

Sikh volunteers out to serve food to bushfire affected communities in East Gippsland

A team of volunteers from Melbourne is camping in the bushfire affected area to serve food to the people evacuated due to raging bushfires that have caused significant property losses in the East Gippsland area.



Sikh Volunteers Australia in Bairnsdale on Monday night

SHAMSHER KAINTH, SBS NEWS, 31 DECEMBER

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When most people in Australia are gearing up for the New Year Eve celebrations, a team of volunteers from Melbourne is busy preparing meals for people evacuated from bushfire affected areas of East Gippsland.

Manpreet Singh of the Sikh Volunteers Australia, a Melbourne-based non-profit organization, said he heard the news about evacuation orders in areas in East Gippsland on Monday afternoon.



Sikh Volunteers Australia team in Bairnsdale on Monday night.

“As soon as we came to know about this, we started preparing meals, loaded all the food on our van we drove to Bairnsdale oval where many evacuees had been sheltered,” Mr Singh told **SBS Punjabi**.

Mr Singh said he and three other volunteers served hot vegetarian food to the people until 1:30 am Tuesday.

A local Indian restaurant offered its kitchen for preparing meals, saving the Mr Singh and his team trips back to Melbourne.

“They saw us were serving free food and two local Punjabis from Bairnsdale offered to give us a hand before Desi Grill offered their kitchen for cooking the food. Otherwise, we’d have done this in Melbourne and brought it here,” Mr Singh said.

While the emergency services battle the raging bushfires and the affected communities need food and shelter, Mr Singh says he and other volunteers will continue to serve them fresh food.

“The Indian restaurant has also very kindly offered us accommodation while this situation is at hand and we will be here to do our bit,” he said.

Significant property losses have been reported in the East Gippsland area as the raging fires burnt thousands of hectares of land. At least four people are unaccounted for in the region. Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews said there were “real fears for their safety”.

Thousands of people have been evacuated from Mallacoota as the fire raged on. Many houses are reportedly lost in Sarsfield.

State Emergency Management Commissioner, Andrew Crisp said it’s a “dynamic and dangerous situation” not just for the people but for the emergency workers as well.

“[The fire] put up a column, punching into the atmosphere 14 kilometers high. The columns are generating their own weather, there’s lightning coming out of these columns,” Mr Crisp told a media conference.

“It is unpredictable, it is dangerous out there, and people need to stay tuned to their local conditions and stay across the good information so they can make good decisions.”