 August 2010

6.1 The NEA sought the Sikh community's views on designating an area for the scattering of ashes after the cremation of a deceased person and for the provision of a facility to conduct last rites before and after the dispersing of the ashes. The Board's Chairman and Welfare Officer, Mdm Indrejit Kaur explained that for the Sikhs, it was not necessary for ashes to be scattered at designated spaces so long as they were done at a considerable distance from the shore. Furthermore, after the scattering of the ashes, prayers were typically carried out at the temple or at the home of the deceased. As such, there was no need for the provision of a facility at the shore for conduct of last rites for the Sikh community.

6.2 The Board Chairman also took the opportunity to request the NEA for railings to be installed at the Mandai Crematorium Halls for elderly visitors who had difficulty descending the steps. NEA agreed to this suggestion and promised to carry it out at their next scheduled Redecoration and Repair works, in 2011.

6.3 The NEA would also consider the retrofitting of the Ash Collection Centre at Mandai Crematorium for the provision of an additional Hindu/Sikh Ash Sorting Room. This would help speed up the collection of ashes for bereaved families.

7. Surrogacy Case (X Singh's Case)

7.1 A case was referred to the Board concerning an 8-year-old boy born under a surrogacy procedure in India, and whose parents were a Singaporean mother and a PR father. The child had been in Singapore since he was 2 years old. In 2009 when the child needed to be registered for Primary education, a student pass was applied for by the parents. ICA required DNA evidence of the biological father before they would issue a student pass to the boy. The DNA test however indicated that the father was not the biological parent of the child as had been claimed. ICA therefore rejected the application and required the child to leave Singapore immediately. Representations by the Singapore Sikh Education Foundation and the boy's legal counsel to the ICA to allow the child to continue his education in Singapore were unsuccessful. The Board then made representations on behalf of the parents of the child seeking the ICA's compassionate understanding of the case and pointing out that it was entirely possible that some "mix-up" could have occurred in the surrogacy procedure without any fault of the boy's parents. The Board also emphasized that the boy's roots were in Singapore and he deserved an

education in Singapore. The Board sought an extension for the child's visa in Singapore pending approval of his student pass.

7.2 As a result of the Board's representation, the ICA reconsidered the matter and granted a student pass to the boy to study in Singapore.

8. Discrimination of a Sikh by Nanyang Institute of Management

8.1 A foreign Sikh student, who wanted to study at the Nanyang Institute of Management (NIM) in Singapore, was told by NIM on 30 April 2009 that he was allowed to keep his turban but was not "allowed to keep the beard and moustache due to hygiene reasons." This matter was brought to the attention of the Board by the CSGB on 4 March 2010. The Board then wrote to NIM explaining the basic tenets of the Sikh religion and the requirement to maintain certain articles of faith, one of which was to keep unshorn hair. The Board also pointed out that the Singapore Government respected the rights of the Sikhs to maintain their form in keeping with the requirements of their religion. Sikh students in schools, colleges and the Polytechnics/Universities as well as those performing National Service in the army and Police had never been told or forced to remove their facial hair or moustache. The Board urged NIM to remove such a ruling in their institute and to inform the student accordingly. NIM wrote back on 8 March 2010 apologising for the error. They also apologised to the student and informed him of the change in their rules.

9. Book on Sikhs in Singapore by Ms Arunajeet Kaur

9.1 Sikh institutions in Singapore took offence to parts of a book written by Ms Arunajeet Kaur on "The Sikhs in Singapore" which was to have been launched publicly under the auspices of the Institute of South East Asia Studies (ISEAS) on 31 May 2010. Sikh community leaders who had had prior access to the book and read it voiced strong objections to its contents. The book had not provided a balanced presentation of the issues discussed, contained factual inaccuracies and made insinuations and allegations against Sikh leaders. These objections were conveyed by the Board to ISEAS through MP Inderjit Singh. Mr. Kesavapany, the Director of ISEAS immediately postponed the launch of the book pending review and resolution of these objections.

9.2 On 10 June 2010, the Board Chairman and Mr. Bhajan Singh from the Singapore Sikh Education Foundation met Mr. Kesavapany and Ms Arunajeet Kaur. It was agreed at this meeting that there would be a comprehensive revision of the book taking into consideration the views expressed by Sikh community leaders and for more sensitivity, particularly on those areas that touched on religion.

(After Note: Director, ISEAS informed that the Institute would not be supporting the publication of the book written by Ms Arunajeet Kaur).

