

Vaisakhi at Westminster 2022



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On this Vaisakhi day, we pray that it will be a year of peace, happiness, and an abundance of joy. May God shower you all with endless blessing, love, health and happiness.

Happy Vaisakhi!



Welcome Speech by Pat McFadden MP

Member of Parliament, Wolverhampton South East

VaheGuru Ji ka Khalsa, VaheGuru Ji Ki Fateh.

It is a great honour for me to host Vaisakhi in Parliament once again in conjunction with the British Sikh Consultative Forum. Before I say anything further I want you to join me in thanking the children from the Khalsa Academy – in Wolverhampton South East – for the wonderful Kirtan they have played to open our event tonight.

I want to say to the children, you have been a great credit to your school and your teachers and I hope that the memory of coming here to Parliament and beginning this wonderful Vaisakhi celebration stays with you for a long time.

Friends this Vaisakhi in Parliament celebration has been taking place for many years and it has been my honour to host it for the past decade. It is the first time in three years that we have been able to hold this event in person. In 2020 we could not hold it at all because we had just entered the first lockdown. Last year we held an online event. So it is a particular pleasure to welcome everyone here tonight to celebrate Vaisakhi in Parliament and in person.

And I want to thank Mr Speaker for his kind permission in allowing us to hold this celebration in these amazing State Rooms, one of the most beautiful and historic locations in Parliament. It is very important that our Parliament, the heart of our democracy, should celebrate those religious occasions which mean the most to every part of the community in today's United Kingdom. And Vaisakhi is such an occasion.

Through these weeks, Sikhs in every corner of the United Kingdom and throughout the world celebrate the foundation of the Khalsa, that are willing to lay down everything for one's faith. And the community does this through gathering at gurdwaras, meeting family and friends and taking part in the Nagar Kirtan processions which take place in many towns and cities around the country – including, of course, several in Wolverhampton. We have learned a lot in these past two years, not least the importance of human contact to us as human beings. We are really only whole through our relationship with others.

These past two years have been a very tough time for the country. We lost so many people to the pandemic. We had to change our lives in ways that were very hard for people. Social occasions missed. Family and friends that could not be seen. And of course, in the hardest cases of all, people could not say goodbye to their loved ones. These were hard and testing times. But this pandemic also showed great strengths in our country. We saw hard work and care, way beyond the terms of any employment contract from NHS and social care workers. We saw delivery drivers make sure the country was supplied with essential goods.

We saw a huge scale vaccination programme designed to protect ourselves and protect one another. And right across the country, we saw countless community efforts to look after one another, distribute food and combat loneliness. The Sikh community was at the very heart of those efforts. The tradition of Langar was brought to the fore as Gurdwaras throughout the country played their part in making sure the community was fed and supported. And in the finest traditions of Langar, it did not matter one jot whether the recipient was Sikh or non-Sikh. These were hard times, but they also showed the best of the human spirit.

I want to put on record my thanks tonight to the Sikh community in the United Kingdom for everything you did during the pandemic. And at this Vaisakhi celebration, we look forward to a better future, based on all those efforts which you made.

We have a number of speakers for you this evening. This is a cross-party event and we will hear tonight from Speakers from all the main parties. We also have an illustrious range of speakers from the Sikh community itself. And I want to introduce the first of those to you now. He is a good friend and a constituent. He is Executive Director of the British Sikh Consultative Forum – our co-host tonight – and holds positions in a number of charities including being Chairman of the Council of South Asian Culture and Education. Please welcome Dr Sadhu Singh.



DR SADHU SINGH

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, BRITISH SIKH CONSULTATIVE FORUM

Welcome to all guests and members of both Houses of Parliament to this 15th Vaisakhi at Westminster.

I want to thank Rt Hon Sir Lyndsay Hoyle, Rt Hon Patrick McFadden and the staff of this wonderful place for hosting and promoting this Vaisakhi function.

Let me first wish Happy Vaisakhi to everyone. We also heard wonderful inspiring spiritual Kirtan from the Children of the Khalsa Academy Wolverhampton, my home town.

The British Sikh Consultative Forum has been working in several areas in the last two years. We worked together with other Sikh national bodies to deal with the Pandemic as a community. Some Gurdwaras rose to the challenge and worked together to supply Langar to thousands of people.

We worked together to set up guidelines during the Pandemic with advice from experts. We started a bi-monthly news magazine of BSCF activities and of the Sikh community. We ensure that other Sikh organisations are also included in this news magazine.

