

Tuesday, 24th March 2020

Latest (No.4) Directives for Gurdwaras, Sikh Organisations, Charities and Jathebandis during the Covid-19 pandemic

During last night's ministerial broadcast by the Prime Minister, it was announced that many other non essential shops and public spaces are required to close, including 'places of worship'. This directly affects the Sikh community and the way that Gurdwaras can operate.

Following this further guidance and clarity was issued from the Cabinet office and Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). **We ask that every Gurdwara Management Committee reads the official Government guidance thoroughly OR follows the advice of this directive (which has been prepared in light of the most recent government guidance):**

In the last week, most Gurdwaras have adopted strict, new policies and many Gurdwaras have already shut their public operations (prior to the government's instruction). We appreciate the difficult role Gurdwara Management committees are faced with in order to to play their part in defeating the deadly corona virus.

In accordance with the *sandesh* of Sri Akal Takht Sahib, the highest spiritual and temporal power of Sikhs **ALL** Gurdwaras should adapt their operations to achieve full compliance with the Government's instruction (if they have not already done so).

This does not mean that we must close Gurdwaras entirely. Instead we urge that Gurdwaras continue to make use of residential Granthis so that the daily *Maryada* (protocol) surrounding the Guru's Darbar is carried out. We kindly request that public notices informing the *sangat* of access restrictions refrain from stating 'the Gurdwara is closed'. Unknowingly, such messages do not reflect the true nature of the change and are contrary to the teachings of Gurmat.

It is important to understand that the Government has already clarified that religious staff (including Granthis) are included in the 'key workers list' and should continue to serve their roles like medical workers.

There are two circumstances that in which limited public access is allowed:

- 1) The cabinet office has stated that funerals maybe attended by immediate families.
- 2) The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local government has stated that places of worship 'should remain open for solitary worship'.

The MHCLG has also stated that the 'live streaming of a service without

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audience would be permissible'. This is especially useful for bereaved families wishing to enjoin with *Gurbani* during their period of loss.

Langar is a fundamental part of the Sikh faith. In these extraordinary times, Sri Akal Takth Sahib has instructed us to utilise our resources including *langar* as a means to help those in need. We fully support those efforts that are being made to use the productivity of the communal kitchen in supporting the vulnerable in society. MHCLG guidance states, 'Facilities may remain open for the purpose of hosting essential voluntary or public services, such as food banks or homeless services.

Today, many people will receive notifications from the NHS asking them to self-isolate for the next three months. It is important that we follow these instructions to protect ourselves and others. Sikh Council UK is collating resources in Punjabi and working to make these more accessible to the *sangat*. Our central helpline should be live later this week and will serve as an essential signposting service needed in our community. We urge Gurdwaras and Sikh organisations to make provisions for international students alongside other *sewa* as per the instructions of Sri Akal Takth Sahib.

Note: The Prime Minister's speech and subsequent supporting guidance has included 'places of worship' in conjunction to a list of non-essential venues. This has already lead to the inference that 'places of worship' are non-essential by some media outlets. This is insensitive to the sentiments of Sikhs as the Gurdwara is at the core of their spiritual needs. Religiosity needs to be treated and considered as an essential occupation for the faithful and such statements should be avoided.

Please refer to the Latest Official Government Guidance:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/874738/Full_guidance_on_staying_at_home_and_away_from_others.pdf

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/874732/230320_-_Revised_guidance_note_-_finalVF.pdf

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