10. Article in the Straits Times on Mega Churches

10.1 An article in the Straits Times of 17 July 2010 on Mega Churches in Singapore included references to Pastor Joseph Prince from the New Creation Church referring to his father as “an often drunk Sikh priest”. This description of his father upset and angered Sikh leaders and members of the community and a number of complaints were received by the Board. The Board, after consulting some Sikh leaders, including MP Inderjit Singh and former MP Davinder Singh sent a letter to the Editor of the Straits Times effectively stating that by publishing the comments of Pastor Joseph Prince in that manner, the paper had displayed an unacceptable disregard for minority religions in Singapore that amounted to a dereliction of its duty to uphold the multi racial and religious fabric in our society. The Editor acknowledged the mistake made in publishing the comments in the manner in which they appeared and agreed to publish the Board’s letter in the Straits Times edition of 27 July 2010 with an apology from the paper to go along with it. This was duly done. The Board’s letter and the apology from the Straits Times are at Appendix III.

11. Task Force on Teasing of Sikhs

11.1 A task-force to look into the teasing of Sikhs by Singaporeans was set up by the Board. Mr. Satwant Singh headed this task force. The team conducted a survey to gather more information on this matter to help identify problems facing the Sikh community in this regard and ways to resolve them. The survey results would be presented at the Sikh Retreat to be held on 20 January 2011.

12. Keeping the hair for Sikh inmates at the Prisons

12.1 The Singapore Prisons wrote to the Board on 25 October 2010 stating its policy on the keeping of facial and head hair by Sikh inmates, which was that those who entered the system with unshorn hair would be allowed to keep their hair but those who came shorn would not be allowed to keep their hair during their sentence although they may have had a change of heart. The Board felt that it was in order for a shorn Sikh to keep facial and head hair should he change his mind during his incarceration. This would further be consistent with rehabilitation and religious study counseling during the internment. The Board is seeking the views of Sikh Institutions on this policy of the Prison’s department before responding.

## **Other Issues handled by the Board**

13. Complaint by Mr. Charanjit Singh against the immigration authorities at Warsaw Airport
  - 13.1 Mr. Charanjit Singh, a Singaporean, who runs a restaurant in Warsaw, Poland, made a report to the Singapore Police upon his return from Warsaw on the search and inspection procedures he was forced to undergo with respect to his turban at Warsaw airport. He mentioned in his report to the Police that the Polish immigration officers had asked him to remove his turban and then handled it disrespectfully whilst laughing at the same time. He was visibly upset and sought the assistance of the Board. The Board wrote to the Polish Embassy in Singapore explaining the importance and significance of the turban to Sikhs and the need for it to be treated with respect. The Board also requested the Polish Embassy in Singapore to take up the matter with the concerned authorities in Warsaw. A copy of the Board's letter to the Polish Embassy had been handed to Mr. Charanjit Singh at his request.
  
14. Recent ISA arrest
  - 14.1 A Chinese newspaper, the Lianhe Zaobao, sought the Board's views on the arrest of some misguided Muslim radicals under the ISA. The Board Chairman commented that these arrests should not be seen as a reflection on the good work done by the Malay-Muslim community and leadership in fostering community engagement and relations. The latter had done a lot to maintain and promote peace and harmony in Singapore. The Board Chairman's views were reported in the paper on 7 July 2010.
  
15. Minister Mentor's (MM) Visit to Bhai Maharaj Singh Ji Memorial Gurdwara
  - 15.1 The Board assisted the CSGB in organizing MM's visit to the Bhai Maharaj Singh (BMS) Ji Memorial Gurdwara on 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2010 to initiate its re-opening after recent renovations. It was a happy occasion for the Sikh community to witness the MM inaugurating a major community event. He was welcomed by some 3000 Sikhs. MM's visit lasted about 45 minutes. He was presented with a Kirpan by the management committee of the CSGB on behalf of the Sikh community before his departure.
  
16. Deceased Bathing Facilities
  - 16.1 The issue of the deceased bathing facilities at the mortuaries of the various government/restructured hospitals in Singapore was finally resolved with Kandang Kerbau Women's and Children's Hospital also making its mortuary facility available for the purpose. The Board is grateful to the Ministry of Health, Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam and late Minister of State, Dr Balaji Sadasivan for their assistance in resolving this issue. The Sikh Welfare

Council (SIWEC) will liaise with the hospitals in future on the utilization of the facilities for the needs of the community.

