

## COMMENT

# Religion or speech, no freedom absolute

KULJIT BAINS

ANY follower of any religion has the right to practise his faith the way he pleases. Also, it is reasonable to expect that others respect his right and not cause offence to his faith. And for any such offence, the individual, or even an entire community, has the right to protest, oppose, or demand correction as he deems fit. There, however, have to be limits on how far the opposition can go. That line may have just been crossed in the resistance to the film "Nanak Shah Fakir" produced by Harinder Singh Sikka.

Excommunication, as practised in the Sikh faith, is a right of the practitioners of the religion. In Sikka's case, however, it has triggered threats of harm being issued to him.

That is where one person's faith is beginning to harm another. Arbitration in such a circumstance cannot be easy. Most would agree democracy with all its flaws is still the most acceptable form of civilised living, and one of its fundamental tenets is that 'one person's freedom ends where another's begins'.

Just as with any suspected crime, Sikka's intention should also be a point of reference. He followed the "procedure", as was available to him at the time, to seek approval for releasing the film. The film has also used technology to the extent possible to avoid the violations as demanded.

Thereafter, he has agreed to not release the movie in Punjab. While none of this may satisfy someone, the charge of any intention to "hurt religious sentiments" can surely not apply.

The film was at least at one point approved by a set of Sikh religious appointees, who decided it was okay to release. Their credentials may be questioned, but they were Sikhs nonetheless. Also, on hearing the alleged violations, there was no spontaneous mass uprising. There are also a few among the common people who have spoken for allowing the release of the film. All of this goes to show that it is at least not an

open-and-shut case.

At this point, an appeal has to be made for allowing space for reasonable debate, which means also allowing some difference of opinion. It is also what Guru Nanak Dev worked hard for, debating with various shades of thought during his travels far and wide. Rationality was his other hallmark. A person voicing a contrarian view should not be made to feel intimidated.

There are two basic objections to the film. One, that no one should play the role of Gurus. Two, Guru Nanak Dev has been 'given' a voice by a human. On the first objection, it may be pointed out that Sikka arranged for computer graphics to depict the image. Also, everyone is aware of various paintings of all Gurus, the most recognisable ones being by artist Sobha Singh, who used human models to paint those.

The only difference between paintings and the film is that of still and animated art. On the second objection, the sole purpose of the voice is to convey certain thoughts of the Guru, without any connection to the man whose throat may have produced that voice. It would be a rather big leap of imagination to assume that someone here is trying to play the Guru, unlike the Sirsa dera head.

It also needs to be seen if it is a case of various Sikh bodies and leaders being competitive in being seen as more correct. The protest started with the parallel Akal Takht jathedars, and was then picked up by others. Religion belongs as much to the common follower as to the priests. But there is no mechanism to confirm what the common Sikh in the street feels. Could it be a case of a few speaking for all?

Amidst all this debate, many have also questioned the government bans on several movies related to Sikhs in the past. That is a very valid point, and by the logic of freedom of speech, those equally deserve to be released.

But for all such matters that come to a head, the country has a process of the judiciary. It may not be perfect, but choosing not to respect it will mean destroying a lot else.

## Under debt, farm labourer ends life

TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

BATHINDA, APRIL 15

A debt-ridden farm labourer ended his life by hanging himself from a tree at Jhanduke village on Saturday night.

The deceased has been identified as Jagjeet Singh (45), a resident of Jhanduke village. His body was found on the village's outskirts on Sunday morning.

The Balianwali police have initiated proceedings under Section 174 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) on a family member's statement.

Fellow villagers Jaswinder Singh and Bittu Singh told the police that Jagjeet had taken a loan of Rs 3 lakh from a bank and a financier. Jagjeet is survived by his wife, two sons and a daughter. According to the family members, he left his house on Saturday night without informing anyone and didn't return. Some villagers — out for morning walk — noticed Jagjeet's body on the Bhuchoo road and informed the police.

