

# Speech: PM speech at Vaisakhi reception: 8 May 2019

It is fantastic to welcome you all to Downing Street for these Vaisakhi celebrations once again.

This is such a special event – coming as it does when the days are growing longer and together we can celebrate spring.

But for me, it is also an incredibly important opportunity:

To say thank you to all of you here and to Sikhs across the UK for the brilliant contribution you make to our country day in and day out.

To recognise the diverse and wide ranging roles our Sikh community plays in so many different arenas.

And to reflect together on the values this important festival represents.

Now – I have to confess – I haven't yet been to a Vaisakhi Nagar Kirtan. But I have heard what fantastic events they are – with five baptised Sikhs – representing the “panj pyare” leading the procession in ceremonial dress, as the Sikh community comes together to commemorate the birth of the Khalsa.

This year we have seen fantastic processions in Southall. Gravesend. Coventry. Leeds. Nottingham. Leicester.

And of course – we can be immensely proud to be home to one of the biggest celebrations outside of India – in Birmingham.

But although I haven't yet been to one of these parades – I have been lucky enough to be a frequent guest at gudwaras in my constituency and across the UK – and can not only imagine the warm Punjabi welcome at this time of year – but just how good the food must be.

This of course is a particularly important year for the whole of the Sikh community.

2019 marks the 550th anniversary of the birth of Guru Nanak, the first Sikh guru, in 1469.

And I am sure we will see many events to celebrate this later in the year.

But 2019 also marks the centenary of an appalling event – the Jallianwala Bagh massacre in Amritsar.

No one who has heard the accounts of what happened that day can fail to be deeply moved. No one can truly imagine what the visitors to those gardens went through that day one hundred years ago.

It was – as the former Prime Minister H.H. Asquith described it at the time – “one of the worst outrages in the whole of our history”.

Jallianwala Bagh is a shameful scar on British Indian history.

We deeply regret what happened and the pain inflicted on so many people.

And on the day of the centenary Sir Dominic Asquith – the current British High Commissioner and H.H. Asquith’s grandson – visited Jallianwala Bagh and laid a wreath on behalf of the whole country.

Our relationship with the Sikh Community is one we cherish greatly – with collaboration and partnership at its heart.

And I am delighted that last week a debate in Westminster Hall focused on the contribution of Sikhs to the UK – following on from the launch of Sikh History and Awareness month by Seema Malhotra MP in April.

There were some great contributions made during that debate – and it was a timely reminder of the hard work, compassion, and generosity of Sikhs in communities up and down the country and abroad.

That generosity is – of course – very much in evidence at Vaisakhi, and most particularly in the way this is such an inclusive festival with a welcoming hand extended to everyone.

So finally, let me send all Sikhs celebrating Vaisakhi my belated – but heartfelt – best wishes.

I hope you all enjoy this afternoon’s event.