BSCF has been working with the Sikh Human Rights Group in setting up a Sikh Neurodiversity Network. This project is to make Gurdwaras more welcoming and accepting of children and adults with Autism. We are glad to see progress in this area.

We have set up an interfaith group to work on resilience and joint efforts by learning from the experience of the pandemic. Our focus is practical rather than dialogue.

We are embarking on a new project. At BSCF we feel we as a community have not done much for the generation that built the Gurdwaras, fought to get us the rights to practise our religion and ensured we had a future as a proud community.

BSCF is bringing together Gurdwaras to set up Day centres and looking toward setting up residential homes for the elderly close to Gurdwaras to continue to meet their spiritual needs, and ensure they remain close to the community. I hope by next year we will have some concrete progress on this.

Can I wish everyone Happy Vaisakhi, again? I want to thank all those who have contributed in various ways. I am also very happy to announce that Amrit Singh Mann of Punjab Restaurant, who provides food every Vaisakhi, has been honoured with an OBE.

In fact, the number of Sikhs who have received honours is increasing. This shows that Sikhs are now well integrated in Britain.



PREET KAUR GILL MP
MEMBER OF PALIAMENT, Birmingham & Edgbaston

VaheGuru Ji Ka Khalsa, VaheGuru Ji Ki Fateh

A very happy Vaisakhi to everyone. It's a real pleasure to be here, and what I think is now a staple of the Sikh Parliamentary calendar. Thanks as always to Pat and Eve in his team for organising this event.

This weekend I was able to join the open-air celebrations at Guru Nanak Gurdwara Smethwick. After two years where we haven't been able to do this, it was such a joyous event. Any MPs here who haven't yet experienced the colour and music of a Nagar Kirtan procession in your constituencies – you need to do it, you're missing out!

It's such a pleasure that today, after two years of virtual events, we have been able to get off Zoom and celebrate together again, with the kind permission of the Speaker today. Vaisakhi is a time for us to reflect on the values on which the Khalsa Panth was founded — the defence of freedom, equality, and the betterment of all.

Across the world, our values – of equality, peace and harmony – are under threat. In this past year, we have seen the fall of Kabul to the Taliban, where the last remnants of centuries of Sikh history and culture in Afghanistan was all but wiped out. And in recent months, we have all been devastated to see the senseless brutality of Vladimir Putin's war on Ukraine. The scenes of wanton destruction and death, targeting civilians and aid workers, women and children among them, are so distressing.

In this time of great instability and division, I seek courage and comfort in prayer. And so I hope this year we can all reaffirm our commitment to the values Guru Gobind Singh Ji and the Panj Pyare devoted themselves to in 1699. These eternal values remain as important today as they have ever been.

Earlier this month, I got to see these in practice when I visited the border of Poland, where over two million refugees have been welcomed, in their search for sanctuary from Putin's monstrous war of aggression. I met with United Sikhs who were on the ground there, providing hot food, medical supplies and other goods to those crossing the border. The selfless service of the Sikh community has been something we have all witnessed in the UK, and here we were, on the edge of a war zone doing the same again.

I can't tell you how moving it was to see Ukrainian women and children who had fled for their lives received with such warmth and generosity. And I know Sikhs are working tirelessly through their Gurdwaras to support and welcome refugees across the UK too. The teachings of the Sikh Gurus remind us that the human race is one under God, and how we should work towards the wellbeing of all, Sarbat da Bhalaa.

These are the proudest tenets of our faith, and why I'm so proud to represent our community in Parliament with the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on British Sikhs. Because when we talk about the values that guide us at events like this: it is never just words. We put our values into practice day in and day out.

In these dark times, that devotion is invaluable, and a testament to our community's incredible contribution to the world. Thank you again to all for being here. Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa, Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh



Rt Hon Sir Kier Starmer

Leader of the Opposition

Happy Vaisakhi everyone, it's absolutely great to be here today. It would be great to be here for any celebration like this but after two years of having to do everything online, it's a very special pleasure to see so many people at this event and I am really struck by how many people are here.

My office said to me 20 minutes or so ago "Kier it's really busy in there, it's really buzzing in there." And then as I came in it was wonderful to just see you all here. To see so many colleagues, see so many friends who have come and I can see looking around the room from across so many places to be with us this evening. So it is a real, real pleasure to be here.

