

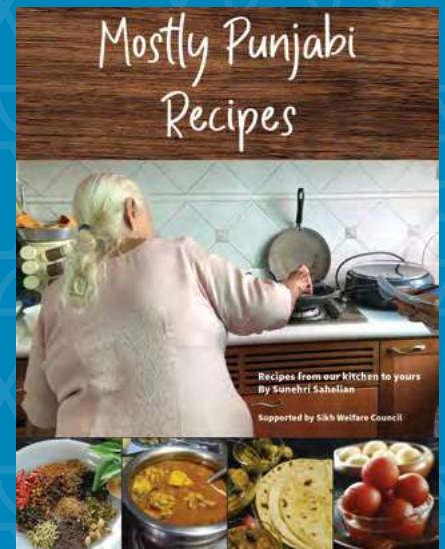


# SIWEC INSIGHT

MAY 2022

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# A Year of Transformational Change



This issue of Insight is a bumper special which chronicles the proceedings at SIWEC's 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Appreciation Day held on 4 December 2021.

It was a historic moment indeed as President Halimah Yacob launched the Sarbat da Bhalla 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary commemorative book and presented copies to our trustees, volunteers, well-wishers, and partners.

I am grateful to our Advisor and immediate past Chairman Gurdip Singh Usma for leading the planning for the event and hosting our guests at Singapore Khalsa Association while I hosted participants assembled at Sikh Centre. By having two venues, we sought to honour as many of our well-wishers and volunteers as were permitted within prevailing safe management guidelines. My special thanks also to all who attended the event in-person and online, as well as to Team SIWEC volunteers and staff, who worked behind the scenes to ensure the success of the event.

The second initiative profiled in this edition is SIWEC's Theek Thak mental health campaign launched in the latter half of 2021. In recent years, concerns were raised about the mental health of certain members of our community, especially live-alone seniors and vulnerable youth. When SIWEC initiated the campaign, the pandemic experience injected greater urgency to raise awareness of mental health support services, to nudge those struggling to cope to avenues where they could seek help.

I am grateful to volunteers from SIWEC and Anglo-American Group of Ambassadors who collaborated on the production of the Theek Thak mental health resource kit. The Theek Thak team also organised an online expert speaker panel whilst developing relevant content on Instagram and hosting a series of monthly live chats on seeking help and coping with mental health challenges.

My appreciation to Sarabjeet Singh, our former management committee member, for his unstinting commitment in working with the Theek Thak team to ensure that campaign deliverables were achieved.

Beyond raising awareness of community resources and hotlines to encourage those seeking help, the whole community must become the eyes and ears to respond proactively. Anybody who needs help will not necessarily pick up a phone and call a hotline. They are more likely to say something to their

peers, colleagues, friends, family, or behave in ways that deviate from the norm. We must all be sensitive and alert to pick up on such subtle cues.

As we embark on the 2022 Theek Thak campaign, we will prioritise on developing SIWEC's internal capacity to provide psychological first aid and counselling support, to continue to develop collaborative partnerships with established agencies and emerging ones in the mental health movement, even as we continue to sustain engagement online.

The third and equally significant feature in this issue of Insight is the recently concluded cycling fund-raising drive in the first quarter of 2022. We profile the achievement of the intrepid Ride 2 Serve (R2S) cyclists. My gratitude to all cyclists, well-wishers, donors and to the R2S organising team led by Paul Singh and Geoffrey Pereira, for the tremendous fund-raising effort. Despite the challenges and pandemic limitations, the R2S community rose to the task again, to ride, to bond and strengthen relationships, while raising funds for charity.

I would also like to commend the Sunehri Saheliaan volunteer team who worked tirelessly to curate and publish a special edition recipe book, Mostly Punjabi Recipes. The book first made its debut at SIWEC's 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary event on 4 December 2021, when it was presented to President Halimah Yacob as a memento.

More than half of the first print run of 500 copies were distributed to members attending the annual Sunehri Saheliaan Thanksgiving prayers at Central Sikh Temple on 28 December 2021. The rest were sold out within a month. This prompted the printing of a second batch of 500 copies, of which 300 copies have already been sold. A big thank-you to the group of ladies at Sunehri Saheliaan for the initiative to publish a keepsake legacy which will be cherished by generations of Punjabi Sikhs in Singapore.

Our Sunehri Saheliaan/Sunehray Pal active ageing activities had resumed gradually since the latter half of 2021, starting with digital classes for seniors, at a reduced capacity initially. In early 2022, the gradual resumption of active ageing activities has been sustained at CST and Sikh Centre. Counselling sessions at Prisons and Ashram have also resumed since March-April, in small incremental stages as we move towards further-reopening.

## 2022 - A Year of Transformational Change

We have commenced the process of building upon our initial 25-year legacy. Ranjit Singh, who led the Secretariat team for a decade, has transitioned into a well-deserved retirement. It will mark the end of an era. Kudos to the team that he has led! Meanwhile, we are focused on recruiting new leadership and fresh staff in a few positions to professionalise Team SIWEC and strengthen our service delivery going forward.

We will be guided by our indomitable Chardi Kala spirit as we persist in the quest to serve our clients and the community at large in more engaging, innovative and impactful ways.

May Waheguruji's grace and blessings always be showered upon SIWEC!

