

## **ANNUAL REPORT OF THE SIKH ADVISORY BOARD FOR THE PERIOD NOVEMBER 2012 – OCTOBER 2013**

### **1. Appointment of Board Members**

The following members were appointed to the Sikh Advisory Board (SAB or Board) by the Minister for Culture, Community & Youth (MCCY) for the period from November 2012 to October 2013.

<u>Name</u>	<u>Institution</u>
Mr. Harjit Singh	Central Sikh Gurdwara Board
Mr. Pritpal Singh	Khalsa Dharmak Sabha
Mr. Sukhbir Singh	Khalsa Dharmak Sabha
Mr. Harbans Singh	Khalsa Jiwan Sudhar Sabha
Mr. Bhopinder Singh	Government Representative
Mr. Malminderjit Singh	Government Representative
Dr Narinder Kaur	Government Representative
Mr. Surjit Singh	Government Representative
Mr. Rashbar Singh	Gurdwara Sahib Yishun
Mr. Charanjit Singh	Pardesi Khalsa Dharmak Diwan
Mr. Harjit Singh	Pardesi Khalsa Dharmak Diwan
Mr. Darshan Singh Bajaj	Sri Guru Nanak Sat Sang Sabha
Mr. Jaj Raj Singh Bal	Sri Guru Nanak Sat Sang Sabha
Mr Ranjit Singh	Sri Guru Singh Sabha
(1 appointee Vacant)	Sri Guru Singh Sabha

## **2. Meetings of the Board**

The Board met quarterly as scheduled on 8 January 2013, 2 April 2013, 2 July 2013 and 10 October 2013.

## **3. Major Issues Addressed by the Board**

### **i. The Sikh Inmate's Issue**

a. The SAB Chairman, Secretary, Assistant Secretary and Sukhbir Singh of the Board along with Chairman of the Sikh Welfare Council (SIWEC) Mr Jagjit Singh and MP Inderjit Singh, met with Senior Minister of State (SMS) for Home Affairs (MHA) Mr Masagos Zulkifli on 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2013 to discuss the prison's policy on Sikhs. The Director of Prisons and other MHA officials also attended. SMS Masagos highlighted that this was a follow-up to the previous meeting on the matter with then Minister of Home Affairs Mr K Shanmugam. Key points from the discussion are as follows:

- MHA had reviewed the policy on keeping of unshorn hair by Sikh inmates and said that the existing hair policy will be maintained, i.e. only Sikhs with unshorn hair at the point of admission to prison will be allowed to keep their hair.
- SMS Masagos said that Prisons maintains a unique and strict environment with a strong focus on discipline. Prisons must be seen to treat all inmates equally, and this is essential to maintaining good order and security.

- However, Prisons will continue to grant this exemption for Sikhs. SMS Masagos said that Prisons was willing to consider exceptions to this policy in certain circumstances, e.g. inmates on death row who had become pious, assessed to be of good conduct, and attend religious counseling. But this should not be seen as a precedent for other cases.
  - Sikh leaders, while pleased that some concessions had been made, registered their disappointment that their request for shorn Sikh prisoners (especially those serving long sentences) to be allowed to keep their hair after religious counselling should they request for it, had been disallowed.
  - In concluding, SMS Masagos agreed that it would be useful for the government to continue engaging the Sikh community leaders on key issues that were of interest to the community. (Afternote: SAB was informed after the meeting by MHA officials that Minister of Law and Foreign Affairs Mr K Shanmugam would meet with the Sikh community leaders on 18 June 2013.)
- b. Heads of Sikh institutions were briefed on the meeting with SMS Masagos on 6 February 2013. They were pleased at the concessions made by government to allow shorn Sikhs on death row to keep their hair subject to certain conditions. They also urged the SAB to continue working with MHA and the Prisons to further review the inmate policy to allow shorn Sikhs on longer-term sentences to keep their hair.

ii. Meeting with Government Leaders

a. SAB was invited to an informal lunch with Acting Minister for MCCY Mr Lawrence Wong on 18th April 2013, shortly after he assumed this position, to familiarize him on the role of the SAB and matters pertaining to the Sikh community. Chairman Surjit Singh and Board members Malminderjit Singh, Narinder Kaur, Sukhbir Singh and Darshan Singh attended the lunch and briefed the Minister.

b. A dialogue between Sikh community leaders and Minister of Law and Foreign Affairs, Mr K Shanmugan was held at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 18th June 2013. The table below summarises the issues raised and discussed:

No	Issue	Request	Outcome
1	Prisons' hair grooming policy	To allow shorn Sikhs at the time of incarceration to keep facial and head hair	No change in status, i.e. Only Sikhs with unshorn hair at the point of admission to prison will be allowed to keep their hair
2	Policy allowing Sikhs to keep hair in schools and uniformed services	To standardize this policy and to educate parties concerned	MOE noted the need to strengthen awareness among school leaders about male Sikh students and would be reiterating this message to school leaders.
3	Foreign students and private educational Institutions	To get CPE to check if there were other schools who were lax in their attendance requirements. Also for hospitality schools to be upfront when recruiting Sikh students on their hair policy	Minister would follow up with the relevant parties concerned [Afternote: SAB informed MHA that this matter had been resolved and no further action was required.]

