

V A N C O U V E R

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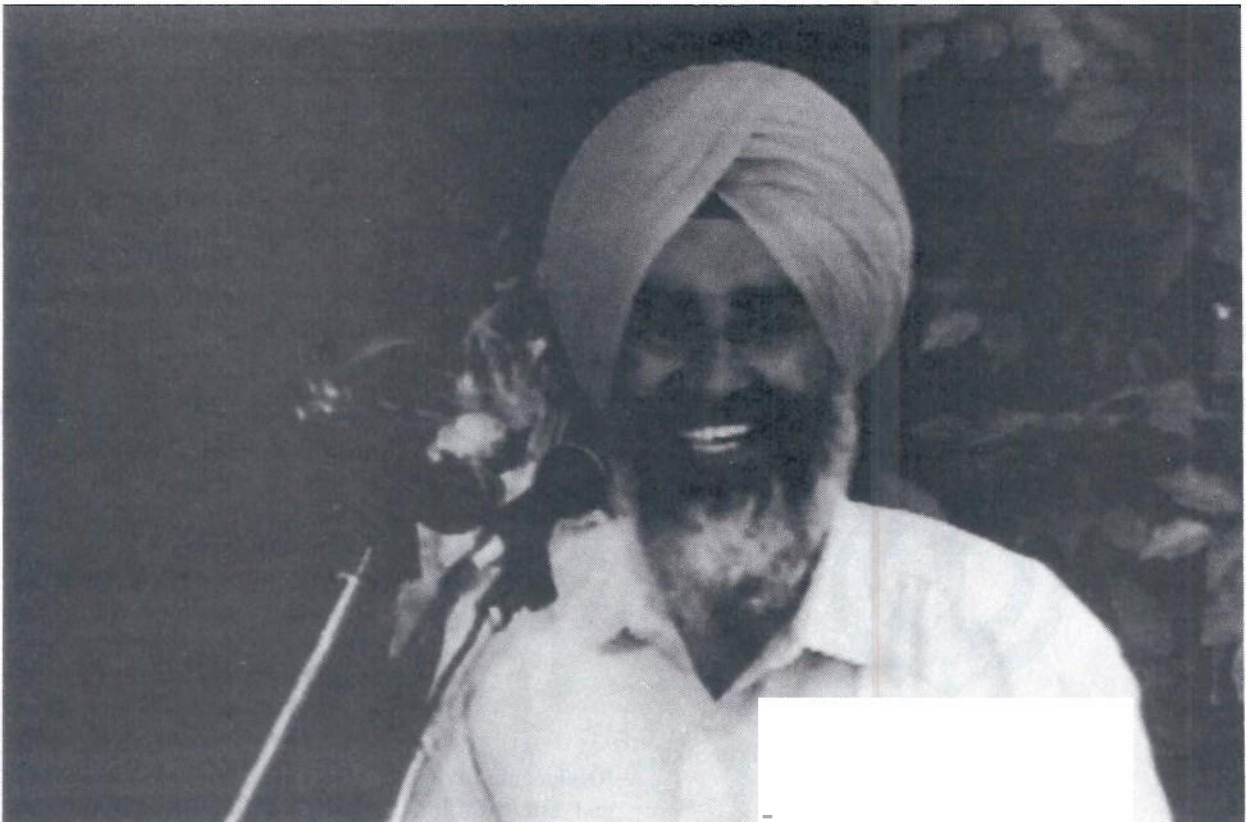
The

# SWORD

WORLD SIKH JOURNAL

VOLUME 18

SPRING 1996



*Mr. Jaswant Singh Khalra, Human Rights activist of Punjab*

*He was abducted by India's police on September 6, 1995 and has not been seen or heard from since.*

In This Issue...

- Is seeking Human Rights a crime? Why is Mr. Khalra Still in Unlawful Custody ?
- Lest we Forget - the Lessons of 1984.
- The Path to Sikh Nationhood.

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The SWORD is an official publication of the World Sikh Organization.

The objective of this publication is to promote understanding, tolerance and mutual respect in our society by highlighting social, religious and historical values and the sanctity of human rights at the national and international levels.