In Waheguru Ji's Sewa,

**Harmit Singh**

Chairman, Sikh Welfare Council



# Commemorating 25 Years of Service to Humanity

The Sikh Welfare Council (SIWEC) celebrated our 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary on 4 December 2021 concurrently at the Singapore Khalsa Association (SKA) and the Central Sikh Gurdwara Board Sikh Centre (CSGB SC). The event was also live streamed over SIWEC's Facebook page and YouTube channel.



A total of 85 participants were recognised at SKA (left) and Sikh Centre (right)



The landmark occasion was graced by the President of the Republic of Singapore, President Halimah Yacob, who was the Guest of Honour at the Singapore Khalsa Association. President Halimah Yacob recognised and thanked SIWEC's past and present members, volunteers and community leader for their efforts that they have put in to "alleviate the plight of the most vulnerable members of our society". She also encapsulated the history of SIWEC and as well as the three themes of the Sikh community – Sewa (selfless service), Renewal and Inclusivity – in her speech.

Mr Gurdip Singh Usma, Advisor to SIWEC and Preceding Chairman, thanked President Halimah Yacob for her speech and recounted the history of the Sikh Welfare Council. He touched upon the significance of holding the landmark occasion in both the Singapore Khalsa Association and the CSGB Sikh Centre. The Singapore Khalsa Association building "has been our community's social, cultural and recreational hub for sports, networking sessions, social gatherings, weddings as well as the annual Vesakhi Mela" whilst the CSGB Sikh Centre is a "spiritual touchpoint for Sikhs to learn about Sikhism from our formative years through to adulthood".

One of the most honourable achievements of our past, that is lesser known to the community today, was that Sikh businesses and community leaders gathered funds to purchase and present two ambulances to Singapore General Hospital and Thomson Road General Hospital in 1964 and 1967 respectively. An even more interesting fact is that the keys to the second ambulance was handed over to then Prime Minister, Mr Lee Kuan Yew, who subsequently presented the ambulance to the Singapore General Hospital on behalf of the Sikh community.

Mr Gurdip Singh Usma credited the success of SIWEC to the community, institutions, donors and volunteers who had contributed and supported SIWEC over the past 25 years. He also outlined the new initiative SIWEC has been brewing – Theek Thak. Theek Thak is a mental health awareness campaign aiming to remove the stigmatisation and encouraging anyone in need of help to come forward without worry. Topics surrounding mental health is becoming increasingly important and the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated it's reach.



President Halimah Yacob inaugurated the first ever publication *Sarbat Da Bhalla – Service to Humanity* which extensively documents SIWEC's major milestones and achievements.



President Halimah Yacob presented the book to Prisons counsellor Balbir Kaur (left), Active Ageing lead Charanjeet Bal (middle) and Bereavement counsellor Baljinder Kaur (right).

President Halimah Yacob then presented the copies to the trustees, donors, volunteers and staff of SIWEC to recognise their contributions to SIWEC's development and growth between 1995 to 2020. She was accompanied by SIWEC's Advisor and preceding Chairman (2015-2020), Mr Gurdip Singh Usma.



Volunteers honoured at Sikh Centre included Dr Gurpal Singh (Healthcare) and prisons counsellors Ms Anupreet Kaur and Mr Amarjit Khaira.

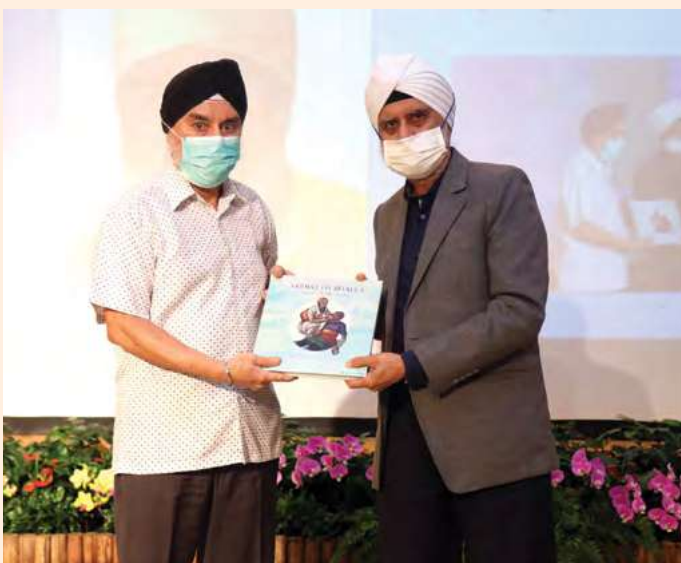




“

I am really glad and thankful to SIWEC for recognising cyclists. I feel very proud, and I think that the cyclists would have been very glad and proud that we have been recognised for our efforts. Thank you, SIWEC, for the wonderful time and opportunity to do this sewa (selfless service) and we hope to see more of this happening in the coming years.”

*Mr Luvinderpal Singh (Paul), Cycling Fund-Raising Lead Organiser*



Among the other cycling volunteers recognised at Sikh Centre were Mr Pawanpreet Ahuja, Dr Melvinder Singh, Mr Diljit Singh and Dr Ramnik Ahuja.



“I am very honoured to be a part of the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations. As a former staff and current volunteer, I see a lot of hard work being put in by everyone for the various programmes that SIWEC undertakes, and I hope that we will continue to thrive and help as many as possible in the community. The commemorative book and the video shared today brought back a lot of memories of the work we have done as a team.”

