



Shefali Razdan Duggal

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Indian-Americans ask Hagel to allow Sikhs to serve in US army

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US secretary of defense Chuck Hagel

WASHINGTON: Sixteen influential Indian-Americans from across the country have asked US secretary of defense Chuck Hagel to allow Sikhs to serve in the armed forces with their religious faith intact.

"As entrepreneurs and community members dedicated to advancing issues important to the Indian-American community and strengthening ties between the US and India, we respectfully request that the US department of defense modernize its appearance regulations so that Sikh-Americans can presumptively serve in our nation's military while maintaining their articles of faith," 16 Indian-Americans wrote in a letter

to Hagel.

According to the copy of the letter dated April 25, which was provided to PTI today, the Indian Americans — all of whom are major fund raisers and wield considerable influence in the nation's political circle — praised the recent efforts of 105 bipartisan members of the US House of Representatives, who recently had also sent a letter to Hagel expressing their support for Sikh-Americans in the US armed forces.

That letter was led by Congressman, Joseph Crowley, who co-chairs the Congressional Caucus on India and Indian-Americans, and Rodney Frelinghuysen, who chairs the defense appropriations subcommittee.

"The importance of this issue to the Indian-American community is underscored by the fact that the government of India issued a statement supporting the effort. As you know, our Nato allies already permit Sikhs to serve," the letter said, which was signed by Shekhar Narasimhan, Ranvir Trehan, Shefali Razdan Duggal, Rajeev Sharma, Parag and Usha Saxena, Reshma Saujani, Frank Ismail, Raj Goyle, Anju Bhargava.

Among other signatories to the letter are — M R Rangaswami, Mahinder Tak, Sunita Leeds, Aneesh Chopra, Vinod K Shah and Parag V Mehta.

"We wanted our Sikh-American brothers and sisters to know that, at the very least, the Indian-American community stands with them and while it may be seen as symbolic, their cause is our cause," Narasimhan said.

In the letter, the Indian-Americans said for more than a century, immigrants from India have strengthened and enriched America, even after overcoming obstacles.

"As Americans, we must collectively ensure that our institutions uphold the values on which our great nation was founded," the letter said.

"In 1948, President Harry Truman declared "that there shall be equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the armed services without regard to race, color, religion, or national origin.

"On behalf of the undersigned 16 Indian-Americans from all over the country, we strongly urge you to make this promise real for Sikh-Americans who wish to serve in the US armed forces," the letter said.

Earlier, 15 influential Senators have asked Hagel to allow Sikhs to serve in the armed forces with their religious faith intact.