

75 TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE KOMAGATA MARU INCIDENT REPORT

On May 23, 1914 the steamer Komagata Maru arrived in Vancouver. Aboard were 376 British subjects (340 Sikhs, 24 Muslims, and 12 Hindus) who wished to immigrate to Canada. The immigration department refused to allow the passengers to leave the ship, and it lay at anchor in Burrard Inlet for two months. The men were confined to the ship suffering from hunger, thirst and humiliation while they awaited the decision of the immigration department. On July 23, the Komagata Maru was ordered to leave with all but 22 passengers under the escort of HMCS Rainbow, a cruiser of the Canadian Navy. When the steamer reached India many men were killed by the British police to silence the injustice that occurred to them in the Dominion of Canada.

The Komagata Maru today is a symbol of challenge, pride, honour, determination, and injustices for the Sikh and Indo-Canadian community across Canada and U.S.A.. Injustices occurred seventy five years ago, and the Indo-Canadian community suffered discrimination and humiliation for over half a century due to Canada's immigration policy of exclusion. Since then positive steps have been taken in promoting Multiculturalism and the Charter of Human Rights in Canada. As the Khalsa Diwan Society, Vancouver along with branch organizations in Victoria, Abbotsford, and Paldi played a major role in assisting the passengers in 1914, a number of activities were held to commemorate the 75th Anniversary of the incident with the support of other societies across Canada. To pay homage to our forefathers and celebrate the existence of the Sikh community in Canada, the following activities were held.

ACTIVITIES

1. To increase everyone's awareness articles were published and distributed in English and Punjabi about this National historical event. The English article was written by Professor Hugh Johnson, and over 5000 copies of these were distributed. The Punjabi article was written by Sardarni Swarnjit Kaur Neel, and 10,000 copies of these were distributed.
2. As a goodwill gesture, donations were made to the Food Banks across Canada during the week of July 9-16 in recognition of the starvation the passengers had to go through in Vancouver. Khalsa Diwan Society, Vancouver donated over \$13,000 worth of food to the Vancouver Food Bank. Open House was held at the Gurdwara for the duration of the week.
3. A Photo exhibition was presented on this historic event. Materials were obtained from the Vancouver Public Library, and the exhibition is now on permanent display in the Langar hall at the Gurdwara Sahib 8000 Ross Street.
4. Akhand Path was held at the Sikh Temple July 21-23, and on July 23 a permanent monument was unveiled at 8000 Ross Street at 10:00 A.M. by Hon. John Fraser, Speaker, House of Commons.
5. Proclamations were made by the City of Vancouver, and the Province of British Columbia, on the request of the society to declare July 23, 1989 Komagata Maru Day.

6. A historical gathering was held on Sunday July 23, 1989 at 2:30 P.M. This gathering was held at Pier A, directly west of Canada Place, the actual site from where the Komagata Maru was escorted out of the harbour on July 23, 1914 under the guard of HMCS Rainbow. During this gathering which was attended by over a thousand people, a very impressive program was presented as follows:

PROGRAM

1. O Canada
2. Deh Siva
3. Introductions: Mr. Kanwal Inder Singh Neel
4. Federal level representation
Hon. John Fraser, M.P., Vancouver South, Speaker, House of Commons
Dr. Noel Kinsella, Associate Under Secretary of State
Mr. Gordon Wilson, Leader, Liberal Party of British Columbia
Ms. Margaret Mitchell, M.P., Vancouver East
5. Provincial level representation
Mr. Doug Mowat, M.L.A., Vancouver-Little Mtn., Parliamentary Sec. Ministry of Tourism and Provincial Sec.
Mr. Emery Barnes, M.L.A., Vancouver Centre
Mr. Moe Sihota, M.L.A., Esquimalt-Port Renf.
6. Municipal level representation
Ald. Jim Young, Burnaby
7. Unveiling of Plaque
8. Gurdwara Presidents
Sardar Bikar Singh Dhillon, Vancouver
Sardar Gurnek Singh Brar, Abbotsford
Sardar Hari Singh Seehra, New Westminster
Sardar Jagtar Singh Sandhu, Surrey
9. Historical presentation
Dr. Hugh Johnston, Professor of History, S.F.U. Author, "The Voyage of The Komagata Maru"
Mr. Richard Bird, grandson of Mr. Edward J. Bird, lawyer for the passengers of the Komagata Maru
10. Canadian perspective: Ms. Rosaline Stoadard, assisted Sikh refugees in Nova Scotia
11. Bhanga: Richmond Punjabi Artists Association

This special event was funded by Khalsa Diwan Society Vancouver, Abbotsford, New Westminster and Guru Nanak Sikh Temple, Delta. During the special event there was a Photo Exhibition, distribution of Articles, Books, Lapel Pins, Buttons, Balloons. There was also a special plane hired to display the sign "Komagata Maru 75th Anniv. 1914-89" over Vancouver city that afternoon. This unique and impressive event was covered by local, provincial, national, and international media on Radio, T.V. and newspaper, in a positive manner.

7. Though requested in March 1989, by Khalsa Diwan Society, Vancouver, a permanent plaque was finally installed at Portal Park in Vancouver on May 23, 1990. This plaque was funded by all three levels of Government.

Committee members: Gurdial Singh Neel, Pritam Singh Aulakh, Shoguin Singh Singhera, Gurnam Singh Pooni, Kanwal Inder Singh Neel (Coordinator)