*Ms Jaspreet Kaur*



Mrs Sarjit Kaur Khosa and Mr Gurdip S Usma presented a memento to President Halimah Yacob, comprising the commemorative book and a recipe book curated by members of Sunehri Sahelian (Golden Girls) Active Ageing group.



Chairman SIWEC Harmit Singh presented a similar memento to Mr Surjit Singh Wasan at Sikh Centre

The speeches made by President Halimah Yacob and Mr Gurdip Singh can be found on pages 18 and 20.





# Honouring Our Pioneers

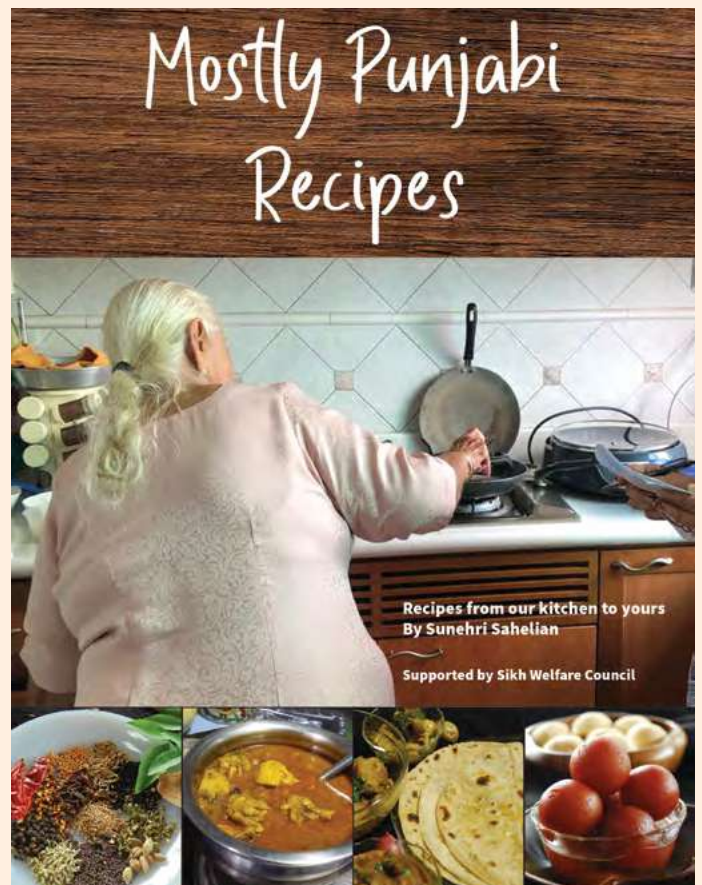
SIWEC volunteers wanted to honour the pioneer generation for their contributions and heritage by sharing and connecting them with the younger generation. What better way to do that than to turn our attention to food? Not only does food bring people together and connect us on multiple levels, but it also evokes memory of the past. This has sparked the idea of compiling recipes shared by the Sunehri Sahelian.

On 28 December 2021, a Shukrana (annual thanksgiving prayer) was organised at the Central Sikh Temple (CST) wherein members of the Sunehri Sahelian, Sunehray Pal, SIWEC Management Committee and staff attended. SIWEC revealed and launched the final look of the publication, *Mostly Punjabi Recipes*, during this auspicious day.

This was the first time the members of the Sunehri Sahelian saw the book and had their own publications which includes a diverse range of recipes, personal anecdotes and memories. Needless to say, it was a joyous and memorable day for them. The copies were distributed to all attendees of the Shukrana programme.

Members of the Sunehri Sahelian were also gifted a copy of the Sarbat Da Bhalla publication.

Priced at only \$20.00 per copy, the launch of the *Mostly Punjabi Recipes* was a great hit and saw many purchases from the Sikh community.







CC

“267 complimentary copies of the recipe book were distributed to the senior members and key partners whilst a total of 233 books were wiped out by the public purely by word of mouth! With that, the first 500 printed copies were sold out! We are continuing to receive enquiries for more copies of the book and there’s a waiting list already for the second print which will be ready in late March 2022!”

*Sarafeen Kaur, Programm and Communications Officer, SIWEC*

CC

“Many of our supporters bought multiple copies, some of which were gifted to their extended family, locally and overseas. We are truly grateful to the volunteer team and members of the Sunehri Saheliaan/Sunehray Pal for pledging all proceeds from the sale to SIWEC. This is indeed a very generous and much-appreciated gesture. We have ordered for another 500 copies which will be sold at our office and promoted at all community engagement events throughout the year.”

*Harmit Singh, Chairman, SIWEC*



# Empowering the Seniors

The world has seen a digital transformation that is further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. SIWEC volunteers recognised that the seniors are the least technologically savvy and wanted to provide them with the necessary support to learn the basic operations of a smartphone.

In July 2021, SIWEC volunteers coordinated with SG Digital Office to conduct weekly digital learning classes for these seniors. The aim was to familiarize and ensure that they were more conversant and savvy in using their smartphones. Topics covered included the likes of using applications, such as WhatsApp and Zoom, and raising awareness of cyber-security. The seniors were happy to attend the sessions and picked up skills allowing them to better connect with their dear ones virtually during the COVID-19 pandemic.