The articles included in this publication reflect the view points of the author and not necessarily, the views or objects of the World Sikh Organization.

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# Human Rights for Sikhs in India

## ..... a plea for Canada's Help

Mr. Jaswant Singh Khalsa

General Secretary, Human Rights Wing, Shiromani Akali Dal

*Text of an address delivered by Mr. Jaswant Singh Khalsa. General Secretary, Human Rights on June 06, 1995. in the House of Commons building. Ottawa, at a special gathering of Canadian parliamentarians. members of international diplomatic community, representatives of the government of Canada. and Sikh Canadians. to mark the occasion of India's military attack on the Sikhs.. holiest - Golden Temple complex and other historical Gurdwaras, in June 1984.)*

Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa,  
Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh!

First of all, on behalf of the Sikhs in Punjab, India, I thank all members of the parliament who have written a strong letter to the Indian government to withdraw the TADA And I hope that the people of Canada, the members of the government and the parliament will help us to protect the human rights which have been violated by the Indian government there.

One thing which is good experience for me, and I want to share with you is that *when I entered, I had no hope that I could carry the Kirpan through the complex, and I was happy when my host told me, yes, you can carry Kirpan in the Canadian parliament com-*

*plex.*

In India, when our leader Simranjit Singh Mann was elected to the parliament, with the record votes, he was refused entry into Indian parliament with Kirpan. And it is a shameful thing for India. We are so sorry that in our country, which we consider to be that, we do not have the freedom to carry our religious symbol. And the point is that *in the 400 pages of Indian constitution there is one single line which relates to the Sikhs, and that line is, that the Sikh can wear and carry the Kirpan. Only that is in the Indian constitution. And when Simranjit Singh Mann was going to the parliament he was denied access because he was carrying the Kirpan. So those are the positions.*

Now I come to the real commemoration of the day. I will tell you the story that I personally went to enter the Golden Temple on the day to commemorate June 1984 martyrdom day when the Indian government and the Indian army destroyed our religious Akal Takhat Sahib. But I was arrested five times with others, and there is no permission for Sikhs to commemorate this day in the Golden Temple. This is the position in Golden

Temple after the 1984 attack. We have to enter the Golden Temple after full body search. So our Golden Temple is in the hands of security forces, and our right to religion and our right to enter our main centre of religion, the Golden Temple, is denied to us by India.

*We want that if you can't help us in our political goal, please help us in our human rights as our basic human rights are denied. The Sikhs consider that the basic right to religion is denied to us. So this is the position that we cannot commemorate the day in Golden Temple and this is the first time after the 1984 attack that I am commemorating this day and that is the place which is not in India.*

So I want to share some other things about human rights, because U.N. human rights charter has given some Universal human rights to every human being in the world. But in India, we have been denied basic human rights which I explained to you that right to religion have been denied and the second main human right denied is that we cannot express our feelings and I have an example of our leader Simranjit Singh Mann, who was detained because he addressed

a gathering that we want freedom and he was detained under the TADA act. So the right of expression has also been denied. There are some other rights denied also.

The right to association. *There is a new act in the Indian parliament, the peoples' representation act in which we are forbidden to make an association based on our religion. The discrimination is based on religion and we are only discriminated against because we are Sikhs. We are forbidden only because we are Sikhs.* So we are forbidden to make a political party to appeal that there is a religious discrimination and in elections they can ban us and the Akali Party and any party based on religion. So this is the violation of the human right of association.

I will tell you the real cause for this. As you know there are many nationalities in India who want self determination for themselves. And in the name of unity and integrity of India, they impose such acts and detain people for such demands. As you know that after 1947 two Christian states, i.e. Nagaland and Mizoram, they were crushed by armed forces in the name of unity and integrity. Now they are crushing Kashmir and Punjab. So we appeal to the International community that you press the Indian government that the right to self determination should be incorporated in the constitution, so that the people who

want the right to self determination should not be called secessionist and they should not be arrested under the TADA act. And you should ask the Indian government to incorporate the act of self determination in the Indian constitution.

