

Special Community Safety Bulletin Release 13th August 2011

Over the last week or so, with the backdrop of looting, arson and violence, in all of the major cities in the UK, Sikhs have been congregating around Gurdwaras and their businesses in order to deter the looters and arsonists. This grass roots response has made headline news, as well as attracting applause from all sections of the society.

While it is understood the actual physical damage done to Sikh/Gurdwara property has been minimal, it is apparent that had large numbers of Sikhs not been patrolling outside of Gurdwaras, and around their businesses then they would most certainly have become target for vandals, looters and thugs.

The police have issued statements to the effect that looters have not targeted Gurdwaras or other places of worship. Regrettably this is not borne out in reality as can be seen from the incidents below. History has also proven that during previous riots, Gurdwaras have been attacked and looted. Examples of this include race riots in Birmingham in 1985 and the Lozells riots of 2005, where Bebe Nanaki Gurdwara was ransacked.

Gurdwaras are particularly vulnerable during times of civil unrest as they are prominent buildings. In areas where racial tensions do exist, they are vulnerable to attack by opportunist thugs, racists, and other organisations who wish to inflame racial tensions.

With the painful memories of 2009, when Bow Gurdwara in East London was burnt down, many Sikhs took it upon themselves to ensure that a repeat did not take place in 2011; we have been largely successful in this endeavour. Not only did Sikhs protect Gurdwaras, but in Southall and Birmingham, they also protected some Mandirs, Mosques and businesses as well.

As a result, much damage was averted. We have been made aware of some of the events that took place over the last few days involving Gurdwaras around the UK. There are many stories and rumours flying around so we are trying to produce an accurate log. Some of these are still under investigation and details needs to be confirmed:

- An incident whereby the Gurmat Camp in Chigwell was disrupted by local young people and it is believed projectiles were thrown and a Sikh was assaulted.
- An incident where bricks were thrown at a Gurdwara in Ilford by rioters.
- Sikh business people and sewadars thwarted looters outside of Southall gurdwara. Youth were also dispersed, whilst preparing balaclavas outside another Gurdwara. Some looters/rioters were seen circling Singh Sabha Gurdwara Barking in their cars in a provocative manner on several occasions.
- Incident at Maidenhead Gurdwara Sahib that was diffused quickly when police were called.
- Potential of attacks on three Birmingham Gurdwaras were averted when Sikhs mobilised to protect them. These were Nishkam Sewak Jatha, Sri Dashmesh Gurdwara (Lozells) and Ramgharia Gurdwara (Graham St)

- Altercation outside Smethwick Gurdwara, when two carloads of youths were taunting Sikhs, resulting in a violent incident.
- Some unconnected Sikh youth were arrested for having their Gatka gear in the boot of their car. A meeting with the Police is yet to take place.

We are aiming to compile detailed logs of any incidents therefore, requesting that any incident brought to the attention of Sikh Council UK include: Date, Time, and Venue along with full details of the incident. Please forward these as a matter of urgency so that a high level meeting with the relevant authorities can be held.

Finally we would urge everyone to work closely with their local Gurdwara Sahib leaders for direction of what is required and for any liaison with the police. It is important to be actively engaging in any work to achieve stability and community safety. Guidelines for Gurdwaras and our request for supporting the research are posted on Sikh Council website: www.sikhcounciluk.org,