

**Ambassador's remarks at the event on 12<sup>th</sup> January 2019  
to celebrate the  
550<sup>th</sup> Birth Anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev ji**

Friends of India,

Esteemed members of the Sikh-American community,

All our partnering Gurudwaras and organizations of the greater Washington DC region:

The Sikh Foundation of Virginia,

Sikhs of America,

Sikh Gurudwara of Washington DC,

Guru Nanak Foundation of America,

Guru Gobind Singh Federation,

Baltimore Gurudwara,

World United Guru Nanak Foundation,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Good evening, Sat Sri Akal!

- I am delighted to join you all today as we gather to celebrate the 550<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev ji. I take this as an auspicious beginning to my term as Ambassador of India to the United States – just yesterday I presented my credentials to the US President and I am confident that with your full support and best wishes, we will take the India-US relationship to new heights.

- As we begin these celebrations, let me brief you on the various key decisions taken by Government of India to honour Guruji's 550<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary:
  - We are developing the Kartarpur corridor from Gurudwara Dera Baba Nanak in Gurdaspur District in Punjab to the international border to facilitate pilgrims to visit the Holy Kartarpur Sahib Gurudwara in Pakistan. This had been a long-pending wish of the Sikh community and we are happy that it has come to fruition in this landmark year.
  - It has also been decided that the historic town of Sultanpur Lodhi shall be developed as a 'Heritage Town'.
  - Further, we also plan to establish a centre for interfaith studies at Guru Nanak Dev University and Chairs on Guru Nanak Dev ji in one University in Canada and the UK each.
  - India will also organize an international seminar on life and teachings of Shri Guru Nanak Dev ji.
  - Government will issue commemorative coin and postage stamps
  - Ministry of Railways will run a train passing through various Sikh holy places of pilgrimage.
  - Furthermore, Doordarshan will arrange live telecast of programmes on Shri Guru Nanak Dev ji and Gurbani and the National Book Trust will publish Gurbani in different languages.
- We are also planning similar celebrations in various countries around the world. In the US, the Embassy has reached out to

various Gurudwaras and Sikh community leaders to discuss various ideas with them. Their enthusiasm and support has been indeed heartening. With their cooperation, we have set up a task force to coordinate planning of different events. Among the events that are planned include:

- Seminars on the philosophy and teachings of Guru Nanak Dev ji in prestigious venues;
  - Musical concerts like the one today during the year at different venues; and
  - interfaith events to get the message of Guru Nanak Dev ji to the wider American society
- In these efforts, we are joined by our five Consulates in Houston, New York, San Francisco, Chicago and Atlanta who will similarly partner with the Gurudwaras and Sikh community organizations in their regions to chalk out a calendar of activities through the year.
  - Guru Nanak Dev ji was one of India's greatest philosophers, teachers and social reformers. Born in an epoch when Indian society was caste-riddled, Guru Nanak's voice was an empowering call to unshackle the human mind of centuries of religious and political tyranny and for the creation of a new egalitarian order (rana rank barabari).
  - Guru Nanak's enlightenment led him to a lifetime of tireless travels and work. His travels, known as the 'Udasis' took him as far north as Tibet, to Assam in the east and Baghdad and Mecca

in the west. He travelled for almost thirty years at a time when travel was largely by foot, bullock carts or by sea. During his travels, he met with people of all religions and stations in life and he changed the people whose lives he touched, not through pontification or sermons but by interacting with them in informal, ordinary settings through logic, sincerity and love that caused them to question their beliefs and dogma. This was the genius of Guru Nanak, the teacher.

- But Guru Nanak Dev ji was also a great organizer – setting up a network of congregations wherever he travelled. Planning ahead, he purchased land to establish Kartarpur, and it was to Kartarpur that he returned after the travels – here he set up the daily routine of the Sikh congregation – kirtan (daily prayers), katha (exposition of ideas) and langar (community meal).
- Through his life, travels and teachings Guru Nanak Dev called for an egalitarian social order, equality for all human beings, compassion, questioning of rituals and dogma through reasoning and sincerity towards an eventual realization of the eternal universal truth. It is truly a philosophy and legacy that we must celebrate and recount to our younger and future generations.
- The ethos of Sikhism – of hard work, simple honest life, compassion for fellow human beings has informed the success of the Sikh community spread across the globe. In the US, the Sikh migration dates back to more than 130 years when they

first arrived in California and on the eastern coast in New York. We are proud to see five Indian-Americans in Congress today but it is important to remember that they are following in the footsteps of pioneers like Judge Dalip Singh Saund who was the first person of Indian origin and first Asian-American to be elected to the US Congress from California in 1957. The Sikh community in the US has prospered through their hard work and ethics and today numbers about 5 lakhs, wielding influence in all walks of American life.

- We pray and hope that this 550<sup>th</sup> year of celebration of the descending of divine light on earth and emergence of a new dawn with the advent of Guru Nanak will be a year of peace and prosperity for humanity.
- To celebrate this beautiful occasion, we are honored to have with us Bhai Baldeep Singh ji, one of the foremost exponents of the Gurbani Kirtan Parampara credited with bringing string instruments back into living tradition. We are honored to have him for this inaugural event of the year-long celebrations across the length and breadth of the United States through the Embassy and Consulates. All of your support will define the success of these endeavours – please do stay connected and stay blessed!

Waheguru jikaKhalsa, Waheguru jikiFateh.

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