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Khalistan Movement

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Why is in news? India lodges protest with Canada over pro-Khalistan posters

The Ministry of External Affairs summoned the High Commissioner of Canada and lodged a protest after campaigners for Khalistan put out posters targeting Indian diplomats in Canada.

The top Canadian diplomat stationed in India was summoned after posters circulated online named two leading Indian diplomats stationed in Canada.

The posters called upon pro-Khalistan sympathisers to assemble in Toronto on July 8 in protest against the killing of a leading campaigner for Khalistan, Hardeep Singh Nijjar.

The poster that carried the words **"Kill India"** also displayed the photographs of Indian High Commissioner Sanjay Kumar Verma and Consul-General in Toronto Apoorva Srivastava and the words "Faces of Shaheed Nijjar's Killers in Toronto".

Khalistan Movement:

It is a **Sikh separatist movement** seeking to **create a homeland for Sikhs** by establishing a sovereign state, called Khalistan (**'Land of the Khalsa'**), in the Punjab region.

Its origins have been **traced back to India's independence and subsequent Partition** along religious lines.

The **Punjab province, which was divided between India and Pakistan**, witnessed communal violence and generated millions of refugees.

The **historic Sikh Empire's capital, Lahore, as well as sacred Sikh sites** like Nankana Sahib, the birthplace of Guru Nanak, **went to Pakistan**.

While most Sikhs found themselves in India, they were a small minority (2% of the population) in the country.

The political struggle for greater autonomy began with the **Punjabi Suba Movement** for the **creation of a Punjabi-speaking state**.

The **States Reorganisation Commission report (1955) rejected this demand**, but the state of Punjab was reorganised (trifurcated into the Hindi-Hindu-majority HP and Haryana, and Punjabi-Sikh-majority Punjab) in 1966.

The **Punjabi Suba movement** had galvanised the Akali Dal, which concluded the **Anandpur Sahib Resolution (1973) demanding autonomy (not secession from India)** for the state of Punjab.

This demand had **gone global by 1971** – when an advertisement in The New York Times proclaimed the birth of Khalistan.

By the 1980s, the appeal of **Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale** had started creating trouble for the government.

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He and his followers (mostly from the lower rungs of the social ladder) were getting increasingly violent.

In 1982, with support from the Akali Dal's leadership, he launched a civil disobedience movement called the **Dharam Yudh Morcha** and took up residence inside the Golden Temple, directing demonstrations and clashes with the police.



Operation Blue Star:

The Khalistan movement was crushed in India following **Operation Blue Star** (by the Indian Army to flush out militants from the Golden Temple and neutralise Bhindranwale in 1984) and **Operation Black Thunder** (1986 and 1988).

The operation was ordered by the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, primarily to take control of the **Harmandir Sahib Complex in Amritsar** (popularly known as the Golden Temple).

The Indian military entered into the premises of the temple to drive out the **Sikh extremist religious leader, Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale** and his armed followers.

The operation had two components to it, **Operation Metal** which was the invasion on the temple complex and **Operation Shop** which was confined to the countryside of the state.

This Operation **helped in eliminating Khalistani terrorism**.

While the operations were ostensibly successful in their aims, they gravely wounded (by the desecration of the Golden Temple) the Sikh community around the world and also galvanised the demand for Khalistan.

Aftermath of the Operation Blue Star:

PM Indira Gandhi was assassinated (on October 31, 1984), triggering the worst communal violence since Partition.

Punjab became the hub of a long drawn-out insurgency (allegedly supported by Pakistan) that **lasted till 1995**.

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The movement continues to evoke sympathy and support among sections of the Sikh population, especially in the Sikh diaspora.

Today, the movement is fuelled by vote bank politics, social issues (unemployment, drug menace in Punjab), dissatisfaction among the Sikh diaspora and support from non-state actors.

Status of the Khalistan movement today:

Punjab has **long been peaceful, but the movement lives among some Sikh communities overseas.**

The diaspora is composed predominantly of people who don't want to live in India.

The **deep rooted anger over Operation Blue Star** and the desecration of the Golden Temple **continues to resonate** with some in the newer generations of Sikhs.

However, even as Bhindranwale is viewed as a martyr by many and the 1980s remembered as dark times, this has not manifested into tangible political support for the Khalistan cause.

There is a **small minority that is clinging to the past**, and that small minority remains significant not because of popular support, but rather because they are trying to keep up their political influence with various political parties both from the left and the right.