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Guidelines

Guru Nanak Dev Ji Birth Anniversary during COVID-19

Objective

To provide guidelines to the local authorities, faith-based organizations, faith communities and local organizers of Guru Nanak anniversary gathering for education, preparedness, and response to reduce the risks of COVID-19 transmission associated with mass gathering at Guru Nanak anniversary event.

Rationale

In the context of COVID-19, mass gatherings are events that could amplify the transmission of the virus. **Guru Nanak Dev Ji Gurburab**, also known as **Guru Nanak's Prakash Utsav** and **Guru Nanak Dev Ji Jayanti** is one of the most sacred festivals in Sikhism. The event celebrates the birth of the first Sikh guru, Guru Nanak. Till 1815, Gurburab (Nanak's birth anniversary) was celebrated in April every year. Since 1868, the event is celebrated on the full moon day of the Kartik month (November) of Sikh calendar at Nankana sahib (Gurdwara Darbar Sahib -Kartarpur, Shakargarh tehsil of Narowal district).

This is the biggest Sikh Religious Gathering in Pakistan with participation from all over the world. This year the 552nd Gurburab will be celebrated at the Janamasthan Nankana Sahib from 17- 27 Nov 2021, where Sikh community will perform their religious rites at the samadhi of Guru Nanak and pay respects to the founder of Sikhism, while observing social distancing, and COVID-19 SOPs.

Preparations – Administrative and Logistics

The Guru Nanak birth anniversary gatherings are likely to be attended by approximately, 12000 - 15000 Sikh Yatrees;

- Indian Sikh Yatrees around 3000 in the light of bilateral protocols.
- Sikh Diaspora around 1200 – 1500 mainly from UK, USA and Canada.
- Local Sikh Yatrees / Nanak Naamlewa around 8000 – 10000 for activities at Nankana Sahib only.

For the safety of Yatrees, following facilities are to be provided by Punjab government:

- Management of Indian Sikh Yatrees coming from JCP Wagah including RAT in coordination with MoI, CHE, ETPB and PSGPC.



- Management of Sikh Yatrees Diaspora (coming from UK, US and Canada etc.) in Pakistan during their stay including arrival, boarding / lodging & departure etc. in coordination with ETPB / PSGPC.
- Establishment of vaccination centers (CVCs / MVTs) at Nankana Sahib and Kartarpur with all available vaccines including single dose CanSino / PakVac for on spot vaccination of non-vaccinated Sikh Yatrees.
- Institute monitoring mechanism in coordination with ETPB / PSGPC for random checking of vaccination status of management staff / Sikh Yatrees.
- Establishment of temporary isolation facility to segregate infected / symptomatic individuals.
- Strict adherence to COVID-19 protocols (mandatory wearing of mask and social distancing etc).
- Arrangements for fool proof security arrangements to guard against any security threat at all places of the event (Nankana Sahib, Kartarpur and different locations which are part of Sikh Yatrees' visit as per details attached at Annex – I).
- Any other measure as deemed appropriate to ensure COVID-19-free smooth conduct of event.

TRAVEL INSTRUCTIONS/ CRITERIA

a. Indian Sikh Yatrees:

- Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) / Pakistan High Commission in New Delhi will manage issuance of visas to Sikh Yatrees in the light of bilateral protocols. Specific COVID-19 protocols are as under:
 - Only fully vaccinated individuals will be granted visa.
 - Mandatory negative PCR test within 72 hours of travel.
 - RAT will be conducted on arrival at Joint Check Post (JCP) Wagah under arrangements CHE / Punjab Govt (positive cases will be returned to India).

b. Sikh Yatrees Coming from across the Globe:

- MoFA / Pakistan High Commission / Embassies in different countries of the world will manage issuance of visas to applicants less Cat C notified countries. Specific COVID-19 protocols are as under:
 - Only fully vaccinated individuals will be granted visa.
 - Mandatory negative PCR test within 72 hours of travel.
 - Health guidelines in the light of revised inbound passengers' policy of Pakistan.

c. Local Sikh Yatrees:

- Only fully vaccinated individuals be allowed to participate in the event.
- Evacuee Trust Property Board (ETPB) / Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (PSGPC) will manage the specified strength of 8000 - 10000 local Sikh Yatrees.



Guiding Principles

CONGREGATION ATTENDING THE GURU NANAK ANNIVERSARY

- Hygiene and Respiratory Etiquette, Cloth Face Coverings/Face masks should be mandatory during the Guru-Granth, Parbat Pheri and all rituals/congregation.
- Conduct daily health checks (e.g., thermal and symptoms-based screening) of all Yatrees.
- Sign posting and messages in highly visible locations (e.g., at entrances, in restrooms) that promote protective and preventive measures in different local languages.
- Symptomatic screening should be ensured at the point of entry for all the participants before embarking on the journey to Gurdwara (the holy shrine).
- It will be advised to the Yatrees that during road travel to the Gurdwara Darbar Sahib, they should maintain adequate distance in the transport vans/buses (e.g., skip rows or keep middle seat empty) where possible. Drivers and the Yatrees should practice all safety protocols (e.g., face coverings, use of hand sanitizers). The driver should clean and disinfect buses or other transport vehicles before and after travelling.
- Social distancing should be observed during air travel according to the SOPs advised to the respective airline service by the Government of Pakistan.