A total of 48 members attended the in-person sessions conducted in Central Sikh Temple on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The class sizes were kept small to comply with the prevailing Safe Management Measures (SMMs). The attendees were issued Step Trackers by the Health Promotion Board and were introduced to the Health Hub and Healthy 365 applications. They were also provided with an option of attending online



sessions to learn the know-hows of the National Library (Libby) application, Google, and Adobe scan.

Besides these initiatives, the Young Sikh Association (YSA) volunteers also engaged with 70 Sunehri Saheliaan members to guide them in the use of various applications such as Zoom and Photo Scan. However, these group of volunteers were aware of the language barrier and conducted the sessions in Punjabi!



“

We offered our members the option of in-person or Zoom classes and the response was overwhelmingly in favour of in-person classes. We had comparably lower take-up of the Zoom classes. The seniors said they prefer having in-person guidance by trainers which they find more effective. We are grateful to HPB for making the step-trackers available to our participants.”

*Madam Charanjeet Kaur, Sunehri Saheliaan Coordinator*





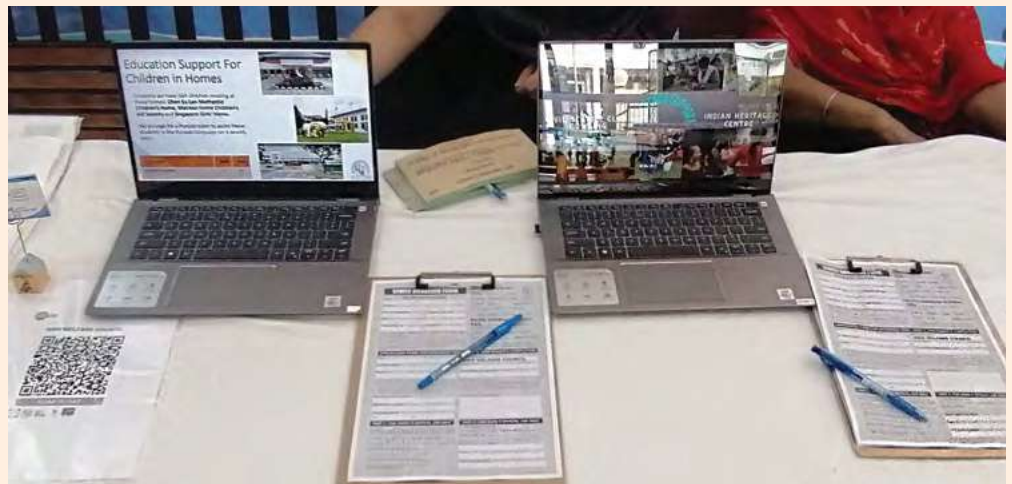
# Community Outreach

On 10 October 2021, a team of members from SIWEC gathered at Gurdwara Sahib Yishun to engage and connect with the assembled sangat.

SIWEC's Vice Chairman (Admin), Mr Dinesh Singh, addressed the assembled sangat in the Darbar Sahib on the various programmes offered by the Sikh Welfare

Council. He thanked the assembled sangat for their regular monetary donations in helping to sustain SIWEC's operations and encouraged them to serve as volunteers in the various programmes offered.

The info session was well received with members of the assembled sangat registering as volunteers.



“

Team SIWEC was very pleased at the positive response from members of the assembled sangat who came forward to show their support by registering as volunteers and donors. We would like to thank Gurdwara Sahib Yishun's Management Committee for providing us with this outreach opportunity.”

*Harmit Singh, Chairman, SIWEC*



# Spreading the Joy of the Festivities

In the spirit of giving, SIWEC received generous amount of donations from well-wishers for Diwali. These donations included sweetmeats from the CST Ladies' Wing, Hongbaos, sponsored dry rations and NTUC grocery vouchers for 34 families.

The well-wishers proactively engaged with SIWEC's Welfare

Officer, Ms Karam Kaur, and Healthcare Ambassador, Madam Kartar Kaur, in the packing of these items. The items were distributed on 27 and 28 October 2021 to various groups of families requiring assistance.

The families were thankful and appreciative of SIWEC's and the well-wishers' effort to bring the festivity to their homes.



“

Being a non-Sikh, I am grateful to SIWEC for remembering me during the festival of lights as it helps ease our difficulties during this pandemic.”

*Madam S Bte, a grateful recipient of the items*





# Theek Thak Awareness Campaign

One key highlight of 2021 was the launch of the Theek Thak mental health awareness programme. Volunteers from SIWEC and Anglo American ambassadors from the Good programme, worked together to develop the core components of the initiative.

Theek Thak's Instagram was officially launched in August 2021 to engage the public on mental health content. It has since

featured a total of 8 reels comprising of community leaders' and experts' reflections on mental health and wellness.

Between August and November 2021, Theek Thak hosted monthly Instagram Live chats with expert guests on topics such as Anxiety and Stress in Children, Men and Mental Health, Couples and Mental Health and Art as Therapy.



To further entrench this new initiative in Singapore, Theek Thak hosted an online panel discussion on 30 October 2021 with Minister in the Prime Minister's Office and Second Minister for Finance & National Development, Ms Indranee Rajah, delivering the opening address. The panel discussion saw a total of 120 attendees participating positively through the Facebook and YouTube live stream. The English version of the Theek Thak resource kit was launched digitally.

## Causes Week 2021: Youth's death spurs new initiative to look out for one another

Causes Week, which is into its 10th iteration, runs this year from Dec 21 to 25. It shines a light on various individuals and groups, and shows how they are making a difference through their chosen causes within the community, for children and youth, in sports and arts, among others.