Can I start by thanking Pat McFadden for bringing us all together this evening and the British Sikh Consultative Forum for their sponsorship of this event? It wouldn't happen if these individuals and bodies hadn't brought us together. Thanks to all the children from the Khalsa Academy in Wolverhampton for playing the opening music.

I met the children earlier on this afternoon. They came up to my office and told me that they have been practising for days on end for this evening. I said to them how delighted all of us would be as we are to see and hear their performance. So thank you to those children for what they brought. Thank you to the Academy of Wolverhampton for the fantastic work it does. You should be really, really proud of what you have done today and for the performance today.

Can I broaden my thanks as well because I want to take this opportunity in person, my first real chance to do so, to thank all the Sikh community volunteers, organisations and charities that have stepped up during these challenging times. That has already been mentioned this evening.

But your efforts I think really embody what is best for us because Sikhs have been at the forefront; whether that is supporting people through the pandemic - that was a really tough, tough period but of course, there is the cost of living crisis. Many people are struggling. Throughout those difficult, challenging times you have supported and extended that hand to so many people in all of our communities and I want to say a big thanks for that.

Some of you in the room will know that I visited the Croydon Gurdwara the week before last on Vaisakhi day and it was really fantastic. That brought home to me the work that you all do, it was one example, but a really very powerful example of a Gurdwara with all of the inclusiveness that we have just heard about but also the extension of holding out a hand to others.

I was struck by so many non-Sikhs who were in contact with the Gurdwara, the food that was being provided - 500 meals a week, day in day out, week in, week out. It was provided to everyone in the community that needed it either to come and get some food or have food delivered to them and the support that goes with it.

I think that more than anything else it embodies for me what this celebration is about. We did some Seva there, I ate, delivered and served up food to the people in the right tradition. It was wonderful to see the inclusivity, excitement and a sense of being that was there in that Gurdwara as there is in so many other Gurdwaras. My big thanks for everything that you do not only in support of your own communities but in support of all communities. It is that inclusivity I was really, really struck by.

But if we are friends we have to face up to the difficulties as well. I want to say a few words about anti-Sikh hate because we all know and you know targeting Sikhs has been on the rise. I know that it is a huge concern to everyone in this room and to many, many beyond this room.

I wanted to take this opportunity to make it absolutely clear that the Labour Party stands side by side with you as we work together to combat racism and prejudice in our society. I think successive governments have been too slow to deal with anti-Sikh hatred.

Therefore, we have got to take a stronger stand. We have got to take it more quickly and I pledge on Vaisakhi Day that the Labour government will put this right. And, under my leadership, a future government will put this right. Under my leadership, a future Labour government will robustly stand up for the rights of Sikhs everywhere and work to ensure that Sikh communities feel safe, secure and respected - if we can take that away from tonight.

I know that broadly the values of Sikhi are aligned with the values of the Labour party - serving your community, fighting oppression and seeking justice. I am really pleased that my party, the Labour party are so proud of this. We have two Sikh MPs in Preet Gill, who was here a moment ago but we have a vote going on at the moment, she is a member of my Shadow Cabinet and Tan Dhesi whom we are going to hear from later on.

We are so proud to have them as our representatives, Labour representatives in the House of Commons. I know what you will all be thinking in your head, which is that's all very well Kier, but we got to go further. We need more representation across all elements of Parliament, nationally and locally.

You are right about that and I want to work with you on that and make sure that we build on that representation as we go forward. Now it remains for me really to end by saying Happy Vaisakhi, enjoy the rest of the evening, and enjoy each other's company. It is so good to be back together.

Thank you so much for listening to me.





DR JASDEV SINGH RAI
General Secretary, British Sikh Consultative Forum

Welcome to the 15th Vaisakhi at Westminster.

The Pandemic has been a painful experience for almost everyone, especially those who lost dear ones. But it also brought out some remarkable qualities within communities.

Communities worked together to get food and other necessities; to those who couldn't get to shops were isolating or were working hard at the frontline. Resilience and partnerships developed. Barriers of race, ethnicity, faith, gender and lifestyles came down and the crises showed us the benefits of inclusivity.

The British Sikh Consultative Forum has teamed up with members of other faith communities to set up a working group on issues such as poverty, joint volunteering and coordinating efforts during disasters. Some of the representatives of this interfaith group are here today.

Inclusivity is a core principle of the teachings of the Sikh Gurus. Throughout Guru Nanak Sahib's life, his musical companion, Bhai Mardana remained a Muslim.

