

Speech delivered by Dr. Rami Ranger MBE on 8th November 2013 at The Punjabi Society of the British Isles Annual Diwali Dinner.

Mr Speaker, the Rt. Hon John Bercow MP, the Acting High Commissioner of India, Dr Virander Paul, Her Excellency, Asta Skaisgiyte Liauskiene, Ambassador of Lithuania, the Rt. Hon. Keith Vaz MP, Hon. Fiona Mactaggart MP, Hon. Virendra Sharma MP, Hon. Richard Harrington MP, Hon. Seema Malhotra MP, Mr Sukhdev Sidhu, Minister Coordination at the High Commission of India, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

First of all, I would like to wish our committee member Mr Gursharan Chadha a speedy recovery after breaking his arm and leg in a nasty fall.

He is a generous and hardworking member of the Society and we wish him well.

It is my honour to welcome you to the Punjabi Society of British Isles's Diwali Dinner, 2013.

It is worth noting that the Society was formed in 1928 making it the oldest Indian cultural organisation in Britain.

The aim of the society is to promote Punjabi culture in Britain in order to make Britain culturally richer.

This reflects the Punjabi spirit of making their mark wherever they decide to live.

Imagine, Britain without the mouth-watering Punjabi cuisine, like the one you are going to enjoy tonight, vibrant Bhangra dance, energetic Punjabi music and colourful Punjabi fashions.

We can see how our ladies look beautiful and elegant in their Punjabi dresses.

I am pleased to say that we Punjabis are also making British Parliament richer with the presence of Baroness Verma, Baroness Flather, Lord Kakkar, Lord Rana, Lord Paul, Lord Loomba, Virander Sharma MP, Seema Malhotra MP and Paul Uppal MP.

Tonight we will be honouring four Punjabis who have brought honour to their community through their lives.

We are privileged to have the Rt. Hon. John Bercow MP, Speaker of the House of Commons and the Acting High Commissioner of India Dr Virander Paul and his charming wife Rachel to grace this evening.

Incidentally, Dr Paul is also a 100% Pure Punjabi.

Those of you who know Mr Speaker will know that he has the unenviable task of keeping an unruly mob of 650 MPs under control, especially at Prime Minister's question time.

Speaker Bercow is as charming as he is firm with them to ensure that the wheels of our democracy keep moving.

We are privileged to have him as the Speaker of the House Commons as it has become much richer place with him being in charge.

He has very kindly offered to host a reception for us in Speaker's House in Parliament to experience its splendour and his warm hospitality.

I can assure you that the visit will be an eye opener and an experience of a life time to witness our rich history.

I shall let you know the date in due course.

Those of you who will donate generously to the Charity, Combat Stress which we are supporting tonight will be invited.

Our Acting High Commissioner is a medical Doctor by profession but has opted to join the Indian Foreign Service.

Since his arrival, the health of Indian diplomats at the High Commission has improved significantly.

They now smile more and also engage more with the community.

Thank you, Dr Paul for making the High Commission a friendly place for all concerned.

It will not be an exaggeration to say that our own Keith Vaz MP has become the most powerful Asian in Britain as the Chairman of the Home Affairs Committee in Parliament.

He has the powers to turn Bollywood actors into doctors, including Amitabh Bachchan.

He has become the champion for sufferers of diabetes and raises thousands of pounds through his charity, Silver Star each year to arrange free tests for diabetes.

Thank you Keith for serving Parliament for over a quarter of a century and helping everyone who approaches you.

We are honoured to have amongst us Her Excellency, Asta Skaisgiryte Liauskiene, Ambassador of Lithuania to Great Britain.

As this year, Lithuania holds the Presidency of Europe; as a result, our friend Asta has become one of the most influential persons in Europe.

I would like to encourage you to visit Lithuania next summer and enjoying its beauty and hospitality.

I would like to thank the Executive Committee for working hard to make this evening possible.

My special thanks to our Advisors, Mr GS Bhalla, Mr JS Gill, Mr TS Sahni and Mr HS Chadha for their help and support.

Each executive committee member is handpicked for their heart of gold and for their passion to care and serve others.

Just for the record Society donated a Medicare ambulance to the Punjab Govt. when Mr Bhalla was the President.

Society has raised funds for Great Ormond Street Hospital, Alzheimer Society and many other good causes.

It also sent money to victims of Gujarat earthquake.

In line with our ethos, tonight we are supporting the Armed Forces Charity, the Combat Stress.

It helps psychologically traumatised soldiers to rebuild their lives and in the process turn liabilities into assets again for our Nation.

Mental agony can be worse than losing an arm or a leg.

Just imagine the trauma of a young soldier of 20 or 21 who sees his comrade blown up by a landmine and he has to pick up the pieces.

Or if a soldier loses a leg, arm or has his face scarred, then I am afraid the mind of that soldier can also be scarred.

Mental agony can repeatedly disturb the soldier which can lead to depression.

Expert counselling is needed to rebuild the life of a soldier and this is where "Combat Stress" comes in.

You will hear more about the sterling work being done by the Combat Stress from Commodore Andrew Cameron, its Chief Executive.

More importantly, the charity demonstrates that we are a Nation of grateful people who never forget those who pay supreme sacrifices for our liberties and freedom.

The Punjabi Society in line with its charter will make a donation of £5000 on behalf of its members to support this worthy cause.

I will urge you to give generously and demonstrate that we Punjabis not only work hard, play hard but also care hard for those who care for the Queen and Country.

You will find pledge cards on your tables, please make your own contributions generously and feel proud.

There are three raffle prizes on offer tonight.

Two are courtesy of Pernod Ricard and one by Sun Mark Ltd.

The first prize is Chivas 25 Whisky RRP £400 signed by Mr Speaker.

The second prize is a case of 6 Chivas Malt Whiskies from the Chivas portfolio.

The third prize is Royalty Spanish wines, 6 bottles each of red and white.

Please do buy a £20 raffle ticket and support a very worthy cause.

Please give generously as giving is good.

It not only makes us feel good but also makes us caring human beings.

Finally, in line with the Punjabi tradition some laughter is a must.

Here is an incident you will enjoy.

The visiting priest was surprised when he went into the church to find just one person in the congregation - an old farmer.

He went down to him and said, "Is it worth proceeding?"

"What do you mean?" said the farmer.

"Well" said the priest, "is it worth having a service for such a small congregation?"

The farmer replied, "When I take a bucket of food to the hens and only one turns up, I don't send it away hungry."

Moved by this simple analogy, the priest went back to the pulpit and went through the whole service including a long and very forceful sermon.

When he had finished he went down to the farmer and asked, "Was that all right?"

The farmer rather abruptly replied, "When I take the bucket to the hens and only one turns up, I don't give it the whole bucket".

Thank you and have a great night.