There is a right to leave the country which is not guaranteed to us. As the Sikh people from abroad like to enter the country to visit the Golden Temple and we in India like to visit the birth place of our founder which is in Pakistan, and we have no right to leave the country to enter Pakistan. So we want that all the Sikhs living abroad should have the right to enter India freely and we the Sikhs living in India should have the right to leave the country to go to Pakistan to visit the birth place of our founder which is Nankana Sahib. So these are the fundamental human rights which we want and you should press the Indian government for this.

The last case is this. Because I work for the human rights organization in Punjab, *in the last few years, thousands of our young people were picked up by police and then stated to us that they had disappeared. When we went to the police they told us that they went to western countries. But we know that these people were killed in false encounters by police. By investigating, we found out that in the municipality cremation grounds of the city, about twenty*

*five thousand bodies were cremated by police as unidentified and unclaimed. These were the bodies of the persons those who (were said to have) disappeared by these security forces. We put our record to the press and to the judiciary that these are the bodies of (people apprehended by police, later killed and cremated as..) unidentified bodies, and we have no justice. We went to the High court and our application was refused that this is not the public litigation. Then we went to Supreme court and we were also told that there is a national human rights commission of India.*

We went to Mr. Mishra, the chairman, he said that he is helpless because there is another human rights commission in Punjab and "I cannot look into the Punjab case". So this is the position. The Indian government claims that there are human rights commissions and judiciary, but when Sikhs go, there is no commission, and no judiciary for them, due to the unity and integrity of the country. So we are denied every basic human right and even in this case we want that the Indian government and the judiciary should at least show us the photos of the dead bodies because their families want to know if their loved ones are dead or alive in custody. But when we demand the death certificates, we are denied. So, we want your help.

This Indian government calls it-

self secular and peaceful. We want our human rights, and we are called communal, violent and terrorists. The country which fought with all its neighbors Pakistan, Bangladesh, China, claims to be non violent. But the Sikhs, who sacrificed for the same country, they are branded as terrorists. This is the tragedy. But I hope that the Canadian people, the Canadian parliament, and the Canadian government, will look into this and help us to get our human rights and to help us to live with dignity.

I am very thankful to all of you and hope that you will help us. / *want to share a personal thing. My family was deported from Canada in Kamagatamaru ship but I was happy when last time I visited Canada I was assured that Canadian people are behind us.* The Sikh community and I consider that my previous impression was real. Now I am very happy and pleased to visit here and meet your people and I hope you will help us to protect our human rights.

Thank you very much. ■

*Soon after presenting the above address to Canada's esteemed parliamentarians, Mr. Khalra returned to Punjab to continue with his work in support of human rights for the religious minorities. On September 6, 1995, he was kidnapped from outside his home by India's police personnel and has not been seen or heard from since then.*

## Highest Court Backs Turbans for RCMP

### Challengers Look For Political Allies to Reverse This

The Supreme Court of Canada has decided once and for all that when Mountie Baltej Singh Dhillon stands on guard for his country, he can do so wearing a turban.

The Supreme Court announced on 15th February 1996, that it will not hear a challenge of a lower court decision that allows Sikh RCMP officers to wear turbans instead of the stetson, the Mounties' traditional headwear.

The ruling ends a six-year legal battle waged by three former Mounties from Alberta. They argued that allowing turbans violates the RCMP's longstanding pledge to be non-religious and neutral while in uniform.

Despite the highest court's ruling, the disgruntled retired Mounties have hinted they are not giving up. Commenting on this ruling, Ken Riley, of Lethbridge, Alberta, one of the challengers, was quoted as saying, "we're disappointed with the ruling, naturally, but I wouldn't say this is over. We can still seek changes legislatively, through political avenues."

Riley and others opposed to the decision of the RCMP to amend the dress code, gathered more than 200,000 signatures on a petition, then went to court.

They lost their case at Federal Court, the Federal Court of Appeal, and now the highest court in the land.

RCMP spokesperson Sgt. Andre Guertin hoped that the Supreme Court decision will put the matter to rest.

