

BRIEFING NOTE FOR MPs, SIKH COMMUNITY AND MEDIA

Critique of the Bloom Review from a Sikh perspective

The purpose of the [Bloom Review](#) was to look at how government should engage better with faith groups, instead Bloom for political reasons has used it to target and demonise active Sikh organisations and Gurdwaras who are 'pro Khalistan'.

Bloom has done a great disservice to the British Sikh community by promoting his own personal agenda. The review is an unbelievably biased and offensive narrative targeting Sikh organisations and Gurdwaras. He has controversially introduced the new phrase "pro-Khalistan extremists (PKE)" defined as an extremist fringe ideology within the pro-Khalistan movement.

The Bloom Review is nothing more than a hatchet job on Sikh organisations and Gurdwaras critical of the Indian authorities, who stand up for Sikh rights, who have successfully challenged the Conservative government on numerous fronts since 2010 and legitimately campaign for the re-establishment of a Sikh homeland.

The author of the review is not a lawyer, but a prominent Conservative Christian with a political agenda who has reiterated the review reflects a personal perspective and represents his opinion. Conservative Ministers and relevant government officials need to tread very carefully with respect to his perverse analysis and recommendations in areas where Bloom clearly lacks knowledge and is no expert with regards to British Sikhs. Any future government, especially a Labour Government should take Bloom's Review and biased Conservative opinions on Sikh organisations and Gurdwaras with a heavy dose of salt.

Bloom has caused deep offence in the review by unacceptably attacking and questioning Sikh teachings, practices and our religious institutions, undermining the equality agenda, advocating restrictions on freedom of speech and dangerously threatening basic democratic freedoms in an attempt to silence and stop all political engagement with those campaigning for the re-establishment of a Sikh homeland.

Bloom's personal prejudice and motivation against British Sikh activists highlighting and challenging human rights violations in India and the UK Government's double standards are driven not only by his political agenda and personal experiences, but the need to appease the Indian authorities. His total silence in the review on mentioning the 1984 Sikh Genocide, the human rights situation in India and the slide in India's democratic credentials that drives independence movements in India suggests negligence.

Bloom's failure to properly address the massive impact of the growth in right-wing Hindu extremism being promoted by the BJP Indian government is a glaring and deliberate oversight noted by many academics and independent commentators.

Bloom has completely failed to understand or appreciate Sikh teachings and history and it is clear the review has been written to appease the Indian authorities without reflecting on the changing dynamics of the British Sikh community over the last 40 years. He has selectively relied exclusively on so-called evidence that is no more than pro-India or anti-Sikh opinions who fear the continued growth in Sikh nationalism and demands for the re-establishment of a Sikh homeland.

Bloom's report has taken more than three and half years to produce and is not based on independent evidence from reliable sources. He has acted unprofessionally by choosing to quote from Wikipedia and dubious Indian sources whilst totally ignoring "[The Idea, Context, Framing, And Realities Of 'Sikh Radicalisation' In Britain](#)" report from November 2017 funded by the Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats (CREST). This was a most comprehensive report produced less than two years before the Bloom Review commenced that concluded Britain had nothing to fear from Sikh activism.

Bloom has gone to extreme and desperate lengths to try and demonise those campaigning for a Sikh homeland in the UK by using historic and irrelevant references from Canada and ignored much more recent and specific evidence from the UK that conclude Sikh activism is not a threat i.e. CREST report. The Commission for Countering Extremism places the risk or activities from Sikhs as one of the lowest in the UK. Data from the Counter Terrorism Unit (CTU) confirms that of the 800+ open investigations, none relate to the Sikh community. Yet Bloom ignores all this and attempts to create a false and manufactured narrative around Sikh extremism.

Bloom, the former head of the Conservative Christian Fellowship has shown he is not qualified and lacks knowledge to know what is a "true believer" in other faiths, especially when it comes to Sikhi. Many who practice their faith will find his phrase "make-believers" to justify his personal opinions throughout the report deeply offensive.

In the report Bloom deliberately and unacceptably tries to draw a distinction between those who can genuinely represent the Sikh faith and those who are exploiting the Sikh faith. He does this to justify the Conservative government's engagement practice for the last five years as regards the Sikh community that ignores Gurdwaras and established Sikh organisations with grassroot support who are vocal to protect the Sikh identity and have successfully lobbied politicians and decision-makers.

Bloom in his review incorrectly implies those opposing the Indian authorities or support a Sikh homeland are divisive and exploiting the Sikh faith knowing they are the same people who have led on lobbying government on many Sikh faith issues for at least the last two decades.

Bloom however avoids making any reference to the Conservative government in May 2020 imposing a non-practising Sikh as the "faith leader" of British Sikhs, a concept accepted by the UK Government to be inconsistent with Sikh teachings. The non-practising Sikh imposed as the faith leader of British Sikhs was forced to resign within a week of his appointment due

to Sikh community pressure. This controversial imposition on the British Sikh community has done lasting damage to Sikh-UK Government relations.