At Vaisakhi 1699, the Khalsa was born as a distinctive order. However, the Khalsa was instructed by Guru Gobind Singh Ji to serve and respect all of humanity irrespective of background or belief. While being distinctive, the Khalsa is also inclusive. In fact, this runs throughout Sikh institutions and Sikhs' worldview.

Inclusivity is about genuine respect, genuine acceptance and genuinely treating everyone with dignity. It is about ensuring that there are no barriers or differential treatments regardless of differences. Britain is a beacon of diversity that has emerged over half a century with communities from all corners of the world.

Ostensibly the Diversity of identities and the idealism of inclusivity pull in different directions, keeping them functioning harmoniously, creating a national synergy with this diversity and cementing a sense of belonging brings challenges that we must work at.

This places great responsibility on leaders and influencers to ensure that statements, policies and laws do not introduce any sense of marginalisation, isolation or loss of rights and respect. We must avoid politics of populism and ultranationalism to avoid fissures.

I think it will be fair to say that Sikhs and the British people have a great deal of congruence in promoting the harmony and synergy of diversity and inclusivity and can work together to remove any remaining or any potentially emerging barriers to achieving inclusivity.

That is a message of Vaisakhi for all of humanity, and indeed as British Sikhs, to all our fellow citizens.



ALISON THEWLISS MP MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT, Glasgow Central

It is great to be here, an absolute pleasure to be back in the Speaker's House and see so many people in a room together as well. It is just wonderful after so long of being apart. Having virtual Vaisakhis are lovely, they are very nice but you certainly don't get the company and you certainly don't get the pakoras or samosas either! So, it's wonderful to be here and share this with you.

It was a joy also to see the processions going through Glasgow as well as between Glasgow's four Gurdwaras. We are so proud to have in the city of Glasgow and around Glasgow such a wonderfully, proud Sikh population, all giving so much to the community no less throughout the lockdown as well. And, it's because I haven't been able to do this and it is such a good thing, I want to give my very public and grateful thanks to the Sikh food bank Glasgow who did so much through the pandemic under the leadership of Charandeep Singh. He was recognised, in the Honours for what he has done in bringing the community together and taking that Langar to people's doorsteps because everybody knows in Glasgow that if you go to the Gurdwara, you will get a welcome and you can't get through the door before somebodies asking you to sit down and eat! Such is generosity and kindness.

But during the pandemic, we all know that was not possible, so Charandeep and his team made sure that Langar went to people's homes, to those who needed it. I had so many constituents who were really struggling during that pandemic and I know that I could trust the teams at the Gurdwaras to make sure that they got the food and that all my constituents who were really struggling during that pandemic. My constituents who received it were so incredibly grateful for that.

So, I wanted to take the opportunity to say that publically and to thank everybody who was part of all the Sevadars who gave their time, their generosity and their donations as well as make it possible. It was really wonderful to see. I also wanted to mention it because it's been an ongoing, long-running campaign of my colleague Martin Doherty Hughes for his constituent Jagtar Singh Johal who is still being held in an Indian jail. It will be five years I understand in November, without seeing justice. I know that Martin was pressing the Prime Minister to raise this during his visit, but we don't know yet if he did. Because there hasn't been a statement given to the House on whether any progress was made on this but please be assured that my SNP colleagues and Martin Doherty Hughes will be pushing for justice for Jagtar so that he can return to his family in Dumbarton from whom he has been apart from far, far too long.

I also want to finish by saying that there is a thing that we have, that people make Glasgow. And, that the Sikh community today are definitely part of the Glasgow that I know and love very much. They are very much part of the community and we are very proud of them. That solidarity was seen most prominently in Kenmure streets in Pollokshields and I don't know if anybody has been to Kenmure street or if they know Pollokshields but there was an incident more than a year ago where two Indian Sikh men were taken from their homes by the Home Office to be removed from the UK. All of the neighbours, all of the families, children, grandchildren, grannies and everybody in Kenmure street and beyond came out into the streets and said that these are our neighbours, let them go! And that was incredibly powerful. Doesn't matter where somebody had come from but in Pollokshields and in Glasgow, everybody stood together to look after those people. That is how welcome and how this part of the community, that the Sikh community are, and indeed stand up for each other in that way.

I'm very, very proud to represent Glasgow, to represent that community and the Sikh community which is at the heart of that too. Thank you very much for having me here this evening.

VaheGuru Ji ka Khalsa, VaheGuru Ji Ki Fateh.



