

Hardy Sikh prayer book revived after 100 years to help personnel practice faith in the field

News story

An operations-ready prayer book has been reintroduced for Sikh service personnel, reviving a tradition last seen in the British Indian Army during WW1.



The new prayerbook is waterproof and tearproof

Waterproof and tearproof, the Nitnem Gutka (Sikh Daily Prayers) is designed to be used in modern tactical environments. Nitnem translates to Daily Routine, and the collection of Sikh meditations will allow Sikh personnel to practice their faith at 3 different times of the day, wherever they are and in any conditions.

There is a long tradition of Sikhs carrying their religious text with them into conflict. In World Wars 1 and 2, Sikhs made up 20% of the British Indian Army. Over 120,000 Sikhs died and many more were injured from the trenches in France to the Jungles of Burma, and records from the time show Sikh troops with their prayer books in the deserts of Egypt and Mesopotamia.

The National Army Museum holds a copy of the original prayer book, pictured here with the new versions.

Provided by the Defence Sikh Network, the modernised Nitnem Gutka is designed to be hardy so it can cope with use on operations.

- Made from a tactical nylon paper, called Polyart paper, it is water and tearproof, and is thread bound for ultimate strength.
- It comes in two versions –camouflage for Army personnel and blue for the Navy and Air Force.

- The Nitnem Gutka has been written in 3 languages; Gurmukhi the original form of Sikh text, Romanised English, and English translation to make the Nitnem Gutka as accessible as possible.
- It also includes instruction and guidance on how to keep the Sikh scriptures in accordance with Sikh scripture code of conduct.

[Watch the making of the new Nitnem Gutka](#)

Maj Daljinder Singh Virdee, who led the project, said:

I was inspired to undertake this initiative when I saw old images of Sikh soldiers conducting their prayers in uniform. It has been a two-year journey to get to this point but makes all the efforts worthwhile knowing that Sikhs in UK Defence no matter where they serve across the world in whatever conditions can connect to their faith and find spiritual support through this Nitnem Gutka, for generations to come”.

The project has opened the door for other faith communities in Defence to create a similar product, such as the Hindu Gita.

Further information

- Permission for conducting the project was sought from the highest seat of Sikh authority Jathedar Akaal Takht Bhai Harpreet Singh.
- Printing was conducted in the UK and was supervised throughout by the DSN and a UK Sikh Organisation called Respect Your Guru.
- This tradition was last seen during World War 1, where thousands of Sikhs fought and died fighting for the allies. Supported by the Ministry of Defence Diversity Inclusion team and community stakeholders, the Defence Sikh Network have produced a modern tactical version.

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[UK aid will save over one million lives from killer diseases](#)

- The UK is again contributing to the Global Fund to help fight three of the deadliest diseases around the world
- The UK’s funding will save lives through prevention of and treatment for HIV, tuberculosis and malaria and strengthening health systems
- The UK remains the third largest ever donor to the Global Fund

New UK aid support to the Global Fund will help fight AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria around the world, Minister for Development Andrew Mitchell announced today (Monday 14 November).

As a founding supporter of the Global Fund, the UK is its third largest ever donor, having contributed £4.4 billion since its inception. The Global Fund has saved 50 million lives since it was set up by the G7 in 2002.

In 2021 alone, the Global Fund provided 23 million people with lifesaving antiretroviral therapy for HIV and 5.3 million with TB treatment and care. It also treated 148 million cases of malaria and helped distribute 133 million mosquito nets to protect families from malaria.

The UK is providing £1 billion over 3 years to the Global Fund, which will help save more than one million lives around the world and pay for interventions to help a much larger number of people stay safe.

From this new commitment:

- 2 million people with HIV will receive antiretroviral therapy
- More than 1 million people will receive TB treatment and care
- 86 million mosquito nets will be distributed to protect children and families from malaria
- Over 28 million new infections or cases across the three diseases will be avoided by diagnosing and treating those already infected to prevent further spread and supporting prevention services such as mosquito nets
- Health systems will be strengthened which will help with pandemic preparedness

Minister for Development Andrew Mitchell said:

The UK and others founded the Global Fund because we refused to accept the loss of millions of lives every year to preventable and treatable diseases.

Countries with better health systems and healthier people are more likely to be stable and prosperous and this fund gives hope and opportunity to millions who would otherwise suffer. Malaria kills a child nearly every minute of every day. These are wholly preventable deaths, and the UK is dedicated to preventing them.

