

## LOCAL, STATE &amp; REGION

# Sikhs in Oregon react to the Indianapolis mass shooting



The annual Nagar Kirtan Sikh parade moves down Oakhill Avenue in Salem in 2015. Members of the religion, which began in India in the 15th century, have been the targets of violence in the United States over the years.

BY JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN

The Oregonian

The victims of this month's mass shooting in Indianapolis felt familiar to Gurpreet Kaur, despite the distance between her Portland-area home and the Midwestern FedEx facility.

Of the eight people killed in the April 15 attack, four were members of the Sikh religious community. And in viewing photos of the victims, Kaur saw the faces of her own family and friends.

"There was a woman in her 60s. My mom worked till she was close to 60," said Kaur, secretary of the Sikh Center of Oregon. "In the U.S., Canada, there are so many places where there's an Indian concentration in the workforce. It's harrowing to think of something like this happening because of identity."

Authorities have not specified whether the shooter, a former worker at the FedEx facility, was targeting Sikhs. But members of Oregon's Sikh community say the threat of violence is always in the back of their minds.

"For many people like us — non-Christian, nonwhite — it's not 'if,' but 'when,'" Kaur said. "There's always fear that something might happen in your community."

The region is home to several gurdwaras, or Sikh temples, including the Sikh Center of Oregon in Beaverton and other locations in Salem, Eugene and Vancouver, Washington.

Kaur said it's been difficult to

*"I think the Punjabi community and the Sikh community tend to be very resilient. People carry on with their regular lives, but there is a psychological cost that is very apparent."*

— Gurpreet Kaur, secretary of the Sikh Center of Oregon

have conversations about safety and the Indianapolis shooting because of restrictions on in-person gatherings during the COVID-19 pandemic. But the limited conversations that have occurred are not new to her and other Sikhs.

"These conversations happen on and off, but at the end of the day, how much can you let these fears incapacitate you from living your life of faith?" Kaur said. "You can safeguard the gurdwara, but when I go to work, I can't leave my identity back at home."

Sarabjeet Teja, former chairman of the Guru Ramdas Gurdwara Sahib in Vancouver, said the Indianapolis shooting sent shockwaves through the local Sikh community and resurfaced memories of a 2012 shooting that killed six people at a Sikh temple in Wisconsin.

Still, he hopes Sikhs will remember it's important to not be intimidated by the Indianapolis attack.

"Being at the gurdwara, doing other stuff we normally do in our daily lives — that cannot stop," he said.

The Indianapolis shooting comes against a backdrop of ongoing concerns for Sikhs, Muslims and other religious minorities.

Teja said that prior to the

pandemic, when more people were gathering in person, temple leaders hired Vancouver police officers or private companies to offer security during Sunday services.

Kaur also described an uptick in the bullying of Sikh children after the election of former President Donald Trump and said adult Sikhs who were bullied or harassed as children increasingly sought counseling for painful memories.

Violence against several South Asian communities, including Sikhs and Muslims, also rose 64% in the year after Trump's election, according to the advocacy group South Asian Americans Leading Together.

In one such attack, a man asked to come into a Gresham temple to use the restroom in 2017, then attacked a Sikh woman and attempted to sexually assault her. Gresham police later said there was no evidence the suspect assaulted the woman because of her race or religion.

Kaur said it's important for Oregonians to know the history of violence toward Sikhs in their own state.

She referenced the St. Johns Riot of 1910, during which about 200 St. Johns residents attacked several Sikhs who lived in the area and worked at a lumber mill, forcing them

onto trains south to another part of Portland.

But Kaur said the Sikhs came back, filed police reports and tried to take legal action against their attackers.

Now, like then, members of the community have been strong, she said.

"I think the Punjabi community and the Sikh community tend to be very resilient," she said. "People carry on with their regular lives, but there is a psychological cost that is very apparent."