SAK Welfare Council management committee member Sarabjeet Singh with the resource kit to that address mental health concerns. (1/10/2021 09:43:45 AM)

Theek Thak has attracted the attention of Singapore Media and has been featured on Vasantham Beat on 3 December 2021 and The Straits Times on 23 December 2021.



Print versions of the Theek Thak Mental Health Awareness resource kit, both in English and Punjabi, was also distributed to attendees of SIWEC's 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration on 4 December 2021.



Mr Bhanjan Singh (SIWEC Pioneer), Dr Sorinder Singh (SIWEC Pioneer), Mr Harmit S Ghandi (SIWEC Pioneer), Janelle Matharoo (Executive Head of Trading and Origination, Anglo American) with copies of their Theek Thak resource kit



Attendee of the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Appreciation Day reading the Theek Thak resource kit in Punjabi



CC

"I was also glad to hear that SIWEC has joined the mental health and wellness movement by recently launching the Theek Thak campaign. It is important for each community to raise awareness of mental health challenges, reduce stigma towards mental health conditions, and promote positive help-seeking behaviours among those coping with the stresses of family life, work or school-related stress."

*President Halimah Yacob, Speaking at the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Appreciation Day*

To ensure that the Mental Health Awareness resource kits are easily accessible to all members of the community, copies of the kits are made available digitally and at various Sikh community institutions across Singapore, including all seven Gurdwaras and the Singapore Khalsa Association, in both English and Punjabi.

The Theek Thak Mental Health Awareness resource kit is available for download at <https://www.siwec.org/downloads/mental-health-awareness/67-mental-health-awareness-resource-toolkit>.



# Ride 2 Serve Goes the Distance



The Ride 2 Serve (R2S) cyclists organised a charity event to raise funds for three beneficiaries – Sikh Welfare Council, Sunlove Abode for the Intellectually Infirm and the Association of Persons with Special Needs (APSN) – over the period of January to March 2022. The team's tagline for the year was *Go the Distance for Charity*, which aimed to inspire riders and well-wishers to go the extra mile to raise extra funds.

The ride was organised as a hybrid event which provided riders the flexibility of choosing between a physical and virtual ride option. The organising committee had initially launched for a massive physical group ride component but was unable to attain approval due to prevailing SMMs. Not willing to let this setback dampen their spirit, the organising committee encouraged riders to form smaller groups to ride independently and to update their progress via R2S social media channels.

This was a huge success as the cyclists and well-wishers raised almost \$100 000 just from the mileage covered. SIWEC had also raised donations via Sikh Institutions and the total amount of raised from the two donation drives stood at above \$200 000.



Some riders started cycling as early as 4.00am and caught the sunrise







Riders also rode in solidarity with the Inter-Faith Friendship Ride (IFFR) cyclists who rode on the day



There was even an ice-cream pit-stop along the way to encourage and enthuse all cyclists passing by!



The ride did not discriminate between age. Seniors, middle aged, youth and children joined in this noble cause.







Stalwart SIWEC supporter Dheeraj made it a family quest to ride a total of 1000km with his family to raise funds!



“

Despite the odds and Covid-related operational challenges, Team R2S has risen above them all yet again, to deliver a meaningful experience for riders and their families, friends and well-wishers. In addition, the team had also brought on board a major corporate sponsor in ATOS Wellness. On behalf of all in SIWEC, my heartiest congratulations to the R2S organising team and all riders for the tremendous effort this year. The funds raised will help sustain SIWEC's ongoing support for our clients and strengthen our existing programmes to alleviate their plight and improve our beneficiaries' psycho-social well-being.”

*Chairman SIWEC Mr Harmit Singh*



# Speech by President Halimah Yacob at the Sikh Welfare Council's

25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Appreciation Day, 4 December 2021

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good afternoon. I am delighted to be with all of you this afternoon to commemorate the Sikh Welfare Council's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

This is indeed a significant milestone for the Sikh community to celebrate with pride, and to appreciate the effort of those who have nurtured and guided the Council's development and growth over the last 25 years.

I am pleased to see many of the pioneer leaders, staff, volunteers and community partners in-person here today. It is only through their concerted and sustained commitment that Social Service Agencies (SSA) are able to reach out and alleviate the plight of the most vulnerable members of our society.

Sikh Welfare Council was first established 25 years ago, to uplift vulnerable Sikh families and individuals facing socio-economic challenges. Self-help has been a core value of the



Sikh faith. Setting up the Sikh Welfare Council demonstrated the commitment of the local Sikh community leadership to reaching out and serving the disadvantaged in the community. Over the years, the Sikh Welfare Council provided psycho-social support in a structured, systematic, and sustained manner, while working closely with other Indian self-help groups. By harnessing their resources and expertise, these self-help groups implemented concrete initiatives to benefit specific segments of the Singaporean Indian community.

Take the setting up of the Ashram halfway house at Sembawang in 1999 for example. It is a safe sanctuary for offenders placed on a pre-release programme, designed to better prepare them for reintegration into the workforce and the community. Another example from the earlier years was the funding of ambulances for the Singapore General Hospital and Tan Tock Seng Hospital through donations from the Sikh community. This was highlighted in Sikh Welfare Council's commemorative anniversary book titled 'Sarbat da Bhalla – Service to Humanity'.

