

Speech delivered by Dr. Rami Ranger CBE on 23 March 2017
at the British Sikh Association Annual Dinner.

Defence Secretary, the Rt. Hon. Sir Michael Fallon MP, His Excellency Sri Y K Sinha, High Commissioner of India, Deputy High Commissioner of India, Ambassador Dinesh Patnaik, Lord & Lady Sheikh, Hon'ble. Virendra Sharma MP, Hon'ble Richard Harrington MP, Minister at the Dept. of Work & Pensions, Cllr Julien Bell
Mr GP Hinduja, Mr Joginder Sangar, Mr Ranjit Singh OBE, Chairman Sikh Forum Int, Lt. Gen. Andrew Graham CB, CBE, Chairman of Trustees Combat Stress, Lt. Gen. James Bashall CBE, Maj. Gen. Richard Stanford MBE, Maj. Gen. Tyrone Urch CBE, Maj. Gen. Paul Nanson CBE, Members of our illustrious Armed Forces, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

It is my privilege to welcome you to the British Sikh Association's Vaisakhi dinner 2017.

We are most grateful to the Defence Secretary and the High Commissioner of India for their presence tonight.

It is with the help and support of leaders like them that organisations like ours can contribute in building a better Britain for everyone.

Before I continue, I would like to acknowledge the contribution of the Executive Committee Members as without their support, it would not be possible to organise dinners like tonight.

May I ask the committee members to be upstanding to receive a round of applause.

Tonight we will also be honouring 4 individuals who have gone the extra mile and brought honour to our community and country.

Lt Gen. Andrew Graham CBE will make an appeal on behalf of the armed forces charity, Combat Stress, which looks after traumatised soldiers.

It is worth remembering that when we send our brave men and women to the battlefields, they are physically and mentally fit.

Sadly, some do not return alive and some return mentally and physically scarred.

We must look after them in their time of need, as they did in ours.

Please donate generously and repay some of the debt we owe to them.

Ladies and gentlemen, tonight I would like to remind you of the great event of Vaisakhi in April 1699 which changed the course of our destiny along with that of India and made us an economic, military and social force in the world.

Vaisakhi marks the Birth of Khalsa which was established to uphold human freedom and above all freedom to worship freely in India.

Vaisakhi also gives us the opportunity to remind our younger generations of the supreme sacrifices paid by the Sikh Gurus and their followers to further the cause of human freedom.

It is worth remembering that it was the Sikhs who stopped the invasions into India via the Khyber Pass which went on for centuries and resulted in looting, raping and the massacre of millions of innocent Indians each year.

I shudder to think how history would have turned out for mankind, without the vision and supreme sacrifices made by the 9th and 10th Sikh Gurus along with their followers.

This year the Vaisakhi day falls on 14th April and it will be celebrated in Gurdwaras as well as street processions in many parts of the world.

Our Gurus realised that if people are suppressed or oppressed either by state or religion, then they cannot develop wholesomely and as a result, cannot contribute much to society and thus become low achievers.

Gurus opposed the then Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb who wanted to control people in the name of religion and to do this he attempted to convert people against their will to his blend of religion on pain of death.

The Sikhs did not rest until they brought an end to the tyrannical rule and established a secular Sikh Kingdom under Maharaja Ranjit Singh where everyone was equal and free to follow religions of their choice.

The Sikh Kingdom was the last in India to accede to the British Empire and the British, having been impressed by the bravery and loyalty of the Sikhs, started to recruit them into the British army in greater numbers.

History bears testament to the fact that Sikhs played a crucial role alongside other Indian soldiers in both the great wars and changed the course of many battles.

Sadly, the contribution of over a million Indian soldiers in each great war is not taught in British schools and if it were, there would be a better understanding about our shared history.

I urge the Defence Secretary to convey our request to the Education Secretary that the contribution of Commonwealth countries in preserving our freedom is taught in schools, especially in the wake of Brexit when we will need to revisit and renew our tried and tested bond of friendship with these allies.

We at the British Sikh Association have been advocating for years to resurrect a Sikh regiment within the British army to keep alive the bravery of those who defended the Empire with their lives.

Sadly, 84,000 Sikh soldiers sacrificed their lives and 109,000 were injured during the great wars defending King and Country which is more than any other community in comparison to its numbers.

The Sikhs made just 1% of the Indian population but made up over 20% to the British Armed Forces in united India.

The Sikh Regiment was the most decorated regiment in the British Empire and per capita won more Victoria Crosses for bravery.

We, the British Sikh Association are passionate about helping the Armed Forces recruit more Sikhs, and the formation of the Sikh Regiment will help us in this endeavour.

On our part, we pledge one million pounds for the recruitment campaign.

The Sikh regiment will not only pay tribute to those brave Sikhs who fought shoulder to shoulder with the Brits and defended the Empire with their lives but will also help British Sikhs to follow in their footsteps.

The Sikh regiment will be in name only and will be open to people from other faiths to join.

Sikhs by their very nature believe in being inclusive and never insular.

Their principles of upholding justice, protecting the weak and liberating the oppressed are in themselves inspirational reasons for anyone to join the Sikh Regiment.

The Regiment will not only help raise the profile of Sikhs in Britain where they are contributing a great deal but will also stop racially motivated attacks on them due to mistaken identity.

Regrettably, those who are perpetrating terror in the world also wear beards and turbans like the Sikhs.

Sadly, due to the fact our schools do not teach about the Sikh contribution in the two great wars, many in Britain have no idea who the Sikhs are and why their turban is a symbol of courage, honour and integrity.

I will urge Hon'ble Varinder Sharma MP and Cllr Julien Bell, Leader of the Ealing Council to grant us the opportunity to erect a befitting memorial in Southall to pay tribute to a community for its supreme sacrifices for our freedom.

Finally, I will urge my fellow Sikhs to only follow the teachings of our Gurus who believed in the universal brotherhood and not that of the self-proclaimed leaders who wish to separate us from our motherland, India.

When the Sikh Gurus never proclaimed a country for themselves, why then, some of their followers feel the need for one.

Surely, they cannot be greater visionaries than our Gurus.

The same goes for Britain where we live and where our next generation will live.

We must take part in the British public and political life and encourage our children to join the British Armed forces to defend our way of life.

I thank you for being here tonight enabling us to celebrate and remember our shared history and we look forward to our future together.

Thank you.