The Sikh "faith leader" was appointed on the advice of Bloom who appears to have taken his forced resignation within a week as a personal rebut given some of his references in the review around the COVID-19 pandemic. The Jathedar of the Akaal Takht (the most senior Sikh spiritual leader) as referred to in Bloom's Review has written to state this so-called "faith leader" of British Sikhs has no right to represent Sikhs in any capacity as he has widely publicised that he has defied specific religious edicts issued by the Akaal Takht.

The reference to pro-Khalistan activism, a subversive agenda and use of aliases in this review has nothing to do with domestic faith engagement but entirely driven by the foreign policy agenda towards India and commercial interests with an impending trade deal being used by the Indian Government to silence opposition from British Sikhs. The Bloom Review is the Conservatives approach to try and discredit pro-Khalistan groups as they do not like them leading on issues relating to the Sikh faith with the UK Government.

This is why Bloom ignorantly suggests this a diversion tactic by pro-Khalistan groups to divert attention and subvert the British political order. He has alarmingly suggested the UK Government should impede the advance of pro-Khalistan groups and only engage at official and political levels with pro-India individuals and groups. Sadly, we have examples through Freedom of Information (FOI) requests that show Bloom when consulted has prevented Ministers engaging with Sikh organisations e.g. on bullying and physical attacks on Sikh children at school.

Bloom concludes his review on the section on Sikhs by offensively trying to confuse the Anand Karaj (Sikh religious wedding ceremony for two Sikhs of opposite gender) with interfaith marriages. This highlights his lack of understanding of the edicts from the Akaal Takht on who can partake in an Anand Karaj that is non-negotiable. Although in principle Sikhs do not oppose interfaith marriages as this is down to individual choice and have no religious significance.

Coming back to the purpose of the review, Bloom should have identified the serious failings of the current engagement approach of the UK Government with the British Sikh community. He should have made meaningful recommendations as to why the UK Government must properly engage with Sikh organisations with grassroots support to rebuild broken trust and confidence.

Annex A provides further information on key failings of the Bloom Review from a Sikh perspective.

Key failings of the Bloom Review from a Sikh perspective:

1) Review is biased against Sikhs to meet a particular pro-India agenda

Why has Bloom dedicated 11 pages to concerns of Sikh extremism that he has repeated is confined to "small pockets" of the Sikh community and only two paragraphs refer to Hindu nationalism that is a current and live threat that is growing in Britain? This totally unbalanced approach reflects the report has been written to appease the Indian authorities without reflecting the reality of what is happening in India today and its impact on the UK.

2) Bloom has put an interesting twist on what constitutes reliable evidence

Bloom has ignored data and information held by the police on the total absence of any Sikh extremism cases in the UK for at least the last thirty years and the November 2017 CREST report that backed this up. Instead Bloom to meet his agenda has chosen to exclusively rely on certain personal views of anonymous haters, who are either anti-Sikh or pro-India calling on the UK Government to take steps to target Sikh activism. Bloom uses these carefully selected anonymous personal views to back his personal crusade and negative opinion to attack Sikh organisations and Gurdwaras.

3) Bloom has used random quotes to defame Gurdwaras and Sikh organisations

Bloom by deciding to include certain quotes from anonymous anti-Sikh or pro-India respondents to justify his opinion to impose further restrictions on Sikh organisations, including the possibility of legally banning organisations, has made very serious allegations in his report against unnamed Gurdwaras and Sikh organisations.

It is simply not good enough to rely on selective anonymous quotes to make unfounded claims and allegations of bullying, aggression, intimidation and harassment. These allegations should be backed up with hard evidence of the misuse of charity funds, successful prosecutions of those accused of spreading hate and evidence to justify the legal basis on which Sikh organisations could be banned in the UK. The hard evidence simply does not exist so it is simply not acceptable without suitable evidence to suggest banning or silencing those who promote the Khalistan ideology as this is what is demanded by the Indian authorities from the UK Government.

4) Bloom is backing a system of UK Government engagement with Sikhs designed to discriminate against Gurdwaras and Sikh organisations who are prepared to challenge government

On the one hand Bloom suggests government should maintain an open door and continue to listen and meaningfully engage with faith communities, but when it comes to the Sikh community, he suggests a pluralist approach to engagement. What this "pluralist approach"

means in practice is to hand-pick a select controversial group and only engage with Sikhs who support the Conservatives, certain academics and/or those who will not rock the boat and are pro-India.

This is a deeply flawed engagement strategy for the UK Government that ignores well established Sikh organisations with grassroots support. Many of those it engages with on Sikh faith matters are not Amritdhari (fully practising) Sikhs and are from newly formed groups who are prepared to tow the government line for recognition.

