

Update on AUM Crematorium – the UK's first dedicated Hindu Crematorium

- An update was provided on the first ever purpose-built crematorium for Hindus, Sikhs and Jains in the UK, followed by discussion on Hindu unity.
- The hurdles faced over the last two years since planning permission was communicated and after overcoming those hurdles in August 2024, proposed timescales for building works were given.
- A campaign for landscaping was launched.
- The call for Hindu Unity was raised by Param Pujya Sahebji – the spiritual head of Anoopam Mission and four eminent speakers from the community addressed the audience on this topic. The event concluded with Param Pujya Sahebji's blessings.
- Attendees included heads and representatives of various Hindu temples and organisations, businessmen and well-wishers representing a cross-section of the Hindu community.

Satish Chatwani, the International President of Anoopam Mission, who has spearheaded the project from its inception, gave a clear and succinct update on Crematorium covering the discharging of pre-commencement planning conditions, followed by the two major hurdles that had been faced over the past two years. This included availing a substation of sufficient capacity for the crematorium. The quote received was in the millions and therefore unfeasible. After eighteen months of effort from Jatinbhai Patel, a member of Anoopam Mission, a quote of £600,000 was obtained and therefore made the project once again feasible.

The second hurdle was obtaining the required permissions for access, as the entry crosses over a neighbour's green belt land. The issue went into litigation followed by mediation in February 2024. Mediation was successful but unfortunately the involved party did not follow through. After months of negotiation, an agreement was signed in early August, and groundworks for AUM were finally begun on 12 August 2024 by Fentons. The actual building works are proposed to start by January 2025, and all efforts would be made to have the envelope ready by August 2025.

He clarified that this project of Anoopam Mission, which has been inspired and guided by Guruhari Sahebji from the start, can only come to completion with the help of the community. He also clarified funding requirements and how the current funds are held within Anoopam Mission but under the category of Restricted Funds which ensures they stay segregated from Anoopam Mission's own funds. He informed everyone of the Advisory Committee that has been formed comprising of highly influential and respected members of the community who will monitor and advise on the process. They are named as follows: Tusharbhai Morzaria (former Group Finance Director of Barclays and currently independent non-executive director of BP and non-executive director of Legal & General), Sunil Sheth (Former Partner at Fladgate LLP), Shilpaben Chheda (ACA FCCA, Partner at KLSA), Rajshree Gokul (Business woman) with two Anoopam Mission representatives, namely Satish Chatwani and Bhavisha Tailor.

Satishbhai also read out a written message by Lord Gadhia which described the project as path-breaking and heeded the call for openness and transparency. A video message by Lord Popat was played who fully commended the project, as the idea was borne by him.

Bhavisha Tailor, a full time volunteer at Anoopam Mission, compered the event and delivered the presentation on the landscaping portion of the planning decision gained for AUM crematorium. In doing so, the Tree Campaign was launched; an initiative to support local ecology, reduce the carbon footprint and create a peaceful sanctuary. To support this campaign 250 trees and 2500 saplings will be planted, and a donation of £2501 for each tree and £251 for each sapling was communicated. The tree donors will have a plaque that will be placed by the tree with their chosen words of dedication and sapling donors will have their names added to a donor wall. The launch of the campaign was immediately supported by audience members pledging a total 25 trees and 35 saplings.

During the event, members of the Asian Foundation for Help & Lions Club Kingsbury, who held an event this year to raise funds, donated £171,000 to Anoopam Mission for the Aum Crematorium. They were thanked for their tremendous efforts.

The call for Hindu Unity was addressed by four speakers namely:

Subhashbhai Thakrar, (CA, Former Managing Partner Blackstone Franks, Founder of Asian Business Association and WHEF member)

Krsna Sanjay Das, (Trustee for ISKCON's Bhaktivedanta Manor from 1995-2020 and presently Bhaktivedanta Manor's representative in Hindu communities and external relations)

Nitinbhai Palan (Founder of Palan Foundation, Former Trustee BAPS)

Shaunaka Rishi Das (Founder and Director of Oxford Centre of Hindu Studies)

They shared their thoughts in the following way:

Subhashbhai Thakrar spoke of the valuable work being done by temples, but focused on the need for a single voice, highlighting two initiatives who take the first step in this, namely World Hindu Economic Forum and Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies. The former is a platform for Hindus to create wealth, with the aim of then sharing that wealth to do good for the community. He said the OCHS adds values for all Hindus, and thus has to be supported.

Krsna Sanjay Dasji began by expressing gratitude to Pujya Sahebji and Anoopam Mission saying, "we are all indebted to Anoopam Mission.... They have made great monetary sacrifice and a sacrifice of their own facilities for the benefit of the community. This contribution itself is a magnificent act of unity.' He spoke of re-discovering and knowing one's own dharma and the importance of dharmic education in this process to cultivate understanding as being pivotal to unity.

Nitinbhai Palan expressed gratitude to Pujya Sahebji and spoke of his own Guru, Brahmaswaroop Param Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj's emphasis on the urgent need for Sanatani dharma practitioners to come together. This clear need resulted in the creation of an independent group - Action for Harmony six

months ago through which events have been organised and will continue every year to educate and raise awareness of Hinduism. He emphasised the need to act and propagate in line with our scriptures and spiritual masters.

Shri Shaunaka Rishi Dasji, delivered poignant messages. He said, “To have an identity as a Hindu community we have to identify with something we can all agree on.” He suggested six simply stated broad principles: Sam-darshanah – equal vision, Ahimsa – non harming, Acharyas – practicing what is preached, Amanitva – humility, Preeti – doing things out of love for God. Through this he beautifully portrayed how we might come to live this in practical terms, unite as a Hindu community, resulting in co-ordination at a national level.

Guruhari Param Pujya Sahebji then gave his blessings and spoke of the need for solidarity within the Hindu community, reminding each individual that before we are affiliated to any sect, we are Hindu first. He praised the generous contributions of philanthropists and spoke of the significance of every single contribution no matter how big or small. He also spoke of the ways in which Hindus may work together, calling on retired professionals to help younger generations. Commending the great work of those present, he urged them to take the call further and work for a united Hindu effort, of which the Aum crematorium marks the first united purpose.

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Anoopam Mission is a registered charity with the object of advancement of the Hindu faith and in particular the Shri Akshar Purushottam philosophy, within the Swaminarayan Sampradaya.