

London mayor's first engagement is Baisakhi Mela

London's colourful new mayor Boris Johnson chose Baisakhi celebrations in central London to make his first major public appearance in the job.

Mobbed by well-wishers and posing for photographs in a policeman's hat at Trafalgar Square Sunday, Johnson pledged to be a "mayor for all London" and to "work to unite communities".

He described London, where a third of inhabitants are foreign-born, as "the world in a city".

The Tory mayor's move was a significant tribute to the large population of Indians in London, community leaders said.

There are some half a million Indians in the British capital - the city's largest ethnic minority population and owners of 10,000 business establishments.

Johnson's choice was also a tribute to London's increasingly influential and wealthy Punjabi population, said Raj Loomba, a prominent Punjabi industrialist.

"I have always been promoting the culture of India in the UK. We have celebrated Diwali in central London since 1999. Because I am a Punjabi and come from Punjab I also wanted to celebrate Baisakhi in the UK," Loomba told IANS.

Baisakhi, Diwali and Eid are now celebrated every year at Trafalgar Square - conjuring up a 'mela-like' atmosphere that showcases the world's most cosmopolitan city.

"As Punjabis we want to demonstrate that through faith we can all come closer to each other, regardless of whether we are in America, India or Britain. That's the importance of Baisakhi," said Resham Singh Sandhu, a prominent Sikh community leader based in Leicester, a city that is known as Little India.

Speaking at the Trafalgar Square, Johnson dismissed suggestions that he would withdraw support to such festivals saying it was 'a canard floated by the outgoing mayor', Labour's Ken Livingstone.

'The last few days have been very, very exciting and very, very exhausting, but this is the single most wonderful job in British politics,' he said.

'I am going to be a mayor for all London and work to unite communities. One of the wonderful things we have got in London is fantastic diversity - we have got the whole world in a city.'

Dipankar De Sarkar (© IANS / India eNews)