Local residents and Bhartiya Kisan Union (Ugraha) district president Mothu Singh Kotra and block president Sukhdev Javanda have demanded Rs 10 lakh compensation and government job for a family member.

This is the third such case in the past four days in the Rampura area as two debt-ridden farmers had ended their life by consuming poison.

The victims have been identified as 52-year-old Jagjeet Singh, who ended his life on Thursday, and 37-year-old Jagtar Singh, who consumed pesticide on Friday. Jagtar was under a debt of Rs 10 lakh.

## Punjab Diary



Nihangs ride horses on the concluding day of the Baisakhi Mela at Talwandi Sabo in Bathinda. A Nihang, Shinder Singh (60) of Kauni village in Muktsar district, died after falling from a horse on Sunday. TRIBUNE PHOTO: PAWAN SHARMA

### Keeping tabs on subordinates

**Bathinda:** A senior police officer here recently made a WhatsApp group to keep tabs on cops deployed for security at the annual Baisakhi Mela in Talwandi Sabo. He directed all SHO's to send him their photographs from the spot as "proof of their presence". One of the SHO's rushed to the place of his deployment late at night so that he could send his photo to his senior before it was too late.

### Thousands fed within hours

**Sangrur:** Chief Minister Capt Amarinder Singh failed to turn up for the state-level debt waiver function at Rampura village in the district on April 12, but the arrangements for food and water did not disappoint the large gathering. Congress MLA Vijay Inder Singla, who took care of the supplies, has decided to honour the people who arranged chapatis, besides cooked vegetables, tea and drinking water. "Providing 2 lakh chapatis was a Herculean task. I have asked my team to identify all those who fed thousands within hours," Singla said.

### Viral videos keep officials on toes

**Ferozepur:** A series of videos kept the district administration and the police on their toes recently. A clip of a clash during Bharat Bandh went viral, followed by a video showing an ex-minister slapping an inspector of the Food and Supplies Department for allegedly hoarding and selling foodgrains meant to be distributed under the Atta-Dal scheme. Later, a clip purportedly showed some people, including NFL officials from Bathinda, having drinks on the premises of the National Martyrs

Memorial, Hussainiwalla. In the latest one, a doctor was seen thrashing a woman in the Civil Hospital. No wonder most of the government officials are now wary of people carrying smartphones. An official quipped, "Ab transfer se darr nahi lagta, video se darr lagta hai (I fear being caught on camera)."

### 'Surplus' meals for slum residents

**Abohar:** The Robin Hood Army, an NGO, has launched a campaign to serve slum dwellers the meals left unconsumed at social functions. "We received calls from banquet halls to collect the surplus food as fewer than the expected number of guests turned up," says Megha Charaya, convener of the NGO. Three teams distributed the meals in three colonies.

### Centurions steal the show

**Anandpur Sahib:** Fauja Singh (107) and Bibi Man Kaur (102) were the star attractions at the half marathon here on Sunday. The event was organised by Sri Anandpur Sahib Heritage Foundation in association with Super Sikh Run Foundation as part of the Baisakhi celebrations. Over 900 runners from across the country took part. Before the run began at 5 am, Fauja Singh led the warm-up exercise at a park.



Fauja Singh at the half marathon in Anandpur Sahib. TRIBUNE PHOTO

CONTRIBUTED BY GAGANDEEP SHARMA, PARVESH SHARMA, ANIRUDH GUPTA, RAJ SADOSH AND ARUN SHARMA

## Truckers oppose 'illegal' lifting of wheat

PARVESH SHARMA  
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

**SANGRUR, APRIL 15** Alleging attempts to start "illegal" lifting of wheat by officers from the Ubhiya purchase centre as the contractor who sent the trucks did not have the allotment letter of tender for wheat lifting, truckers from Dirba Truckers Association (DTA) prevented the same on Sunday.

Sangrur District Food and Civil Supply Controller (DFSC) Jaspreet Kahlon did not give any satisfactory

reply when asked whether the contractor, who tried to start lifting from Ubhiya, had the tender letter.