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4	Social indicators of Sikhs in Singapore	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To provide information on Sikh students-at-risk or underperforming Sikh students</li> <li>• Request for data on Sikh marriages and divorces</li> </ul>	<p>Minister would work with the Ministry of Education (MOE) and Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) to explore the possibility of providing these details to the Sikh community.</p> <p>[Afternote: The number of Sikh students is very small (only 100+ students sit for the PSLE each year, and the number is smaller at O and A levels). They constitute less than 0.5% of the cohort of students each year, and of the total candidature in each level of examination. Statistics derived from such a small base fluctuates from year to year. That said, the performance of Sikh students at the national examinations has been generally comparable to the overall Indian student performance as reported in our 2012 Ethnic Press Release, which can be found on MOE's website (<a href="http://www.moe.gov.sg/media/press/2012/10/performance-by-ethnic-group-in.php">http://www.moe.gov.sg/media/press/2012/10/performance-by-ethnic-group-in.php</a>).]</p> <p>Sikh divorces data:</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Year</th> <th>2008</th> <th>2009</th> <th>2010</th> <th>2011</th> <th>2012</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Category</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Both Sikhs</td> <td>24</td> <td>19</td> <td>27</td> <td>26</td> <td>17</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Either party is a Sikh</td> <td>12</td> <td>20</td> <td>16</td> <td>23</td> <td>21</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Total</td> <td>36</td> <td>39</td> <td>43</td> <td>49</td> <td>38</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Year	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	Category						Both Sikhs	24	19	27	26	17	Either party is a Sikh	12	20	16	23	21	Total	36	39	43	49	38
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No	Issue	Request	Outcome
5	Hindi/Punjabi programmes on Vasantham Channel	Request for some Punjabi programmes on the Vasantham channel	<p>MCI would follow up</p> <p>[Afternote: While the majority of programmes on Vasantham are in Tamil, the channel also offers programmes in other Indian languages. For example, in addition to the dedicated Hindi movie slot on Saturdays at 4pm, 'Indian Panorama' on Sundays at 1pm features non-Tamil movies. 'Yaar Aan Mulle', a Punjabi film, was telecast on 14 Apr 2013. A dedicated weekly programme 'Indian Beat' (Fri 9pm) was initiated in January 2011 with English and Tamil presenters to feature specific events and activities of the various Indian ethnic groups, including those of the Punjabi community. Stories featured in 'Indian Beat' included the Lohri Festival (Jan 2013), Yaar Punjab Bhangra dance (Feb 2013), Khalsa Association Sports Day (Mar 2013) and Gatka Martial Art Story (June 2013), among others. Since 2012, Vasantham has broadened its non-Tamil programming to include dedicated one-hour drama slots from Mondays to Fridays featuring Hindi, Telugu, and Malayalam dramas.</p> <p>On the Oli 96.8FM radio station, news and traffic announcements are made in Tamil to cater to the majority-Tamil audience. Music and other entertainment programmes are offered in other Indian languages to cater to the various Indian communities.]</p>

No	Issue	Request	Outcome
6	Work permit allocation for Sikh religious workers	Request for more such work permits for the Central Sikh Gurdwara Board (CSGB) and Katong Gurdwara	MOM assesses applications by Sikh temples based on the religious need of the temple and job scope of the candidate.
7	The Sikh Community	What was Government's perception of the Sikh community?	The Sikh community has contributed significantly to Singapore.
8	Case of intoxicated trespasser at Yishun Gurdwara	Minister asked for details	<p>Appropriate action taken by area police in-charge</p> <p>[Afternote: SAB informed that this matter had been resolved and no further action was required.]</p>
9	Gross Floor Area (GFA) of Central Sikh Temple	To allow additional GFA to build a sheltered walkway	Additional GFA was supported with the addition of 2 new car park lots to meet the minimum car parking requirements. A+A works underway and expected to be completed by November 2014.