The Sikh Welfare Council's development story has been underpinned by three themes – service, renewal, and inclusivity.

The first is the spirit of Sewa, or selfless service. This was illustrated by the generous contributions of early volunteers, successful businessmen and professionals who worked with pioneer generation Sikh leaders to address the challenges faced by disadvantaged families in the community. The pioneers worked tirelessly to establish the Sikh Welfare Council, with seed funding from the community to initiate operations. Management teams also worked with lean staff to sustain operations. This history encapsulates the spirit of self-reliance embedded in the community.

The second theme, renewal, was featured in Sikh Welfare Council's decision to appoint a taskforce to conduct an objective self-evaluation into the Council's achievements, and to propose the way forward. The study looked outwards to discern best practices of well-established SSAs run by other groups. One of the significant recommendations was to actively consider applying for an Institution of Public Character (IPC) status, departing from the prevailing self-help, self-reliance model.

The findings of that seminal study and the developments which catalysed over the following decade gave concrete expression to the Sikh value of living in 'Chardi Kala'. I understand that this refers to striving towards excellence by rising above inertia and setbacks, as well as embracing fresh knowledge and insight to overcome complex challenges with renewed faith and enduring optimism.

The third theme of inclusivity is reflected in how Sikh Welfare Council has remained committed to serving the vulnerable and disadvantaged, regardless of race, language or religion. After attaining its IPC status, Sikh Welfare Council managed an extensive range of IPC-compliant programmes which catered to non-Sikhs as well. It is noteworthy that about 20 per cent of its beneficiaries today are non-Sikhs. It has also actively promoted racial and religious harmony, with initiatives such as the Sarbat da Bhalla round-island relay runs, which culminated in 2010 with the Singapore Racial and Religious Harmony Marathon Relay.

These three themes of service, renewal, and inclusivity underpinned the transformation of the Sikh Welfare Council from a self-help group to an institution dedicated to benefitting the wider Singapore community. I am glad that Sikh Welfare Council has joined the mental health and wellness movement by recently launching the Theek Thak (All OK!) campaign. It is important for each community to raise awareness of mental health challenges, reduce stigma towards mental health conditions, and promote positive help-seeking behaviours among those coping with the stresses of family life, work or school-related stress.

May the Sikh community and the Sikh Welfare Council continue to be guided by your creed and the aspiration towards fulfilling the Sarbat da Bhalla vision. It is through all our collective efforts that we can achieve this noble goal of service towards humanity. I wish the Sikh Welfare Council many more years of positive impact and success in your various programmes and initiatives. Thank you.

# Speech by Advisor to SIWEC and Immediate Preceding Chairman, Mr Gurdip Singh Usma

at the Sikh Welfare Council's 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Appreciation Day, 4 December 2021

President of the Republic of Singapore, Madam Halimah Yacob;

Member of the Presidential Council for Minority Rights and the Presidential Council for Religious Harmony, Mr Surjit Singh Wasan;

Chairman of Sikh Welfare Council, Mr Harmit Singh;

Esteemed community partners from the social service sector, heads of Sikh institutions, SIWEC trustees, donors;

Past and present fellow volunteers, staff of Sikh Welfare Council;

All our distinguished guests and well-wishers assembled here at SKA and Sikh Centre and all who are following today's proceedings online.

A heartfelt Sat Sri Akaal, and good afternoon to everyone! It is my privilege to welcome all of you as we gather (in-person and virtually), to commemorate a very significant milestone in Sikh Welfare Council's growth since its inception in 1995.

It is somewhat a bitter-sweet feeling when we look at how we celebrated the important day back in 1995, when 1500 people had then attended the Sikh community's 30<sup>th</sup> National Day celebration dinner held on 14<sup>th</sup> October 1995, where the Sikh Welfare Council was formally launched at the open field diagonally across from the Central Sikh Temple.

The Sikh Community celebrated with then Acting Minister Teo Chee Hean as Guest of Honour, under a grand tentage, an impressive stage, with the Punjabi school choir performing Bhangra & Giddha.

The astounding fact was that the community dinner to celebrate Singapore's 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of independence was the finale to the fund-raising drive initiated by the Sikh Advisory Board, and by the end of that evening, an impressive sum of about \$1.7 million had been raised from the Singaporean Sikh community.



We too had drawn inspiration from the 1995 event to initiate plans for a grand charity dinner in 2020 to celebrate our 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, but unfortunately, we were compelled to defer our plans by more than a year due to Covid-19 and its disruptive impact. Those were uniquely special times indeed in 1995 - pre-SARS and pre-Covid - when the practice of social-distancing and masking were beyond anyone's imagination.

Although today's event is staged on a relatively modest physical scale - with 100 guests between 2 locations for Covid-19 safety reasons, we draw much comfort in harnessing the reach of digital technology and social media platforms - so that we can connect both groups united as ONE; and with many more of our cherished volunteers and well-wishers joining us virtually from different parts of Singapore and overseas.



Despite such capacity limitations, the Sikh spirit of Chardi Kala (or enduring optimism) inspired us to aim high, to reach for the stars and invite the President of Singapore as our Guest of Honour, as we wanted to make our 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Appreciation Day truly historic and special. The organising committee was totally overjoyed the day we learned that President Halimah Yacob had accepted our invitation. Welcome again, Madam President, we are all truly honoured by your presence with us today. We thank-you from the bottom of all our hearts.