This is a recipe for disaster for both the Sikh community and the UK Government as mistakes will be made such as nearly happened with the Offensive Weapons Bill as rightly identified and mentioned in the review by Bloom. Although he deliberately fails to point out the pro-Khalistan organisation that worked with Conservative Ministers and other politicians to amend the legislation that could have criminalised all Sikh households.

To appease the Indian authorities Bloom suggests the UK Government should not engage with those who promote the Khalistan ideology. This simply reflects a policy the Conservatives have applied for at least the last five years following Indian Government pressure to blacklist certain pro-Khalistan groups from UK Government engagement. This is something the Indian High Commission in London openly admit which reflects negatively on the UK Government demonstrating it to be weak and not able to decide what is in the best interests of the UK.

This change of approach taken by the Conservatives came about on the one hand due to Indian Government pressure to take actions against pro-Khalistan groups and on the other as these groups were also regularly challenging the Conservatives on a range of issues of importance to British Sikhs since 2010. For example, these have included:

- new EU security guidelines issued in 2010 on the checking of Sikh turbans at airports;
- revelations in January 2014 under the 30-year rule that the Conservative UK Government in 1984 assisted the Indian authorities in planning the Indian army assault on the Harmandir Sahib Complex;
- legal action forcing the UK Government to de-proscribe the International Sikh Youth Federation (ISYF) in March 2016;
- completely ignoring anti-Sikh hate crimes in Britain contrasting with the approach to Islamophobia and Antisemitism;
- failing to provide a Sikh ethnic tick box in the Census 2021 to allow public bodies to collect relevant information to address potential discrimination and encourage equal opportunities;
- planning to introduce new legislation on offensive weapons that could have criminalised all Sikh households who possess and keep a large Kirpan at home;
- challenging the government's COVID-19 guidance for places of worship that was designed for practices in churches that were not relevant to Gurdwaras;
- the failed extradition of three British born Sikhs to appease the Indian authorities; and

- the failure to get Jagtar Singh Johal released and returned to the UK as he has been in arbitrary detention in an Indian jail for nearly five and a half years.

5) Bloom intentionally avoids any reference to the 1984 Sikh Genocide and historic injustices and is unacceptably attempting to define what is or is not acceptable activity or behaviour by Sikhs and their organisations

Although Bloom refers to the persecution of Sikhs and historic injustices, he intentionally avoids making any reference to the 1984 Sikh Genocide, possibly due to a Conservative Government's direct involvement. Documents declassified by the UK Government in January 2014 under the 30-year rule and released to the National Archives revealed Margaret Thatcher had secretly authorised an SAS officer to visit India in February 1984 and assist the Indian authorities in planning the attack on the Harmandir Sahib (Golden Temple) Complex and the Sikh Genocide.

Bloom ignores the 1984 Sikh Genocide and more or less dismisses the persecution of Sikhs and historic injustices by suggesting the Conservative government decides what is or is not acceptable activity or behaviour by Sikhs in the UK. In a deeply worrying development Bloom has attempted through his review to target Sikh organisations that are part of what he describes as the "mainstream" Sikh community by suggesting they intimidate or are subversive.

Intimidation normally involves making threats of violence or actual physical violence. This is clearly unacceptable and those making threats or involved in physical violence against anyone should be dealt with by law enforcement agencies. However, Bloom has stretched the definition of intimidation to suggest pressure on politicians by encouraging voters to vote in a particular way or influence the selection of candidates by political parties is intimidation when it comes to Sikhs. Bloom in his pursued and blinkered view of British Sikh activists who are pro-Khalistan has failed to recognise and understand that pressure, lobbying and opposition is a genuine and logical part of the British democratic process.

6) Bloom Review is a missed opportunity as direct engagement with those advocating for the re-establishment of a Sikh homeland would be in the UK's best long term interests

If the Bloom Review wanted to promote international law on the right to self-determination and properly address those advocating for the re-establishment of a Sikh homeland it should have made a recommendation to the UK Government that it should proactively engage with pro-Khalistan organisations as the number of British Sikhs that support the re-establishment of a Sikh homeland are very large in number and growing. If the UK Government think this is a tiny minority it is mistaken and should question their sources. This engagement could take account of the British historic context, treatment of Sikhs in India since 1947 and allow an open debate on the grounds of international law.

The Bloom Review in dealing with the demand for Khalistan fails to recognise the idea of a Sikh homeland is not a new phenomenon from the 1980s and 1990s as suggested in the review and ignores the direct association between a Sikh homeland and Britain. Khalsa rule

was first established in 1710 by Banda Singh Bahadur and the larger sovereign Sikh state that was recognised by all the world powers was established in 1799 and existed for 50 years. The Sikh Kingdom was annexed by the British in 1849 and subject to Anglo-Sikh treaties.