AKHAND PATH AND GURPURAB / AMRIT VELA (INDOOR MANDATORY CONGREGATION)

- Congregation activities should be made with seating arranged in a manner so that distance of 6 feet apart is ensured for each attendee.
- Avoid crowding at points of entry and exit in the gurdwara.
- Ensure the cohort formation of the participants and groups by having the participants from the same provinces and districts of the respective country in one demarcated location.
- Where possible, religious leader(s) from the same country/region should be assigned to a fixed cohort of participants, to minimize the exposure of different groups to each other during the communal activities while ensuring adherence to social distancing.
- Use loud speakers at the congregation site so that people may listen to the Guru granth, hymns and message of Guru Nanak and do not necessarily have to assemble/congregate in one place.
- Provide physical guides, such as tape on floors or sidewalks and signs on walls, to ensure that individuals remain at least 6 feet apart in lines and at other times (e.g., guides for creating one-way routes).
- Avoid the use of air conditioners/closed door heating within the gurdwara and for indoor gatherings.
- Ensure ventilation systems operate properly and increase circulation of outdoor air as much as possible. If portable ventilation equipment like fans is used, take steps to minimize air from them blowing from one person directly at another person to reduce the potential spread of any airborne or aerosolized viruses.



PRABHAT PHERIS

It is essential to establish direct links and channels of communication between procession organizers, health authorities, local authorities, and other relevant stakeholders.

- Processions should adhere to proper COVID-19 standard operating procedures/ protocols.
- Multiple symptomatic screening desks should be ensured at the point of entry for the symptomatic screening of all the participants of the processions
- Encourage greeting among people with friendly words, rather than handshakes or other forms of physical contact.
- Number of participants should be kept reasonable with reduced procession timings. Focus should be on essential activities and avoidance of prolonged activities / extended procession duration.
- Participants unable to attend the in-person procession, can participate through distance, live streaming, and video technologies.
- If attendees or organizing staff develop symptoms during the event, event organizers should liaise with health authorities to facilitate sharing of information and subsequent appropriate handling of symptomatic individuals and their contacts
- Participants are advised to bring their own water bottles to avoid drinking at the communal places through shared/non-disposable utensils. Disposable glasses should be used at the points of water containers.

Instructions for Sikh Yatrees/ Visitors

- Wear a face mask at all times
- Maintain the safe distance of 2 meters (6 feet) from each other indoors/ outdoors.
- Greet people at the entry to worship spaces with friendly words and smiles, rather than handshakes or other forms of physical contact.
- Prevent touching or kissing of devotional objects that are frequently touched
- Receive a blessing from at least 1 m away and avoid the distribution of edibles through hands or drinking from a common cup.
- Consider using individual pre-packaged boxes/servings of ceremonial foods (langar), rather than shared portions from communal containers.
- Visual displays of advice on physical distancing, hand hygiene, and respiratory etiquette.

Cleaning and Disinfection

- Establish routine cleaning of Gurdwara with disinfectant/detergent including the indoor spaces, open courtyards, and other buildings where people gather. The chance of transmission through inanimate surfaces is less, and only in instances where an infected person coughs or sneezes on the surface, and someone else touches that surface after the cough or sneeze.
- Disinfect the public washrooms and ensure the availability of soap, running water and disinfectants.



- Disinfect the frequently touched objects such as doorknobs, light switches, and stair railings, graves and sacred icons.
- Avoid sharing cell phones, cameras and other devices unless disinfected.
- Clean and disinfect the mats used in the congregation place.
- The preference of affinity of the chemical disinfectants, recommended concentration, surfaces to be tackled, toxicity, contact time, frequency, duration, and stability of the product should be
 - Disinfection of surfaces with 70% alcohol where the use of bleach is not suitable, or
 - Use of freshly prepared 1% sodium hypochlorite for disinfection.

Note: The above recommendations are being regularly reviewed by the Ministry of National Health Services, Regulations & Coordination and will be updated based on the international & national recommendations and best practices.

The Ministry acknowledges the contribution of Ms. Syeda Shehirbano Akhtar, Dr Urooj Aqeel and HSA/ HPSIU/ NIH team to compile these guidelines.

For more information, please contact:

HSA/ HPSIU/ NIH, PM National Health Complex, Islamabad

<http://covid.gov.pk/>

<http://nhsrco.gov.pk/>

<https://www.facebook.com/NHSRCOOfficial>

<http://www.hsa.edu.pk/>

<https://twitter.com/nhsrcoofficial>

<https://www.nih.org.pk/>

<https://www.youtube.com/NHSRC-PK>



Annexure – I

VISIT SCHEDULE - SIKH YATREES

- Day 1 (17 Nov 21) - **Arrival Gurdwara Janamasthan, Nankana Sahib**
- Day 2 (18 Nov 21) - Visit local gurdwara at Nankana Sahib
- Day 3 (19 Nov 21) - **Main ceremony** - Birthday of Guru Nanak at Gurdwara Janamasthan
- Day 4 (20 Nov 21) - Visit Gurdwara Sacha Sauda & back to Nankana Sahib
- Day 5 (21 Nov 21) - Move to Gurdwara Panja Sahib, Hasanabdal
- Day 6 (22 Nov 21) - Stay Gurdwara Panja Sahib, Hasanabdal
- Day 7 (23 Nov 21) - Move to Gurdwara Dera Sahib, Lahore
- Day 8 (24 Nov 21) - Stay Gurdwara Dera Sahib, Lahore
- Day 9 (25 Nov 21) - Gurdwara Darbar Sahib **Kartarpur** and night stay
- Day 10 (26 Nov 21) - Gurdwara Rohi Sahib (**Eminabad**)
- Day 11 (27 Nov 21) - **Depart to India via JCP Wagah Border**