Executive Director of the Global Fund Peter Sands said:

We are incredibly grateful to the United Kingdom for this renewed commitment to accelerate progress toward ending HIV, tuberculosis and malaria, and strengthening health and community systems everywhere.

Over the past 20 years, British taxpayer support has helped save 50 million lives. The UK's new £1 billion pledge is instrumental to

helping us save millions more lives, get back on track following the reversals from COVID-19, and strengthen global health security.

Pledges for the Global Fund are just one element of the UK's efforts to strengthen global health. We are the largest donor to Gavi's core mission to save lives and protect people by increasing access to vaccines and we hosted the CEPI replenishment this year which raised \$1.5 billion to reduce vaccine development time.

Through innovative technology, the UK is harnessing new developments to boost global health in the long term. For example, the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office has funded Liverpool-based Innovative Vector Control Consortium (IVCC) to create a new generation of bed nets, which kill mosquitoes resistant to traditional insecticides. To date, their innovations have averted an estimated 27 million malaria cases, especially in children.

Notes to editors:

- This pledge is drawn from the current Official Development Assistance (ODA) allocation.
- More information about the Global Fund's work can be found [here](#).
- The funding is in response to the Global Fund's seventh replenishment for 2023-2025.

[More French officers to patrol beaches to tackle small boat crossings](#)

Numbers of officers in northern France will increase by 40% over the coming months as a result of UK funding to step up action to reduce illegal small boat crossings, following a new UK and France agreement signed today.

The Home Secretary, Suella Braverman, is in France today (Monday 14 November) to finalise the arrangement with the French Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin. The new agreement lays the foundations for deeper UK-French co-operation to tackle illegal migration and marks the next step for the close operational partnership between the 2 countries which has prevented over 30,000 crossings this year.

The arrangement means, for the first time, specialist UK officers will also be embedded with their French counterparts, which will increase information sharing, improve understanding of the threat, and ensure UK expertise is at the heart of efforts to disrupt crossings and clamp down on people smugglers. This more integrated approach will also include strengthened operational co-operation, including joint UK-France analysis teams supporting the co-ordination and exchange of information by French-command HQ.

Home Secretary Suella Braverman said:

We must do everything we can to stop people making these dangerous journeys and crack down on the criminal gangs. This is a global challenge requiring global solutions, and it is in the interests of both the UK and French governments to work together to solve this complex problem.

There are no quick fixes, but this new arrangement will mean we can significantly increase the number of French gendarmes patrolling the beaches in northern France and ensure UK and French officers are working hand in hand to stop the people smugglers.

Joint working between UK and French officers so far has secured more than 140 convictions connected to people smuggling since the start of 2020 – and these criminals now face a combined 400 years behind bars.

The UK-France Joint Intelligence Cell, which has so far dismantled 55 organised crime groups and secured over 500 arrests since its inception in 2020, will also be expanded.

This latest multi-year arrangement between France and the UK is worth up to 72.2 million euros in 2022 to 2023. It will strengthen security at ports to help clamp down on illegal entry by funding investment in cutting edge surveillance technology, drones, detection dog teams, CCTV and helicopters to help detect and prevent crossings.

It will also go towards supporting reception and removal centres in France for migrants whose journeys to the UK are prevented, to further deter crossing attempts.

A new taskforce will also be set up, focused on reversing the recent rise in Albanian nationals and organised crime groups exploiting illegal migration routes into Western Europe and the UK.

This enhanced approach will boost joint British and French collaboration, which has already prevented over 30,000 illegal crossing attempts since the start of the year – more than 50% more than at the same stage last year.

The renewed partnership marks the next step in joint efforts to reduce these dangerous crossings and paves the way for deeper co-operation between the 2 countries in future, looking ahead to next year's UK-France leaders' summit.

The Home Secretary will travel to Frankfurt later this week, where she will meet her international counterparts from the G7 to discuss a range of priority issues including tackling serious organised crime. She will also meet with neighbouring countries as soon as possible as part of the UK's ongoing co-operation with European partners to drive progress on the issue of illegal migration.

The UK's work with international partners is a key part of the government's

wide-ranging approach to fix the broken asylum system, break the business model of people smugglers facilitating these journeys and clamp down on illegal migration.

This includes the measures introduced through the Nationality and Borders Act to prevent abuse of the system, such as introducing life sentences for people smugglers and increasing the maximum penalty for entering the UK illegally, as well as our world leading partnership with Rwanda which will see migrants who make these unnecessary journeys relocated there to have their claims considered and rebuild their lives.