### **Significance of SKA & CSGB Sikh Centre in Singapore**

Our physical footprints today at Singapore Khalsa Association and CSGB Sikh Centre are also very significant for SIWEC as they are two of Singapore Sikh community's historically important institutions and they both resonate deeply with the community as we celebrate SIWEC's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary. SKA and CSGB have been the pillar Sikh community institutions for Sikh Welfare Council, both in terms of financial contributions and co-operation in carrying out our programmes.

For more than 50 years, this SKA building has been our community's social, cultural and recreational hub for sports, networking sessions, social gatherings, weddings (including my own wedding 45 years ago), as well as the annual Vesakhi Mela. For SIWEC, SKA has been our venue of choice for all our Appreciation Day tea-sessions where we have honoured our volunteers, community partners and well-wishers.

The CSGB Sikh Centre is part of the Silat Road Sikh Temple built in 1924. It is a spiritual touchpoint for Sikhs to learn about Sikhism from our formative years through to adulthood, where we deepen our understanding of living the Sikh faith in a contemporary society. Many reflect on how they can perform Sewa (community service) differently and create impact after drawing renewed motivation from our faith's exhortation to live a life of hard work and service to the community.

SIWEC has benefited directly from Sikhs having attended such classes, as many have approached us to volunteer in our programmes and to launch fresh charity initiatives. One such group was the Harmony on Wheels movement led by Mr Manjit Singh Randhawa, who teamed up with the co-founder of Bike Aid Singapore Mr Manjit Singh Sevea in 2014, to revive cycling for charity and to help raise funds not only for Sikh Welfare Council but also for other charities such as the Sunlove organisation in Singapore and other causes beyond our shores.

It is unfortunate that both these gentlemen could not join us today. Their significant contribution to community building and fund-raising is well-documented in our 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary publication titled Sarbat da Bhalla - Service to Humanity.

The commemorative book will be formally launched by Madam President today. Everyone attending the event will receive a copy of the book in recognition of your steadfast support over these past decades. Soon after this event, we will also arrange to courier the book to many of our ardent volunteers, well-wishers and stakeholders who could not be present today, in view of the prevailing capacity restrictions.

In essence, the story of the growth of many of our Sikh institutions reflects how the two pillars of our faith - Sewa and Vand Chakna (sharing with others) are expressed in action ever since Singapore's pre-independence days. In this connection, our editorial team found some rare treasures in the national archives. One of these were the early acts of philanthropy by our Sikh business and community leaders in the 1960s; when they pooled funds to purchase and present 2 ambulances; first to the Singapore General Hospital in 1964 and the second to Thomson Road General Hospital in 1967.

Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew who received the keys to the second ambulance, presented to Thomson Road General Hospital in January 1967 was quoted in The Straits Times to have congratulated the Sikh community for their valuable contribution to the success of society in the Republic. He said, and (I Quote)," To me, the Sikh community is one of the stirring sagas of human history. It is a small but vigorous community." (Unquote) He went on to urge the Sikh community gathered at the Singapore Conference Hall celebrating the 300th birthday of Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji, to hold on to their values which their faith and culture provided. He said, (I quote) " We should not throw away virtues and doctrines which hold groups together." And he added, "...you and I who have become co-owners of this country must find the largest common denominators." (Unquote)

It is also not too striking that the pillars of our faith have guided Singaporean Sikh pioneers to fund-raise with faith and conviction, mobilising and rallying the community together to establish, grow and sustain each institution from the ground up. In the early 1990s, that same belief inspired the Sikh Advisory Board then led by Mr Bhajan Singh Suropada to convince our community leaders to setup Sikh Welfare Council - a few years after CDAC, MENDAKI and SINDA had been established as self-help groups - with Dr Sorinder Singh as the pioneer Chairman, who served for 14 years.

### **From Self-Help Group to Becoming an Institution of Public Character (IPC)**

Sikh Welfare Council was initially set up as a self-help group to assist vulnerable families and challenged individuals within the Sikh community to better cope with a fast-changing socio-economic context which posed a range of financial, educational, employment and social challenges.

The pioneers who established SIWEC also set high aspirations for the Council, by exhorting successive generations of volunteers and staff to be guided by the SIWEC motto “Service to Humanity is the Highest Deed” (Jan ki Sewa Uttam Kamma).

Our thinking on SIWEC’s target beneficiaries evolved after 15 years, to realise the aspirations espoused in the motto and the spirit of Sarbat da Bhalla (Service to Humanity) urged and compelled us to be less insular and to be more embracing to serve all Singaporeans, regardless of race, language or religion.

This vision was also well-navigated and expressed through one of SIWEC’s earliest community engagement initiatives which brought Singaporeans of different races to run together annually in the series of Sarbat da Bhalla runs which evolved to be known as the cross-island Singapore Racial and Religious Harmony Marathon relay.

The year 2009 was a watershed year for SIWEC, when the Government granted us the Institution of Public Character (IPC) status. It had two immediate implications. First, our scope of services was expanded beyond serving only Sikhs to now encompass the wider Singapore community as well.

Second, the IPC status boosted our fund-raising efforts as all donations to SIWEC began to enjoy generous income tax deductions. SIWEC’s status was further bolstered in 2014, when we became a full member of the National Council of Social Service, which provided more opportunities and funding resources to help our beneficiaries.

Overall, with the support of the whole community, we believe that over the past 25 years, SIWEC has made a positive impact on the lives of the beneficiaries served in the wider Singapore community.

