

PRESS RELEASE

10,000 parade through Coventry's streets in Vaisakhi celebrations

- Up to 10,000 local Sikhs are to parade through Coventry's streets on Sunday 24th April 2011 to celebrate their New Year and the founding of the Khalsa or Sikh brotherhood.
- In line with the Sikh philosophy of charitable giving, the parade or "Nagar Kirtan" will commence with a donation ceremony where British charities including the Coventry Snowball appeal, The Police Benevolent Fund, and Age Concern will each receive £501 - money that has been raised by Coventry's Sikh community for this purpose.
- The Nagar Kirtan will be led by 5 Sikhs called the Panj Pyare or beloved ones, dressed in traditional attire with others playing drums to announce the parade as it moves through the City's streets.
- There will also be a number of colourful floats, with one modelled on The Golden Temple in Amritsar and a parade of Jaguar cars including one painted in Union Jack colours.
- Free refreshments will be made available along the route for both participants and onlookers, some provided by non-Sikh organisations, highlighting the community orientated aspect of the parade.
- The parade will finish with a Gatka display (Sikh martial arts) including live sword-fighting displays.

Timings: The parade will start at 10.30am on Sunday 24th April 2011 at the Gurdwara Guru Nanak Parkash, Coventry and return to the same location by around 2.30pm.

Route: The parade will take an anti-clockwise direction, commencing from the car park of the Gurdwara Guru Nanak Parkash ("GGNP") moving to Howard Street, left onto Stoney Stanton Road, then left onto Cross Road and again left onto Foleshill Road and finally turning left onto Harnall Lane West where it will finish. GGNP is located at 71-81 Harnall Lane, Coventry, CV1 4FB. Participants are strongly requested to use the free secure signposted parking at the City College's multi-story car park in Bath Street (near to the junction of Stoney Stanton Road and Harnall Lane East).

Background: Sikhism, the youngest of the major religions, was founded in the fifteenth century by Guru Nanak Dev Ji. He emphasised the need to live a simple life and that the best way to spirituality was by living an honest and hardworking life ("Kirt Karni") within the general community, whilst reciting God's name ("Waheguru").

He was succeeded by nine other Gurus, the last of whom Guru Gobind Singh Ji, declared at a Vaisakhi meeting (annual harvest celebration) in 1699 A.D. in front of thousands of Sikhs, that all people were created equal. He baptised five Sikhs from different castes and declared that all Sikhs should either take the surname Singh or Kaur ("Lion" or "Princess") to dismantle any caste/class differences.

Baptised Sikhs are required to maintain the 5 K's including a turban to protect their Kesh (uncut hair) and so they are easily recognisable – he introduced the concept of Saint-Soldier ("Sant-Sipahi"), which means that Sikhs are required to maintain inner calm and spirituality through prayers ("Simran") whilst helping the vulnerable and countering injustice.

Hardeep Singh, Event Manager states "Vaisakhi celebrates the formation of Sikhism as a nation and the time when its' disciples were given clear instructions on how they should live – the Sikh community has specifically chosen charities such the Coventry Snowball Appeal, the Police Benevolent Fund and Age Concern as they typify Sikh values such as contributing positively to society, selfless service and caring for elders."

Bali Kaur is the Nagar Kirtan's Chief Press Officer and she comments; "In these difficult times we hope that this colourful event will help bring some joy to Coventrians as it passes along the City's streets. Our Sikh youngsters particularly enjoy the event as it allows them to connect with their faith in a different way. We are also extremely pleased that in spite of the harsh economic environment, the Sikh community of Coventry has managed to collect over £2,000 for these deserving local charities. This is a great example of how our faith helps us contribute positively to the society in which we live"