[Remembrance Day service held at Taiping War Cemetery, Malaysia](#)

World news story

The British High Commission hosted a service of remembrance for the first time in recent years at Taiping War Cemetery today (13 November) to remember those who served their countries in both World Wars and other conflicts since.



High Commissioner Charles Hay and Defence Advisor Captain Antony Stockbridge laying a wreath.

The service this year also marks 77 years since the end of the Second World War.

Ambassadors, High Commissioners and Defence Advisers from various countries stood in respectful silence alongside representatives from the Malaysian Armed Forces, Malaysian Veterans' Associations, representatives of local societies and schools.

The service began with a performance by the 1st Battalion Royal Gurkha Rifles

pipers.

British High Commissioner to Malaysia, His Excellency Charles Hay MVO then delivered his address saying:

Today we remember those who sacrificed their lives fighting for peace and for our liberty. We must never forget the price they paid and continue to honour their legacy.

The Taiping War Cemetery was created by the British Army and is managed by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. We have hosted several memorials here over the years – including a visit in 2017 by the then His Royal Highness Prince Charles, The Prince of Wales, but our annual remembrance event usually takes place in Kuala Lumpur. I am pleased that this year we are able to hold our remembrance service in Taiping in the beautiful and emotive setting of the Taiping War Cemetery

The service continued with a reading of 'In Flanders Fields', delivered by Mr. Paul Baker, British Veteran and 'The Soldier by Rupert Brooke' by Veerayah A/L Subramaniam, SM of Polis Diraja Malaysia. Defence Advisor, Captain Antony Stockbridge then performed a reading of the 'For the Fallen' by Robert Laurence Binyon.

After observing two minutes of silence in respect of the fallen heroes, the ceremony ended with the traditional laying of wreaths at the base of the Cross, a solemn tribute to those who gave their lives in the name of peace.

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Millions invested in language lessons

Thousands more students will benefit from high quality language teaching as part of a programme to boost the number of pupils taking languages like French, German and Spanish at GCSE and A level.

Leading schools in language teaching will form a new Centre of Excellence, comprised of up to 25 schools, which will work with other schools to improve standards of language teaching across the country in line with the teaching methods set out in Ian Bauckham's 2016 Modern Foreign Languages Pedagogy Review. The programme will be backed by £14.9 million over the next three years, which will also aim to raise interest in studying German.

The programme will deliver on the pledge made in the Schools White Paper to create a network of language hubs and build significantly on the previous

Modern Foreign Languages Hubs programme, which was made up of nine lead schools.

Languages are a key part of a broad and balanced curriculum and [evidence](#) suggests learning a language has strong economic benefits, including improving international trade. The [British Council](#) also identified that Spanish, Mandarin, French, Arabic, and German are the top five priority languages to improve the UK's skills, security and influence in the world.

This initiative will support the Department for Education's ambition that 90% of year 10 pupils in state-funded schools study a combination of the core academic subjects as part of the EBacc by 2025, which includes a language.

Schools Minister Nick Gibb said:

In an increasingly globalised economy, it has never been more important for our pupils to be taught modern foreign languages. There is mounting evidence which shows the economic benefits of learning an additional language.

This programme will give teachers the rigorous training and knowledge they need to support pupils in learning some of the most prominent global languages such as French, German and Spanish.

The Centre will be overseen by a centre of language teaching expertise – which could be a range of institutions including a trust, university or business – and will bid for the contract launched today (Monday 14 November).

The scheme will also raise the profile of learning German in schools including increasing awareness of the benefits of studying it, by setting up a German Promotion Project. Included within the investment, this project worth £400,000, will involve increasing the number of German teachers in schools and will champion German as a subject.

The Department has successfully launched Hubs Programmes for other subjects in the curriculum including English and mathematics, linking schools across the country to subject specialist schools – also known as Lead Hubs – which can support in increasing the quality of teaching.

The Lead Hubs will engage with schools to improve the languages offer and ensure more effective transition from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3, as well as ensuring pupils aged 14-18 from all backgrounds have the opportunity to study languages through to Key Stage 5.

Additional information

- Schools and organisations wanting to apply to run the Language Hubs Programme can do so via [Jaggaer](#).
- The Invitation to Tender application will be open for 30 days and we will announce the successful Tender in early 2023.
- EBacc subjects, which include English, mathematics, science, humanities

and languages, are considered essential for many degrees, providing opportunities and a sound basis for a variety of careers.

- This Government has already made languages a priority and since the EBacc performance measures were first introduced in 2010, the proportion of pupils entering the EBacc has increased from 22% in 2010 to 39% in 2022 in state funded schools.