17. Sikh Retreat

17.1 MCYS approved funding of \$20,000 on 27 September 2010 for the Board to organize a Sikh Retreat. The purpose of the retreat was for Heads of Sikh Institutions and prominent Sikhs including members from the academia, professionals and expatriates to review and discuss challenges and issues facing the community and to develop firm action plans to address them. The retreat would take place on 20 January 2011. The retreat would touch on and discuss topics such as promoting Sikhi and the Punjabi language, improving the academic and sporting excellence of Sikhs, extending a helping hand to the less fortunate, reaching out to the youth, improving governance and management systems and establishing an Umbrella Body for the Sikh community. Professor Tan Tai Yong of the NUS would facilitate the retreat.

18. Disorderly conduct by Sikh Foreign Workers

18.1 The Board received an email from a Singaporean lady on 19 April 2010 complaining about the unruly behavior of some Sikh foreign workers opposite City Square Mall. She was concerned that such incidents put the Sikh community in poor light. The Board thanked her for her feedback and forwarded her complaint to the Sikh institutions advising them to counsel the foreign workers who congregated at their premises on the need to conduct themselves respectfully and with decorum.

19. Application for Work Permits

19.1 The Board continued to assist gurdawaras by liaising with MCYS and the Ministry of Manpower for the speedy approvals of work permits. The Board also reminded the Sikh institutions that care ought to be taken by the temple management committees to ensure that the correct calibre of persons was recruited as temple workers to avoid delays in processing the applications and non-fulfillment of contractual obligations.

**Interactions with other Organisations**

20. Dialogue with SINDA

20.1 A dialogue session was held between the Sikh community leaders and SINDA at the Singapore Khalsa Association (SKA) on 28 Nov 2009. SINDA gave a presentation on the services that it provided to the Indian community at large. CEO, SINDA requested more involvement from the Sikhs in its activities. SINDA pointed out that more classes would be held for Indian students in Mathematics, Science and English at the various SINDA centers

spread across the island, and that Sikh students were encouraged to attend these classes.

21. Singapore Harmony Run (SHR)

21.1 MCYS had indicated its interest in organising and running the SHR. The Board assisted SIWEC in successfully negotiating with MCYS that SIWEC, with the support of MCYS, should continue to organize the SHR.

21.2 The run was flagged off on the evening of 9 October 2010 at Sri Guru Singh Sabha by Mrs Yu-Foo Yee Shoon, Minister of State in MCYS and ended next morning at Sri Guru Nanak Sat Sang Sabha where Member of Parliament, Dr Fatimah Lateef gave the closing speech. The route covered Sikh temples and other places of worship.

22. Harmony Games

22.1 The third series of the Harmony Games was organized by the Muslim community and was held on 26<sup>th</sup> June at the Islamic Hub in Braddel Road. Teams from the SKA and the Young Sikh Association (Singapore) represented the Sikh community and walked away with a number of prizes. The next games would be organized by the Buddhist Federation in 2011.

23. Media Corp's Vasantham – Indian Beat

23.1 The Vasantham TV channel had decided to air half hour programmes on non-Tamil Indian social, educational and cultural themes and activities provided they were not religious in nature. The Board encouraged all Sikh institutions to take this opportunity to publicise and promote their activities through the TV channel.

**Miscellaneous**

24. Paying respect to the late Dr Goh Keng Swee

24.1 Some 45 Sikhs from all major Sikh institutions, including some from the Board, gathered at Parliament House on 21 May 2010 to pay their respects to the late Dr. Goh Keng Swee in recognition of his services to the nation. Dr. Goh Keng Swee was responsible for introducing Religious Knowledge (RK) in Schools, which benefited Sikh students immensely as they learnt more about their religion under the Sikh Studies programme.

25. Paying respect to the late Dr Balaji Sadasivan

25.1 Around 15 Sikhs, including MP Inderjit Singh and some from the Board, attended the Minister's wake on 29 September 2010. The Sikh community

and the Board are grateful to Dr Balaji for his support on various issues relating to the Sikh community and particularly for making available the deceased bathing facilities at some of the mortuaries of Government hospitals for the washing of our deceased. Dr Balaji was a great friend of the Sikh community and will be missed by many.

26. Straits Times Interview on Youth & Religion

26.1 Two youths, Mr Jasbir Singh and Mr Harminder Singh, were nominated by the Board to be interviewed by the Straits Times on the role of youth in Sikhism. Their views were reported in the Straits Times of 27 November 2010.

