

The New York Times July 29, 2004 Thursday

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The New York Times

July 29, 2004 Thursday
Late Edition - Final

SECTION: Section B; Column 5; Metropolitan Desk; Pg. 3

LENGTH: 561 words

HEADLINE: Two Sikhs Win Back Jobs Lost by Wearing Turbans

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BODY:

Two Sikhs who were told they could not wear turbans on the job as traffic enforcement agents will be reinstated and allowed to wear their turbans, their advisers said yesterday.

The two unrelated cases followed different routes through the legal system but essentially involved similar allegations: both men said they were denied exemptions from police uniform rules for their turbans, a central element of daily religious practice for Sikh men. One, Amric Singh Rathour, was dismissed. The other, Jasjit Singh Jaggi, left his job.

Mr. Jaggi, 36, was the valedictorian of his class at the Police Academy. He filed a complaint with the city's Commission on Human Rights. Mr. Rathour, 28, sued the city in federal court on grounds of religious discrimination.

"It's a tremendous moment for the Sikh community, one of our first big civil rights victories in this country," said Prabhjot Singh, a director of the Sikh Coalition, a civil and human rights organization.

An administrative law judge, Donna R. Merris, heard testimony in the Jaggi case and recommended in April that he be reinstated. She said that the Police Department had violated his civil rights when it threatened to fire him if he did not remove the turban. Three members of the Human Rights Commission -- the Rev. Calvin O. Butts III, the pastor of the Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem; Edison O. Jackson, the president of Medgar Evers College in Brooklyn; and Rabbi Haskel Lookstein, the rabbi of Congregation Kehilath Jeshurun and the principal of the Ramaz School in Manhattan -- issued a decision on June 29 ordering Mr. Jaggi's reinstatement.

The Police Department decided not to appeal the commission's decision, the city's Law

Department said. Mr. Jaggi, who has worked as a motel manager in Killington, Vt., since he walked off his traffic job in 2002, said yesterday that police officials called him on Monday and offered to reinstate him and work out a way for him to wear the turban on the job.

"The main idea was, how on earth has a city agency blocked someone because of religion?" said Pritan Singh Bindra, an adviser to Mr. Jaggi. "The police couldn't explain their denial" of Mr. Jaggi's requests to wear the turban while he was on duty.

The three commissioners said Mr. Jaggi's requests "were categorically denied without any dialogue or attempt to reach a middle ground." The commissioners also said the city had offered no evidence to show that letting Mr. Jaggi wear a turban would create "safety issues."

Ravinder Singh Bhalla, a lawyer for Mr. Rathour, said a settlement had been worked out that essentially paralleled the Jaggi case: the charges in the lawsuit will be dropped and he will be reinstated. Since he was dismissed from the Police Department in August 2001, Mr. Rathour has worked for Federal Express, processing packages at Kennedy International Airport, Mr. Bhalla said.

A spokesman for the Police Department, Inspector Michael Coan, would not discuss the Rathour case because the settlement had not been completed late yesterday. As for Mr. Jaggi, he said, "Accommodation will be made, and he'll be reinstated." Mr. Jaggi said he planned to see police personnel officials after a news conference about the case that the Sikh Coalition had scheduled for this morning outside police headquarters in Lower Manhattan.

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