As of 2020, SIWEC remains a modestly lean social service agency employing 7 staff, operating 8 programmes, assisted by about 150 volunteers and serving about 1,200 clients annually. We are now duly recognised by the community and government agencies as a well-regarded welfare organisation.

### **Corporate Governance and Financial Stability**

This recognition also highlighted the need for better corporate governance, transparency and financial stability. Over the past 6 years, SIWEC has enhanced its financial and operating processes, developed and documented its processes in line with the guidelines established by the Commissioner of Charities. Since 2019, we have also started to publish comprehensive Annual Reports for the benefit of our stakeholders.

Our ability to raise funds and obtain matching grants from the government and other agencies, like the President’s Challenge and Tote Board has enabled SIWEC to build our reserves, because uncertain economic situations may slow down donations to charities and these could affect sustainability of our programmes for our beneficiaries.

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### **Success Factors**

The key factors that have contributed significantly to the success that SIWEC has achieved over the past 25 years include: Firstly, the steadfast community support from individuals, institutions, donors and dedicated volunteers helping to plan and implement programmes and raise funds; and secondly, forging strong partnerships across the social and health sectors with key agencies like SINDA, NCSS, HPB, C3A, Singapore Prison Service, Sunlove and SSEF.

One key reality confronting social service organisations like ours is in building on what we have achieved so far and to plan for the next lap of our development. As an organisation, it is vital to institute clear succession planning, enhance professionalism and skill sets of the Management Committee and the staff team as well.

In terms of programme enhancements, we are already witnessing an increasing complexity of challenges facing clients we support, especially with the intersection of multiple issues in the prevailing context as we transition from pandemic to endemicity. The last 2 years have also resulted in changes to the way we deliver our services, including live streaming funerals, sending exercise and motivational videos to our senior members to help them stay active and engaged, video calls to check-in on clients we could no longer visit, Zoom meetings and many more adaptations like embarking on getting donations via Online streams.

On the mental health front, even as we embarked on our Theek Thak mental health awareness campaign, we remain concerned about people not seeking help due to concerns about stigma, confidentiality and anxieties about their future. SIWEC will continue to devote attention to this area



and develop our internal capacity to help people with mental health issues access the help they need.

In closing I would like to first thank Madam President for gracing our 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Appreciation Day and also for providing the message in the book, which you will launch today and present to our esteemed guests.

I would like to also thank Mr Inderjit Singh for his foreword in this publication and his support for SIWEC throughout the last 25 years. Unfortunately, he was unable to join us today.

On behalf of all in SIWEC, our gratitude to all Sikh institutions' leadership for the steadfast support since our inception, as well as all our individual donors, volunteers, past and present management committee members, past and present staff, social service and health sector partners, government agencies and all who have helped SIWEC over the past 25 years to achieve our objectives. In addition, I would like to thank all for giving me the opportunity to do my 6 years sewa as Chairman of SIWEC and look forward to your continued support to my successor, Mr Harmit Singh Ji.

I would specially like to express my heartfelt appreciation for the dedication and commitment of our staff team led by Mr Ranjit Singh. All of you have adapted to the situation and overcome every new situation that we faced these past two years with steadfast resolve. Keep up the Chardi Kala spirit and excellent work as you continue to serve our community with dignity and pride in the face of future challenges.

My personal thanks also go out to the editorial team (especially Mr Manmohan Singh and Ms Sarafeen Kaur) that helped make the Sarbat Da Bhalla commemorative book a reality, and the members of the SIWEC 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Appreciation Day Organising Committee, who worked tirelessly to put this multi-dimensional event together.

Thank you, All.

# OUR SERVICES

24-Hour Hotline  
**+65 6299-9234**

Financial Assistance &  
Food on the Table  
Programme

Academic Excellence  
& Education Support  
Programme

Hospital / Home Visits  
& Healthcare Ambassador  
Programme

Eldercare & Active  
Ageing Activities

Prison Counselling &  
Aftercare Programme

Community Mediation &  
Counselling Programme

Bereavement Services

Community Outreach  
Activities

## YOU CAN HELP AND MAKE A DIFFERENCE

### Donations

A small contribution from you translates into huge benefits for the less fortunate. You can donate by:

- Making a One-off Donation
- Donating Monthly via GIRO
- A Bequest (Will) - Leave a legacy in support of SIWEC's clients
- A Memorial Donation - A thoughtful way to remember a loved one while giving support to others

**Donors will be able to claim tax deduction of 2.5 times the amount donated to SIWEC.**

### Volunteers

Your efforts as a SIWEC volunteer enable us to successfully run our programmes and thus, make a difference to the community.

We are looking for volunteers to strengthen our services and contribute to the community at large.

To find out more, kindly contact us at [info@siwec.org](mailto:info@siwec.org) today!

## WHOM WE SERVE

**SIWEC is here to help. We serve everyone!**

If you or someone you know requires assistance or is interested in our services, please call us, e-mail us or come down to meet us at the SIWEC Office.

### Sikh Welfare Council

2 Towner Road, Singapore 327804  
Opening hours: Monday – Friday, 9am – 6pm  
Tel: 24-hour helpline: +65 6299 9234  
Email: [info@siwec.org](mailto:info@siwec.org)  
Website: [www.siwec.org](http://www.siwec.org)



**Sikh Welfare Council**