

## White House celebrates Guru Nanak's birth anniversary

After Diwali, the Obama White House for the first time celebrated Gurparab, Guru Nanak's birth anniversary, with about 125 Sikh men in colourful turbans and women in traditional Punjabi dress.

President Barack Obama himself was not present, but senior officials led by Christina M. Tchen, head of the White House office of Public Engagement, welcomed the guests to the executive mansion at the function last week.

'This is your White House and this first event is the just the beginning and it will be part of many gatherings of your community here. We want you to stay in contact with us,' she was quoted as saying by the Sikh Council on Religion and Education (SCORE).

The programme started with Sarabjit Singh, Granthi of a New York gurdwara in Glen Cove in Long Island, offering prayers for Obama and his administration in addition the prayers for the well being of all humanity.

Traditional kirtan with harmonium and tabla was performed by Ragi Nirmal Singh Nagpuri, and Sukhjeevan Singh of the Golden Temple, India, with a translation of the hymns. Two American Sikhs, Guru Sangat Singh and Gursangat Kaur, sang a song on Nanak in English.

Among senior Obama administration officials present was Kalpen Modi, an Indian-American actor and now associate director of the Public Engagement office.

The official speeches were interspersed by a series of Sikh greetings 'Jo Bole So Nihal' and thunderous response of 'Sat Sri Akal' which means - 'whoever hails the Timeless Being as true, is blessed'.

Rajwant Singh, SCORE chairman, said: 'This event is a tribute to all the pioneers of the Sikh community who worked hard to lay the foundation of our community in America.

'We are thankful to the president and his administration for opening their hearts and the doors of the White House for Sikhs. We have been in America for over 100 years and this definitely sends a strong signal that this White House recognises the Sikh presence in the US.'

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