KAMALPREET KAUR

Supreme Sikh Council

May I wish everyone a Happy Vaisakhi.

Do you, one day, want to wake up to a world where there is no prejudice, no hunger, just empathy, peace and love? The world which is just for one and all, where there are equal opportunities for all to share the bounties of the Earth? Where the Fatherhood of God and brotherhood of human beings is not divisive but an exhilarating and liberating experience? I can safely hazard a guess that the answer to this is most likely to be affirmative at least in the minds of the people present here today.

On the Vaisakhi Day in 1699, the Tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh Ji, established the Order of the Khalsa, the pure and the awakened souls to fulfil these very ideals of human existence. The people who joined the Order then, and those who get initiated today, know that they are expected to go beyond the call of their duty to stand up for the rights of all the oppressed, vulnerable and in dire need of help. They are ordained to serve the world without any bias against the circumstance of anyone's birth, clan, caste, colour, creed, race, faith, gender or region.

Guru's message of Oneness helped replace privilege, bigotry and intolerance with equality, diversity and inclusion. The Khalsa gets a new identity that comes with the responsibility of care and service to all beings. Its articles of faith, are a constant reminder to endeavour and build an egalitarian society where living becomes joy, Anand, bliss. The Khalsa understands that it is Guru's Will to accept all and not simply 'tolerate' because we only tolerate something which we dislike but have to live with. The Khalsa's embrace is all-inclusive.

Sadly, despite all the progress we have made as civilised people, we are no closer to the ideals of equality and inclusion. People around the world continue to suffer, most suffering man-made, inflicted out of greed and ego and one-upmanship. And when I see the images of the suffering humanity, mothers crying, children dying, cities turned into rubbles, hope for love and peace almost extinguished in many parts of the world, I realise how important it, therefore, is to repeat, reiterate, revisit, and share the history behind the birth of Khalsa.

Especially so, in the corridors of powers that be, like these Houses of Parliament where the policies are drafted and enacted as laws that decide the fate of the citizenry, that dictate the kind of life people can have. If the politicians are inspired by the values of truth and justice and welfare for all, Sarbat Da Bhala, and are empathetic to the pain and suffering and needs of the people they represent, this will reflect in the policies and laws they make and themselves abide by.

Alternatively, lies, deceit, bigotry, racial and institutional discrimination would continue to cloud the better judgement of the lawmakers and people will suffer.

The ideals of the Khalsa are a beacon of hope for the greater good of humankind. They shine brighter in the dark times like wars and Covid and injustice and thus need to be upheld with conviction and courage. Equally important is to respect the articles of faith, that for the initiated, are a constant reminder of their responsibility towards the World. It is heartening to see more and more politicians joining in to wish everyone Happy Vaisakhi and Khalsa Saajna Diwas.

However, it would be more wholesome and appropriate for the lawmakers to ensure that these articles of faith, the kirpan, the kara, and the turban get the legal protection they deserve so that the Sikhs who

set up food charities for the homeless countrymen, or those who fight for the country or those who as doctors and nurses and other frontline staff put themselves in the line of danger, do NOT have to fight to protect their self-respect and identity in stadia or concerts or schools or airports or even places like the London Eye.

It would only be befitting to not only seek and garner Sikh votes but also allow them ample opportunities to rise and make a mark in the political and public sphere without prejudice.

Like always, it is important to conclude on a positive note, like the day of Vaisakhi itself which celebrates the hope and glory of the human potential to rise both spiritually and materially as a wonderful blend of a Saint (Sant) who feels and embraces the pain of his fellow beings and a soldier (Sipahi) who has the moral courage and wisdom to do something about it. Let's continue to pass on the legacy of Sarbat Da Bhala (welfare of all beings) so that one day the world actually wakes up to peace and love.



SUKHJEEVAN SINGH Executive Member, Sikh Council UK

Good evening, I am Sukhjeevan Singh, the former spokesperson of Sikh Council UK and a current member of the National Executive.

Vaisakhi coincides with the harvest season in many parts of the world and the growing season here in the UK. The cycle of growth relies on the dispersion of the sun's energy through its rays. For growing, it's essential that the weather is warm enough and for there to be enough sunlight. If there's a warm spring, the crop is plentiful, and we are prepared for the harshness of winter when there isn't much warmth or sunlight.