iii. Sikh Religious Identity and Symbols

- a. Chairman and some SAB members met with MCCY Deputy Director, Vendesan Somo on 27 December 2012 to discuss actions the authorities could take to help resolve the problem of teasing faced by Sikhs because of their form. Mr Somo mentioned that MCCY, through the Inter Racial and Religious Confidence Circles (IRCC), would intensify awareness campaigns on the different races and religions, highlighting various aspects of the religion through multi-racial exhibitions, the IRCC website, Facebook and distribution of a quarterly newsletter (30,000 copies).
- b. Separately, the SAB highlighted at the meeting that a principal of a public school demanded that a Sikh student remove his facial hair. Secretary SAB, Malminderjit Singh and Harminder Singh from the Sikh Sewaks met up with the school principal on 23 January 2013 to resolve the matter. After explanations given by Malminderjit Singh and Harminder Singh, the principal agreed that his earlier directive was incorrect and had now allowed the Sikh student to keep facial hair.
- c. Mr. Jogindar Singh, a Sikh driver of a truck and trailer informed the SAB on 25 February 2013 of a non-Sikh driver who had placed the Khanda symbol, which is a respected religious symbol for the Sikhs, at the foot rest of his trailer and requested that the SAB speak to the parties concerned to have the Khanda removed from the said trailer as it was disrespectful and upsetting to the sentiment of Sikhs for the driver to place his foot on the Khanda. Chairman SAB took up the matter with the manager of the company that

owned the trailer who was apologetic and who willingly agreed to have the Khanda symbol removed.

- d. SAB helped Professor Sally Rubin from the Chapman University to interview Sikh men, women and children on a film project of hers on aspects of the turban and how it related to the Sikh religion. Interviews with the group of Sikhs chosen took place in the month of January 2013.

iv. Harmony Games

The purpose of the Harmony Games was for participants from various religious groups to get to know and mingle with each other with the intention of fostering inter-racial and religious harmony. The Sikh community was given the privilege to organize the games for in 2013. An organizing committee comprising members of the community was established to organize the Games, which were held on 20<sup>th</sup> April 2013 at the Singapore Khalsa Association. Acting Minister for MCCY Mr Lawrence Wong was the Guest of Honour (GOH). The event was well attended with about 350 participants from the various religious groups participating in futsal, netball and hockey. The GOH gave away the prizes and sportingly participated in the mass Bhangra session at the end of the games. The Sikh community received noteworthy praise from the other participating communities for having organized a successful event.

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

i. Salary Increments for Mother Tongue Teachers

MP Inderjit Singh referred to the SAB a query he had received about a Sikh NIE-graduate school teacher who had not received her increment in salary for receiving an A grade in her A-level Punjabi. On checking with the Ministry of Education, it was clarified that the increment was only given to non-graduate teachers. The message was conveyed to the complainant.

i. Online Racism

In July 2013, there were incidences of racist comments targeting Sikhs posted on a Facebook page. Some young Sikh netizens picked up these remarks and forwarded them to MP Inderjit Singh and SAB. SAB alerted several government agencies including MCCY and MHA and at the same time advised the young Sikh netizens not to retaliate or inflame the situation online but instead to make a police report, which they did. The offensive posts have since been removed.

ii. CSGB Elections

A member of the CSGB wrote to MCCY complaining about alleged irregularities in the election process at the previous CSGB Annual General Meeting (2011) and elections. MCCY proposed to the SAB that having a mediation session between the parties could help resolve the complaint made by the complainant. SAB conveyed this to CSGB but it declined mediation. Instead it offered to present all details on its processes and procedures pertaining to the election to MCCY. The complainant was informed of CSGB's response and decided to take up his complaint further with the Commissioner of Charities.

iii. Demise of Sikh Police Officer

The sudden demise of Sgt. Sandeep Singh on 14 September 2013 shocked the Sikh community. SAB received a request from the SIWEC to get the Singapore Police commissioner to carry out a full investigation of what happened as rumours circulated in the community and online that Sandeep had been victimized at work. SAB advised SIWEC that it was best to await the outcome of the investigation that was being carried out by the authorities.

**5. Other Matters**

i. Revamp of SAB website

Mr. Manjit Singh Usma redesigned the website and sponsored the cost of redesigning and hosting the website. The SAB appreciates and records its thanks to Mr. Manjit Singh Usma for the “sewa” (service) he has done.

ii. Outreach to and Networking with other Communities

- a. SAB arranged for some 10 members from Sikh institutions to attend the Building Bridges Seminar organized by MUIS on 6th April 2013.
- b. Chairman SAB attended the International conference on Terrorist Rehabilitation, organized by the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) on 28 March 2013.
- c. At the request of SAB, Central Sikh Temple hosted a group of Catholic seminarians on 6th September. The visitors were happy with the visit and featured it in their

newsletter. Many Sikh youth came forward to help with the visit, giving presentations and a tour of the temple.

## **6. Appreciation of Support**

The Sikh Advisory Board would like to thank all Sikh institutions and community leaders, as well as members of the Sikh community, for their support and cooperation during the year, without which the SAB would not have been able to successfully perform its role.

We would also like to put on record our appreciation and thanks to MP Inderjit Singh for his advice and to the MCCY for their invaluable support.

Compiled By: Dr Narinder Kaur, Assistant Secretary SAB

Prepared By: Malminderjit Singh, Secretary SAB

Approved By: Surjit Singh, Chairman SAB