Kaur believes more interfaith conversations can help create a safer environment for Sikhs and members of all religious groups.

"What happens in an immigrant community doesn't just affect that community," she said. "It has repercussions for the wider society."

## TODAY

It's Sunday, April 25, the 115th day of 2021. There are 250 days left in the year.

### Today's Highlights in History:

In **1507**, a world map produced by German cartographer Martin Waldseemueller contained the first recorded use of the term "America," in honor of Italian navigator Amerigo Vespucci.

In **1859**, ground was broken for the Suez Canal.

In **1862**, during the Civil War, a Union fleet commanded by Flag Officer David G. Farragut captured the city of New Orleans.

In **1898**, the United States Congress declared war on Spain; the 10-week conflict resulted in an American victory.

In **1915**, during World War I, Allied soldiers invaded the Gallipoli Peninsula in an unsuccessful attempt to take the Ottoman Empire out of the war.

In **1917**, legendary jazz singer Ella Fitzgerald was born in Newport News, Virginia.

In **1944**, the United Negro College Fund was founded.

In **1945**, during World War II, U.S. and Soviet forces linked up on the Elbe River, a meeting that dramatized the collapse of Nazi Germany's defenses. Delegates from some 50 countries gathered in San Francisco to organize the United Nations.

In **1959**, the St. Lawrence Seaway opened to shipping.

In **1990**, the Hubble Space Telescope was deployed in orbit from the space shuttle Discovery. It was later discovered that the telescope's primary mirror was flawed, requiring the installation of corrective components to achieve optimal focus.

In **1992**, Islamic forces in Afghanistan took control of most of the capital of Kabul following the collapse of the Communist government.

In **2002**, Lisa "Left Eye" Lopes of the Grammy-winning trio TLC died in an SUV crash in Honduras; she was 30.

In **2019**, former Vice President Joe Biden entered the Democratic

presidential race, declaring the fight against Donald Trump to be a "battle for the soul of this nation."

**Ten years ago:** President Bashar Assad of Syria sent the military into the southern city of Daraa, where an anti-government uprising had begun the previous month.

**Five years ago:** The city of Cleveland reached a \$6 million settlement in a lawsuit over the death of Tamir Rice, a 12-year-old Black boy shot by a white police officer while playing with a pellet gun outside a recreation center. A panel of the 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Manhattan ruled 2-to-1 that New England Patriots quarterback Tom Brady had to serve a four-game "Deflategate" suspension imposed by the NFL, overturning a lower judge and siding with the league in a battle with the players union. Brady ended up serving the suspension.

**One year ago:** As the global death toll from the coronavirus surpassed 200,000, countries took cautious steps toward easing lockdowns. The U.K. became the fifth country in the world to report 20,000 virus-related deaths.

**Today's Birthdays:** Actor Al Pacino is 81. Ballroom dance judge Len Goodman (TV: "Dancing with the Stars") is 77. Rock musician Stu Cook (Creedence Clearwater Revival) is 76. Singer Bjorn Ulvaeus (ABBA) is 76. Actor Talia Shire is 76. Actor Jeffrey DeMunn is 74. Rock musician Steve Ferrone (Tom Petty & the Heartbreakers) is 71. Country singer-songwriter Rob Crosby is 67. Actor Hank Azaria is 57. Rock singer Andy Bell (Erasure) is 57. Rock musician Eric Avery is 56. Country musician Rory Feek (Joey + Rory) is 56. TV personality Jane Clayson is 54. Actor Renee Zellweger is 52. Actor Gina Torres is 52. Actor Jason Lee is 51. Actor Jason Wiles is 51. Actor Emily Bergl is 46. Actor Jonathan Angel is 44. Actor Marguerite Moreau is 44. Singer Jacob Underwood is 41. Actor Melonie Diaz is 37. Actor Sara Paxton is 33. Actor/producer Allisyn Snyder is 25. Actor Jayden Rey is 12.

— Associated Press

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