The pandemic was like a long winter, and it tested our resilience as a species. Ordinary Sikhs around the UK were able to answer the call of duty and serve local communities disproportionately. It was a pleasure to collaborate with the British Sikh Consultative forum on several initiatives to safeguard the interests of Sikhs during this time. Sikhs in the UK were able to amplify the voice of hundreds of thousands of Indian farmers democratically campaigning on the outskirts of India's capital.

It's springtime now, literally. It's a time for growth. Stage 1, for gardeners, is clearing out the weeds and preparing the ground. We need to better our institutions, including faith, those in the third and public sectors.

That's the story of Vaisakhi. Guru Gobind Singh had an established 'following' and a lineage dating over two centuries before his birth; he didn't need to change anything. Yet, he still chose to create the 'Khalsa', the order of 'pure' men and women. 'Purity' is based on character, discipline and virtue as opposed to birth, race, privilege and social status.

Like I said at the beginning the sun disperses its energy through its rays – this is the basis of our growth and survival. At Vaisakhi, the Guru, like the sun, dispersed his energy into the 'Panj Pyare' (the five beloved).

Like a hardy seedling, against many odds, this small community grew into what is today the world's 5th largest faith. There are great lessons for all, especially those in decision-making and representative capacities from the story of Vaisakhi.





Rt Hon Michael Gove MP

Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and Minister for Intergovernmental Relations

A great thank you to all of you for coming this evening. A huge thank-you to the Speaker for allowing us to meet in these magnificent rooms. Thank you to the British Sikh Consultative Forum for helping to organise this evening's celebrations and of course to the All-Party Parliamentary Group that does so much to make sure that the interests of the Sikh community are represented here in the House of Commons.

I think that the fact that there are so many different speakers, so many different members of Parliament from both Commons and the Lords, from different parties and from here are a reflection of three things.

The first thing is our job that we can celebrate Vaisakhi in person after two grim COVID years when all of us found that we couldn't be together with friends and family in the way that we wanted. And when this was the most significant, most holy, most warm celebration it could not be enjoyed, in the way that we would have wanted. When Gurdwaras were empty when homes were restricted to families. At last, we can all be together today and that is a fantastic cause for celebration.

The second thing is, if we look back on these two years, I think it's the case, I know from my own constituents that people were helped throughout that time. By the spirit of the community, the spirit of compassion and the desire to help all their constituents. That is the character of Britain's Sikh community. When it's been food for those who have been in need, or help and medicine for the vulnerable, your compassion has extended across all boundaries and I want to say a deep and heartfelt thank-you to all of you.

The third reason is as we live towards the future, as we think about what it is that makes our United Kingdom great, one of the things in which we can take pride is that across all our institutions, we have been a country that has welcomed and grown strong through diversity. We have respected tradition, and we know the importance of faith but we also know that together we achieve far more by celebrating where we have come from. Venerating what we have inherited but having that shared sense of purpose for the future.

I was reminded of that this morning when I visited my second favourite place in the whole of the United Kingdom. Now Alison and I know that our favourite place in the United Kingdom is Aberdeen. My second favourite place is, Pat, - Wolverhampton! The reason that I was in Wolverhampton earlier is that my department has established new headquarters there. It is wonderful to see that city which has such effective representation here in the House of Commons on the up is that it is a city that prides itself on its tradition - its industrial heritage. The fact that it's a place where the values of all of you are being celebrated this evening is exemplified.

Those values of community and compassion, and the way in which they vibrate virtues of Sikhism are exemplified in how that city is reviving. I want to see them all across the United Kingdom. So, this Vaisakhi is a chance for us to celebrate how far so many of you have come and also to celebrate a British future in which you play such an important part.

So I just wanted to say thank you all very much and I hope you all have a wonderful year ahead. Thank you.



TANMANJEET SINGH "TAN" DHESI MP MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT, Slough

Good evening, everybody, it's a pleasure to be here once again in the Speaker's State Rooms.

I know that because of the pandemic restrictions, many of us have not been able to enjoy this event or indeed the Nagar Kirtans that have now recommenced. First of all, I want to pay tribute to my very, very good friend the Rt Hon Pat McFadden MP because long before the likes of me were elected to this house, the likes of Pat have been there as a strong friend of the Sikh Community, raising Sikh issues on innumerable occasions.

Whether it was human rights issues, whether it was other issues affecting the Sikh community within the UK and beyond, it was Pat who was standing there being the standard-bearer. So thank you so much Pat for everything you have done. I also want to pay tribute to the British Sikh Consultative Forum - Dr Rai, Dr Sadhu Singh, Bhai Sahib Ji and all the organisers who have made today's event possible. And indeed we know why we are all here. We are here to mark the creation of the Khalsa order in 1699 by the tenth Sikh Guru.