Bloom will also be well aware Sikhs made sacrifices wholly out of proportion to their demographic strength in the independence struggle from Britain prior to 1947 and were therefore the third party with whom the British negotiated the transfer of power. The UK Government at that time acknowledged their admiration and appreciation of the Sikhs as well as their sacrifices. Clement Attlee's Labour Government therefore offered Sikhs a separate Sikh homeland and a ten-year agreement of military assistance and support for the Sikh administration.

However, the British decided on a hasty and hugely chaotic partition of the Sikh homeland of Panjab in 1947 that split the tiny minority Sikh community between Hindu-dominated India and Muslim-dominated Pakistan. There was unprecedented bloodshed and destruction as millions crossed the border to safety with their own communities for which Britain has never been held to account. For these reasons the UK Government in particular must accept their actions led to tens of thousands of Sikhs coming to the UK and the Sikhs more than most have the democratic right to campaign for the re-establishment of a sovereign Sikh State.

7) Bloom's obsession to demonise British Sikhs who support Khalistan by bringing up subversion and historic and irrelevant information from Canada

On the one hand Bloom repeats "It is important Sikhs be allowed to debate the merits of a Sikh homeland without such conversations being . . . labelled as 'extremist' or 'terrorism' and that the promotion of pro-Khalistan ideas does not have to be subversive." However, he then confuses and criticises political lobbying and influence with coercion by more or less suggesting a draconian no political platform policy on any Sikh issue, including Sikh identity and human rights issues for those who support the Khalistan ideology.

In his desperation to malign British Sikhs supporting Khalistan who engage with UK politicians Bloom does not refer to any specific examples of violence by Sikhs in the UK to justify a current threat. Instead Bloom brings up the alleged attack on the former Premier of British Columbia (Canada), Ujjal Dosanjh nearly 40 years ago in Vancouver in February 1985 for speaking out against Sikh extremism. Is a physical attack on a politician in Canada nearly 40 years ago the most relevant evidence that Bloom could find in three and half years that he could find to fit his narrative?

If Bloom was to apply the same flawed logic to the threat from Hindu extremism, he would have his work cut out as he will be well aware of regular attacks and killings of religious minorities by right wing Hindu extremists in India over the past decade. If Bloom wants to ignore what is happening in India, the latest example from Canada of a Hindu fanatic attacking worshippers with a weapon at a mosque in Markham came on 6 April 2023.

8) Bloom confuses a secessionist political agenda for a Sikh homeland with legitimate demands to address discrimination and equal opportunities

Bloom in his review publicly admits calls for an additional ethnic Sikh tick box option in the Census 2021 was viewed by the Conservative government as a secessionist and subversive political agenda. Nearly 100,000 British Sikhs rejected the ethnic tick group options provided and in a show of protest wrote "Sikh" suggesting considerable support.

The calls for a Sikh ethnic tick box in the Census 2021 being a secessionist issue was a line pushed by the Indian authorities and pro-India groups and individuals and it has now been confirmed this was wrongly and worryingly accepted by the Conservative Government that chose to ignore 100% support from Gurdwaras and hundreds of UK MPs for a Sikh ethnic tick box option.

Nothing could be further from the truth as the demand for a separate Sikh ethnic tick box is linked to the historic *Mandla v Lee* House of Lords judgement 40 years ago and the only practical way to get 40,000 public bodies in Britain to collect information on Sikhs to address discrimination and equal opportunities.

9) Bloom in his review has peculiarly promoted the views of Lord Singh who opposes the APPG for British Sikhs and Sikh Federation (UK)

Bloom has quoted evidence given by Lord Singh to the House of Lords Conduct Committee in 2021 and redacted the name of the person who complained about the bullying by Lord Singh and redacted the organisation named by Lord Singh. Bloom has however provided a link in his review to enable readers to identify the APPG for British Sikhs and the Sikh Federation (UK).

It is odd Bloom would choose to refer to a complaint of bullying against Lord Singh that was not upheld, when he could easily have referred to a 2019 [complaint by the Chair of the Sikh Federation \(UK\) against the conduct of Lord Singh that was upheld](#) in a case that involved breaches of the Code in relation to non-registration and non-declaration of a relevant interest.

10) Bloom has remarkably singled out the APPG for British Sikhs to consider the findings of his review

Bloom has unnecessarily made an indirect swipe in his review at those from the Sikh Federation (UK) who took legal action and had the International Sikh Youth Federation de-proscribed by the UK Government in March 2016. He then boldly suggests the Parliamentary estate should not host certain Sikh organisations and individuals with subversive behaviours. If Bloom was being fair and balanced, he should not have singled out the APPG for British Sikhs as there are hundreds of APPGs with some exclusively focused on succession.