

Turban wasn't welcome in cowboy bar

Getting called 'stupid Pakis' by swearing customers prompted hasty exit

CLUBS

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But the buddies decided to leave about 15 minutes later when other customers made a comment about Sandhu's turban. "They swore at us. He said: 'what is that... thing on his head?' and they started laughing," Khan says. "When we walked by, they said: 'stupid Pakis.'"

The incident left him shaken. "I'm the kind of person who can adapt to anything, but that day it kind of felt strange walking into a place where you are not appreciated to be in. I haven't felt that way in a long time."

It was the friends' first and last time inside Esmeralda's, where cowboy hats rule and couples twirl and trot on the dance floor as though they're in a country music video.

On the night two *Journal* reporters went to the club, there were about four visible minorities in the packed room; a black, a Chinese and two Lebanese men. The rest of the crowd were white.

Assistant manager Sam Ichday says he was "very surprised" to hear of such an incident at the bar.

"The majority of our staff is a different race and our clientele can range from colored to different races of Italian and Spanish," says Ichday, who is Italian.

Esmeralda's manager Tom Meckenhauer says the problem lies with some of the new patrons coming from rural areas, mostly new students attending NAIT and Grant MacEwan.

"Some of them in reality have not even seen a traffic light before," Meckenhauer says. "To see an East Indian, that might be something they've seen in a picture or they might be bitter because they wear a turban as an RCMP now. Who knows what they are."

Khan, Naveed and Kulbir say they've tried to go to the club twice in the past and were denied entry. The second time, for no apparent reason, police were called.

Meckenhauer says the only time they refuse entry to someone is if the bar is full or if the person is too intoxicated.

"Everyone's money is good to us."

He conceded that country bars are more conservative than other establishments. "Our biggest problem is with cowboys, to be honest with you. They've got their redneck mentality: it's their woman because they looked at her so you can't."

Three months ago, on Naveed's 18th birthday, the group got together with other friends, men and women, and went to Chase. Two of the group, including Johnny, were wearing turbans.

"We were in front of the doors, looking in," Johnny recalls. "We weren't even in the lineup. One of the bouncers said 'what's with the turbans here? I don't think we'll let that happen.'"

When their turn came, they were told they couldn't come in because of trouble the club had in the past with men in turbans. "We just left," Johnny says. "It pretty much ruined the night for all of us."

They were told if they took the headgear off, they would be allowed in. That doesn't make sense, Johnny says.

"If he's wearing a turban, he's the same person. He could be a violent person, even if he takes the turban off."



Shaughn Butts, *The Journal*

Nightclub operators insist they don't discriminate against minorities; patrons have their doubts

THE RECORD: RACE RELATIONS & BARS

■ **April 1995:** Leanne Iglesias, 24, and her husband Clarence, 25, are turned away from the Rebar nightclub on Whyte Avenue. A bouncer tells them the club isn't letting in any more Asians because some Filipino customers had caused trouble earlier that month.

■ **April 13, 1995:** Two drunk males hurl racial slurs at a group of natives in the Transylvania Burger Restaurant, 9440 118th Ave. Two undercover police officers mistaken for friends of the two men are attacked by the group of natives.

■ **Aug. 22, 1995:** Randy Rakic, 21, is stabbed to death outside the South Side Club Malibu. Rakic got into a fight with another man after he had a dispute with the man's girlfriend. Rakic's longtime friend Ken James believes the fight was part of mounting racial tension between young Asians and Caucasians.

■ **July 1, 1995:** Edmonton Trapper catcher Mike Maksudian, 29, is stabbed in the chest after some men directed racial remarks at teammate Jim Bowie. The incident occurred at Chase Nightclub, 10060 Jasper Ave.

■ **May 26, 1996:** Kasadaya Sasorith, 21, is fatally stabbed outside the downtown Club Rio during a brawl that involved 20 people. The melee starts inside the club and spills on to Jasper Avenue. A 19-year-old is admitted to hospital with stab wounds and five others — ranging in age from 16 to 22 — are treated for cuts and bruises.

■ **Aug. 23, 1996:** Mandeep Singh Kakar, 21, is turned away from Chase Nightclub. He is told he can't enter unless he removes his turban. Chase manager Brian Long says men wearing turbans are banned because Sikh youths started fights involving 30 to 40 men in April 1996. "It's almost like guys wearing gang colors," Long says of the turbans.

WHAT WE SAW

The *Journal* accompanied members of visible minorities to the following nightclubs. Here's what the two reporters, both Caucasian, observed:

□ **Rebar:** A bouncer thoroughly checks the identification of three young Asian men, has them empty their pockets, runs metal detector up and down their bodies and enforces a cover charge. While this is going on, several Caucasians pass right on through with no security check and no cover charge.