As the Guru himself said "Khalsa Mera Roop Hai Khaas, Khalsa Mein Hua Karo Miraas" the Khalsa is my special form and I reside within the Khalsa. And that is why it was said "Waho Waho Guru Gobind Singh Aape Gur Chela" that the Guru not only did he create the Khalsa but as is beautifully depicted in the picture behind me, he actually became a member of the Khalsa himself by taking the Amrit, the ambrosial nectar from the five beloved ones.

So it's very, very important that we remember why we are celebrating Vaisakhi and also the central penance of faith. It is about love, compassion, and sharing with others. It has been incredible to see the Sikh organisations, there's a plethora of them and many of these are within the room today. And as was also described earlier, many of them have not only done selfless service (Seva) within the UK, which has made many of us extremely proud. They have also gone to war zones whether that was previously in Syria, whether that's been wherever disasters have struck in Haiti and elsewhere, but they also been recently in Ukraine as well.

I think this is emblematic of the Guru's vision that we are working for Sabat da Bhalla, for the betterment of all regardless of background, gender, colour or creed and long may we continue in that vein. I know there are a lot of speakers and you don't want to be bored to death with my long, long speeches. Thank you once again to Pat, to everybody that's here, especially the media partners. I know that this event will no doubt be broadcasted far and wide, especially within the Punjabi and Sikh media.

I am also grateful to many of our parliamentary friends on a cross-party basis. They are here, I won't list them as that's Pat's job. It is a poisoned chalice if you miss out on one individual and all hell breaks loose. Thank you all so much for attending here in Parliament. I hope that all of the organisations here will continue for the betterment of not just Sikhi but of wider humanity.

VaheGuru Ji ka Khalsa, VaheGuru Ji Ki Fateh.



Bhai Sahib Bhai Mohinder Singh Ahluwalia OBE KSG Chairperson, British Sikh Consultative Forum

Dear brothers and sisters, Vaheguru ji ka Khalsa, Vaheguru ji ki Fateh.

A very happy 323rd Vaisakhi to you all. May God, the All-embracing, Almighty Creator, bless us all.

Vaisakhi is universally celebrated by all Sikhs, particularly since the birth of the Khalsa on 30th March 1699. Vaisakhi also marks the start of Vaisakh, the second month of the traditional Punjabi calendar.

Guru Nanak Dev Ji's message for this month is in Raag Tukhari. It evokes the mindfulness of a believer, who contemplates the pangs of separation from God and the ecstasy of being reunited with one's Maker. It does so by drawing on the analogy of a bride awaiting her longed-for husband. By depicting how, in the month of Vaisakhi, nature reveals its many colours and elegant beauty, this verse reminds us of the golden opportunity before us to embrace and connect with God.

Guru Arjan Dev Ji's message for the month of Vaisakhi is in Raag Maajh. This composition takes the converse strategy of considering the adverse effects of separating ourselves from God, through distraction or delusion. Here, Guru Ji reminds us that the month of Vaisakhi becomes truly beautiful and joyful when we establish a spiritual connection with God and begin to blossom with spiritual virtues which emanate from our Creator. As we perceive the Divine Light dwelling in all creation, we more keenly recognise our interconnectedness and interdependence with others.

Traditionally, Vaisakhi marks the harvest and new agricultural year. It has long been a time for joyous celebrations, reflections and resolutions, for expressing gratitude for the fruits of our labour, with hopes and prayers for the future. Vaisakhi also represents a culmination of the vision of all ten Gurus to uplift and unite people through the Khalsa's creation. For many Sikhs, it provides an occasion to take Amrit as per the stipulated Sikh initiation ceremony of Amrit Sanchar.

Let us reflect this Vaisakhi on inclusivity as we remember the first initiates who took Amrit in 1699. Known as the Panj Pyare or Five Beloved Ones, they were ordinary men of diverse backgrounds, from different parts of India. The tenth Guru exercised revolutionary inclusivity to exalt them to the 'Beloved' status.

- Bhai Daya Singh, from Lahore, was a shopkeeper
- Bhai Dharam Singh, from Hastinapur, was a farmer
- Bhai Himmat Singh from Jagannath Puri was a water carrier
- Bhai Mohkam Singh, from Dwarka, was a tailor and fabric printer
- Bhai Sahib Singh, from Bidar, was a Barber.