When some trucks reached Ubhiya from Sunam and Longawal areas, truckers from the DTA also reached there and asked the employees who accompanied the trucks of the contractor to show the tender allotment letter. However, they failed to do so and went back with their trucks after having arguments with DTA members. "All trucks sent by the con-

tractor had the permit of private carrier, which allows their use only for rice mills and not a single truck had public carrier permit to lift wheat from grain markets. The administration has not issued the letter as yet and officers want to start illegal wheat lifting," said Ajay Singla, member, DTA management committee.

Singla, after a meeting with truckers, alleged that officers concerned had formed a nexus with some area rice millers and wanted to pocket

"commission" by starting illegal lifting through private carrier trucks. Truckers requested the Chief Minister to look into the matter and demanded action against erring officers.

Though the Sangrur DFSC is responsible for making all lifting arrangements, he was "unaware" about the letter. He said, "I am not aware if the tender allotment letter for wheat lifting in Dirba has been issued. Let me check," said DFSC Kahlon. However later, he did not take any calls on his mobile.

## 4 held for Phagwara clash

Arms licences of accused cancelled | Police continue vigil in town

OUR CORRESPONDENT

PHAGWARA, APRIL 15

In the wake of clashes between two communities in the town, the police on Sunday arrested four Hindu leaders — Shiv Sena (Bal Thakrey) state vice-president Inderjit Karwal, Shiv Sena national president Shivi Batta, Bhartiya Janta Yuva Morcha leader Rajiv Chahal and Akhil Bhartiya Hindu Suraksha Samiti state president Deepak Bhardwaj.

Phagwara city SHO Gurmeet Singh Sidhu said the arrested leaders were produced in a local court, which sent them to judicial custody for 14 days. He said arms licences issued to the four leaders had been cancelled.

The police had registered cases against more than 300 persons of both communities, including 33 by name on Saturday. Meanwhile, Deputy Commissioner Mohammad Tayab and SSP Sandeep Sharma are camping at Phagwara



Police personnel take out a flag march in Phagwara on Sunday. TRIBUNE PHOTO

to monitor the situation.

They said the administration would pay the medical bill to the DMC, Ludhiana, for the treatment of Yaswant Kumar, who was injured in the clash. Tayab said the District Kapurthala Red Cross Committee had handed over a cheque for Rs 1.25 lakh to Johal Hospital, Rama Mandi, for the treatment of another injured person, Kulwinder.

### No mobile internet till evening today

**Chandigarh:** The state government has extended the suspension of mobile internet services in four districts till Monday evening. The services have been suspended in the wake of a clash between two communities in Phagwara. A spokesperson said all SMS services as well as dogle services, except voice calls, in the territorial jurisdiction of four districts — Kapurthala, Jalandhar, Hoshiarpur and SBS Nagar — had been suspended as a precautionary measure. He said all telecom services providers had been directed to ensure compliance of this order. TNS

## 55-yr-old murdered in Moga village

TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

MOGA, APRIL 15

A 55-year-old man identified as Jagroop Singh was allegedly murdered by some unidentified persons with sharp-edged weapons at Chuhar Chak Purana village in the district on the intervening night of Saturday and Sunday.

Neighbours found his body lying in a pool of blood in the courtyard of his house on Sunday and informed the sarpanch.

Jagroop was not married and his parents had died a few years ago. He belonged to a very poor family and owned just two acres as his share from the ancestral property. He gave this land on lease to his cousins who gave him a fixed annual amount for his livelihood.

SP (investigation) Vazir Singh and other senior police officers reached the spot and took the body into custody. The body was taken to the district hospital for a postmortem examination.

## Cong factions lock horns in Gidderbaha

TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

MUKTSAR, APRIL 15

Two factions of the Congress had a clash on Saturday when one of them reportedly made an announcement about some Akalis during the ongoing Baisakhi fair at Gurusar village in Gidderbaha subdivision.

The other faction raised an objection over it, which led to a clash between the two groups. Police personnel present there controlled the situation.