□ **Club Malibu:** Only one Asian of the four in the group is asked to present identification.

□ **Chase Nightclub:** *Journal* reporters standing at the end of a line made up of at least 15 visible-minority people are given a "special invite" into the club and do not have to pay a cover charge. The rest of the line, all of whom are dark-skinned, are kept waiting 50 minutes before entering. They are asked to pay the \$5 cover charge.

□ **Senor Frogs:** The group is at the end of an estimated hour-long lineup, but a bouncer at the door says for a fee of \$10 per person, our group will get in right away. A reporter is told there's no cover charge for patrons 21 and over.

Barry T's, a large nightclub on Calgary Trail, a 23-year-old black man was asked to produce identification. When all he could show was a U of A student card, which didn't show his age, he was told he couldn't come in.

Pat, a Filipino, and his white girlfriend turned some heads when they went on the dance floor at Barry T's.

"I just happened to look around and some guys gave me the evil

RIGHTS' RULES

Most nightclubs are privately owned businesses, but they're also public gathering places.

Under human rights legislation, they're considered a public service provider. This means they cannot discriminate on the basis of:

- gender
- race/color
- physical disability
- age
- ancestry
- marital status
- religious beliefs
- mental disabilities
- source of income

floor portion of the club. One woman on the dance floor had a thick chain linking a collar around her neck and a leather belt on her waist.

The upstairs portion is more mainstream. The university-styled crowd consisted of young couples and groups of friends dressed in jeans and T-shirts.

Joe also noticed his group, including Charmaine, was drawing stares on the upper floor.

"They stopped playing pool, looked up, put their cues down and turned their face and watched us walk by. There was a guy at the bar just staring at us. What's to look at? It's crazy how they just stared."

Gary, Pat and Joe were also subjected to a security check at Rebar. All three were scanned for weapons with a hand-held metal detector and both Pat and Gary had their pockets searched. Other patrons wearing leather jackets, chains, and tattoos didn't appear to have to go through the same drill.

IDs were also scrutinized closely. Bouncers at Rebar took Joe's driver's licence and scratched the surface to see if it was fake. Pat had to remove his from his wallet, so the bouncer could take it apart.

When the group headed to Chase Nightclub, everyone stood in line. But within a minute, the two *Journal* reporters, both of whom are white, were approached by a

Clubs urged not to bar minorities

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Nightclubs should be extra vigilant not to unfairly exclude visible minorities by lumping them in with known trouble-makers of the same race, says a director of the Alberta Civil Liberties Association.

Shirish Chotalia, an Edmonton human rights lawyer, says nightclubs can influence the broader public opinion in a multicultural society.

"Certainly nightclubs can exclude people who are causing a problem, but in using that reasonable provision, they have to take care to make sure they are not discriminating" based on stereotypes, Chotalia says. "Not only is it the legal thing to do, but it's the best thing for Edmonton."

Dan Pahl, a lawyer who represents several Edmonton nightclubs, calls nightclub admittance a "very difficult enforcement issue" where the methods are imperfect and mistakes are made.

Pahl says he knows of at least one case in which a black man was refused entry to a nightclub because employees believed he was part of a group previously involved in a large fight.

"Somebody thought he was a trouble-maker ... my guess is he probably wasn't."

If there's a fight involving 50 or more people, employees can't always identify everyone in the offending group, Pahl says. To be on the safe side, they exclude anyone who may have been involved.

"It was a judgment call on the part of the club to keep the situation from arising again when the passions weren't yet cooled."

"It becomes really a practical decision on a day-to-day basis."

There were blacks who were being allowed inside, Pahl says. It was not a blanket policy to exclude a certain race.

Pahl says he knows of no nightclub which has, even temporarily, excluded all members of a certain race.

Chotalia says a club should be able to identify trouble-makers individually or not at all.

"The law will not tolerate haphazard stereotypical attempts to identify a person on the provision they have to keep a safe premise."

Charlach MacKintosh, head of the Alberta Human Rights Commission, says racial discrimination by bars is not a widespread problem. The average is four or five complaints per year.

"I think the whole province is striving for recognition and acceptance by all Albertans. We are a diverse racial culture mix here. Things are getting better."

line for 50 minutes before they were let in. They also had to pay a \$5 cover charge.

Chase general manager Brian Long says the club's invitations aren't related to a customer's race.

The club targets professionals 23 years and older. Anyone who fits those criteria will be invited in ahead of younger and less