Overcoming social divisions was long reflected in the Sikh tradition of serving the Guru's Langar to all without exception. Wherever they have settled in the world, Sikhs have vibrantly continued this practice that keeps alive the values of humility, hospitality, selfless service and seeing God in all. It reflects the dynamic principle of 'Sarbat da Bhalla', the resolve to serve the common good.

A deep respect for religious and cultural diversity is combined with a recognition of the oneness of the human family.

Beyond this, 'inclusivity', as taught by the Sikh Gurus, includes a deep respect for 'Kudrat' or nature and a recognition that we are connected to earth itself, with its air, water, soil and intricate web of life.

Vaisakhi is then a time to renew our sense of kinship with others, to exercise an abundance of compassion, forgiveness and love for all.

The Sikh story of Vaisakhi also challenges us to rise to the best in ourselves and to live with a greater sense of personal and shared responsibility. All this demands inclusivity, where nobody is left behind. This conviction is reflected in the preamble of the United Nations Charter, which '...reaffirms faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of each human person and in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small.'

More than ever, Vaisakhi reminds us that both religious and political leaders must engage in profound self-reflection and exercise responsible leadership - in a genuine spirit of inclusivity - to resolve many complex and interrelated problems in our contemporary world.



Closing Speech by Pat McFadden MP Member of Parliament, Wolverhampton South East

People have come from all over the United Kingdom to be here tonight to be a part of this celebration.

And I want to wish you all a very Happy Vaisakhi and a very safe journey home.

VaheGuru Ji ka Khalsa, VaheGuru Ji Ki Fateh.

Thank you.



Dr Jeevan Singh Lall

Inter-Faith team, British Sikh Consultative Forum

VaheGuru Ji Ka Khalsa VaheGuru Ji Ki Fateh

Ladies and Gentlemen, Mr Speaker, MPs and Lords, this has been a wonderful day, to celebrate the 15th Vaisakhi at Parliament. We are grateful to Mr Speaker, Sir Lyndsay Hoyle for inviting us to celebrate Vaisakhi at these splendid State Rooms. We thank the staff of the State Room for all the help.

I very much enjoyed the Kirtan by the children. They came all the way from Wolverhampton. We from The British Sikh Consultative Forum thanks Pat McFadden MP who has been sponsoring this event for a number of years now and has raised its profile in Parliament.

Working day and night, weekends and evenings as a team have been; Mr McFadden's assistant, Eve and Gurinder Kaur, our administrative executive of BSCF.

We also appreciate the efforts of Dhanwant Kaur behind the scenes, making everything work seamlessly.

It is also encouraging to see so many MPs attend this Vaisakhi event. It's nice to see the level of respect shown to the Sikh community. We were also graced by senior ministers, leaders of Labour and the SNP.

I am part of the BSCF interfaith team interacting with many faith organisations. We have members of the Interfaith group here that BSCF has helped to set up.

We have Lakshmi Vyas from the Hindu Forum of Europe, Raafat Kamal from the Seventh Day Adventist Church, Nicky B from the Jewish Community Security Trust, Mariano Marcigaglia from the Buddhist Spiritual Trust and Behram Kapadia From The Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe.

The wonderful food has been provided again by Punjab Restaurant. I would also like to congratulate Amrit Maan, who has been awarded an OBE. Congratulations!

The Mithai is donated by Sri Guru Singh Sabha, Southall and the refreshments were provided by Mr Kohli and Mr Saguu, thank - you.

But this event will not be an event without all the guests. There are over 70 organisations represented here today from various parts of the country from as far as Manchester, Bradford and Cardiff. I am humbled to see so many important people representing so many organisations. We have a list of the organisations in the brochure that I request you to please take at the end.

Let me again thank you all for attending.

Please take the rest of the evening to meet with MPs, our interfaith Guests and with each other.

We hope to see you again next year.





LINKS

Watch the whole Vaisakhi at Westminster 2022 programme:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nEFpLJlmLg>

Watch the informal Vaisakhi at Westminster 2022 interviews:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B3k_w0bSsFE&t=7s

Watch the Kirtan performed by The Khalsa Academy, Wolverhampton:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mgu_YZ_vWr0

Watch the rest of the speeches:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCCuvZP1NaJ6qy-V0wh4VeJg/videos>

View the picture album:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/195593950@N05/albums/72177720298936017>