Bhupinder Singh Gill, former member, Block Samiti, alleged, "Parampal Aulakh and some others chased my nephew on Sunday and damaged his vehicle with some sharp-edged weapons. Though we had some dispute on Saturday, it was sorted out. The other faction aggravated the situation on Sunday."

Meanwhile, Parampal Aulakh, a youth leader of the Congress, of the other faction said, "Some people made up a story today (Sunday) just to register a false case against us."

### BSF, STF seize 900-gm heroin along border

**Ferozepur:** In a joint operation, personnel of the BSF and Special Task Force, Ferozepur, seized three packets of heroin weighing 900 gm near Jagdish Border Outpost along the India-Pakistan border on Saturday night. BSF officials said based on a tip-off, a special joint search operation was launched during which the said consignment was found buried in the soil. TNS

### 2 swindlers arrested, 21 ATM cards seized

**Sangrur:** With the arrest of two members, the police claimed to have busted a gang of swindlers and seized 21 ATM cards from their possession. The gang was allegedly active in Punjab, Haryana and New Delhi. Moonak SHO Ramandeep Singh said on Saturday they arrested Vinod Singh and Parkash Singh from near an ATM of Moonak city. The police detected frauds of Rs 70,000 by the duo. TNS

**PUBLIC NOTICE**

This is to inform public at large that the State Environment Impact Assessment Authority (SEIAA), Haryana, vide its Letter Ref. No. SEIAA/HR/2018/215 dated 4<sup>th</sup> April 2018 has accorded environmental clearance for expansion of commercial complex project at Village Badshahpur, Sector 66, Gurugram (Haryana) under the EIA Notification, 2006. Copies of the Clearance Letter are available with the Haryana State Pollution Control Board (HSPCB) and SEIAA, Haryana.

**Emaar MGF Land Limited**  
306-308, 3rd Floor, Square One, C-2  
District Centre, Saket, New Delhi 110017

Transfer of ownership in respect of constructed property No. 230, Sector 71A, Faridabad, Haryana in respect of 100% share upon the intestate death of Shri Y.K. Goswami, S/o D.K. Goswami who was the owner of the subject cited property to the extent of 100% as per record has died on 12th October 2006 and has no registered or un-registered will leaving behind following legal heirs: (1) Danish Goswami, (2) Surbhi Gugliani and (3) Veena Goswami. Smt. Veena Goswami W/o Late Shri Y.K. Goswami, R/o A-602, Kenwood Tower, Charm wood Village, Surajkund, Faridabad-121009 intends to apply for the transfer of the said property in her favour being the legal heir. If any person is having any objection against the transfer of ibid plot/house, he/she can submit objections in writing to the Estate Officer, HUDA, Faridabad, along with supporting documents within 30 days from the date of publication of this notice, otherwise the Estate Officer may sanction mutation of the property as per HUDA policy and may not entertain subsequent claim, if any.

**Danish Goswami**  
**Surbhi Gugliani**  
**and Veena Goswami**  
(LEGAL HEIRS)

*Remembering*  
**UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador**  
**Madanjeet Singh**  
(April 16, 1924 - January 6, 2013)  
*On his 94<sup>th</sup> Birth Anniversary*  
*A visionary, philanthropist, diplomat, artist, writer, and founder of the South Asia Foundation who, all through his life, championed the cause of unity and goodwill amongst the peoples and countries of South Asia. A UNESCO Prize for the Promotion of Tolerance and Non-Violence has been established in his name.*  
*His commitment to Regional Cooperation in South Asia resulted in setting up of ten Institutions of Excellence in the Eight SAARC countries.*  
*The South Asia Foundation pays tribute to the memory of its Founder and dedicates itself to achieving his vision for the Region.*

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Website: www.southasiafoundation.org

*"I do believe that history is not merely a series of accidents. It is a never-ending struggle between the reactionary, divisive warmongers and the people striving to realize their dream to live peacefully in cooperation with each other in a society where men and women love reason, despise hatred and violence."*  
- Ambassador Madanjeet Singh