27. Board's role in SIWEC

27.1 Under the new constitution of SIWEC, the Board would no longer be an ordinary member with voting rights but an associate member without voting rights. This was to avoid conflicts of interest in the event the Board was asked to review any dispute or disagreement that may arise from the workings of SIWEC.

### **Acknowledgements**

28. This was another eventful and challenging year for the Board. At the same time it was fruitful and rewarding. The Board would like to put on record the support, encouragement, and involvement of MP Inderjit Singh and the cooperation received from all Sikh institutions, which enabled it to perform its duties and fulfill its obligations efficiently and effectively.

29. The Board would especially like to thank the CSGB for its continued support, cooperation and assistance and for allowing it the use of its premises at the Central Sikh Temple for its meetings.

30. Finally, the Board would also like to thank MCYS officials, in particular Mr. Yoganathan Ammayappan and Ms Sheila Koh, for their advice, assistance and support. The close cooperation and facilitation rendered by these officers made the work of the Board that much easier to manage and handle and has ensured that the close relationship between the community and MCYS continues.

Prepared by:

AMARJIT SINGH  
SECRETARY  
SIKH ADVISORY BOARD

Approved by:

SURJIT SINGH  
CHAIRMAN  
SIKH ADVISORY BOARD

*"Dear Presidents of Sikh Temples/Institutions,*

*You would be aware of another recent stomp posting in the media highlighting the blatantly visible manner in which the kirpan was carried publicly by one of our brethren.... It is apparent that this manner of carrying the kirpan over one's clothing invites unnecessary comments and publicity.*

*The issue in this instance is not about carrying the kirpan by Sikhs but the display of it in public such that other Singaporeans are alarmed about it. The MCYS is sufficiently concerned and has inquired whether there is something the Sikh temples and institutions can do to impress upon our brethren wearing the kirpan do so more discreetly.*

*The SAB would therefore appreciate greater efforts and initiatives by Sikh institutions to educate their congregations of the need to wear and carry the kirpan sensitively and in a discreet manner under ones clothing in public. The wearing of the kirpan should also be declared at checkpoints when required. Sikh institutions are also requested to display posters showing the correct way of wearing the kirpan under ones clothing as a way of reinforcing the message that the wearing of the kirpan must be discreet and Sikhs need to be sensitive to the feelings of other Singaporeans in this regard.*

*Amarjit Singh  
Secretary SAB"*

*“Dear Editor, Stomp,*

*I was referred to your Stomp posting dated 31 October 2010 headlined "Man carries knife into MRT and behaves suspiciously" and showing what appears to be a Sikh gentleman carrying a "kirpan" (Sikh ceremonial knife) slung over his T-shirt.*

*On behalf of the Sikh Advisory Board, I would like to clarify that the kirpan is one of the 5 articles of faith that baptised Sikhs are required to carry on their person in their everyday life. The kirpan is usually carried discreetly beneath their clothing. Some Sikhs however, do wear the kirpan over their clothing, like the person shown in your posting. As many of your readers who have commented on the posting, the Sikhs carrying the Kirpan in the manner shown are only observing their religious practices and do not intend to intimidate or harass others. Nevertheless, the Sikh Advisory Board is working together with the Sikh temples and institutions to advise all Sikhs in Singapore that the kirpan should be carried discreetly under ones clothing and not be openly displayed above their clothing so as not to arouse any suspicion of or the sensitivities of other Singaporeans.*

*Amarjit Singh  
Secretary  
Sikh Advisory Board”*

*Dear Sir,*

*Your report (“Rise of the megachurches”; July 17), and in particular its reference to Pastor Joseph Prince’s father as “and often drunk Sikh priest...”, displayed an unacceptable disregard for minority religions in Singapore.*

*It is entirely up to Pastor Prince to decide how he wishes to describe his father. But a national newspaper in a country which prides itself on racial and religious harmony should have known better than to report it.*

*When a mainstream newspaper reports such a comment, it conveys a false caricature of Sikh priests as drunkards and irresponsible fathers. It also suggests that there was good reason for Pastor Prince to convert from Sikhism to another religion.*

*The report has hurt the feelings of the Sikh community in Singapore.*

*Surjit Singh  
Chairman, Sikh Advisory Board*

***EDITORS NOTE: We are sorry the reference to Pastor Joseph Prince’s father has caused offence and hurt the feelings of the Sikh community. That was never our intention and we apologise for the error of judgement.***