Dhillon, 28, is one of the two Sikhs in the RCMP who wear turbans. He lauds the force for respecting Canada's multicultural face. ■

" ..... *conscience is the inner voice that warns us somebody may be looking.*"

# URGENT ACTION

EXTERNAL

AI Index: ASA 20/26/95

UA213/95

**Fear of "disappearance" / Fear of torture**

7 September 1995

**INDIA**

**Jaswant Singh Khalra, human rights activist**

Jaswant Singh Khalra, general Secretary of the Human Rights Wing of the Akali Dal political party, has not been seen since 9:15 am on 6 September 1995, when he was arrested by police while washing his car outside his home in Kabir Park, Amritsar. He has not been produced before a magistrate and his relatives have not officially been informed of his whereabouts. Amnesty International is extremely concerned for his safety.

In January 1995, the Human Rights Wing of Akali Dal filed a petition in the Punjab and Haryana High Court concerning the deaths of hundreds of unidentified individuals. The Human Rights Wing produced records from cremation grounds in Amritsar district, showing how several hundred "unclaimed" bodies been cremated during 1992 and alleged that many of these were individuals who had "disappeared" following their arrest by Punjab Police and whose fate was unknown (see background below). The court dismissed the petition on the grounds that the families of the "disappeared" individuals should themselves file petitions.

Shortly after the filing of this petition Jaswant Singh Khalra was reportedly threatened by a member of the Punjab Police who stated that it "was easy to make one more "disappear".

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Amnesty International regularly receives reports that alleged members or sympathizers of armed opposition groups, or their relatives, in Punjab have "disappeared" or been killed in police custody, often after torture. Officials later wrongly attribute their deaths or "disappearance" to "encounters" between militants and the police, to "escapes" during such an "encounters" or to other improbable causes. Amnesty International has also received reports of several lawyers being arrested and illegally held by police in the past.

In July 1995, Amnesty International wrote to the Chief Minister of Punjab and the Minister for Home Affairs, Mr. Chavan, calling on the government to order an impartial and independent investigation into recent reports of emerging new evidence (including the petition filed by the Human Rights Wing of the Akali Dal in January 1995) about the fate of hundreds of people who "disappearances" in Punjab between 1991 and 1993. To date, no response has been received from the government.

Even though legal safeguards against unacknowledged detention exist in India's ordinary criminal law and procedural code, they are often simply not adhered to, and prisoners are held in unacknowledged detention for weeks and sometimes months. In cases of unacknowledged detention or "disappearances" brought before the courts in Punjab, legal proceedings are extremely slow and police often fail to comply with the orders of the court.

Spring 1996

The SWORD



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EXTERNAL

AI Index: ASA20/35/95

## UPDATE

16 November 1995

Further information on UA 213/95 (ASA 20/26/95, 7 September 1995) and follow-up (ASA 20/27/95, 21 September)  
- Fear of "Disappearance"/Fear of Torture

### **INDIA: Jaswant Singh Khalsa, human rights activist**

On 15 November 1995, the Supreme Court of India ordered the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to investigate the "disappearance" of Jaswant Singh Khalsa. The order followed persistent denials by police officials that Jaswant Singh Khalsa was taken into custody on 6 September. The CBI has been ordered to report to the Supreme Court within three months. The Supreme Court also ordered the transfer of the Superintendent of Police, Tarn Taran, who is alleged to have been involved in the abduction of Mr. Khalsa.

Amnesty International continues to fear for the safety of Jaswant Singh Khalsa.

### **FURTHER RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Please send telegrams/faxes/airmail letters

- welcoming that a CBI inquiry has been ordered into the "disappearance" of Jaswant Singh Khalsa;
- reiterating concern for the safety of Jaswant Singh Khalsa;
- urging the government to ensure that police officials fully cooperate with the inquiry and that it is completed within the three months laid down by the Supreme Court.

### **APPEALS TO:**

Prime Minister, P.V. Narasimha Rao  
Office of the Prime Minister  
Gate No. 6, South Block  
New delhi 110 001, India

Telegrams: Prime Minister, New Delhi, India  
Faxes: + 91 11 301 9817  
Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

Harcharan Singh Brar  
Chief Minister of Punjab  
Office of the Chief Minister  
Raj Bhavan, Chandigarh, Punjab, India

Telegrams: Chief Minister, Chandigarh, India  
Faxes: + 91 172 540 936; + 91 172 545 058  
Salutation: Dear Chief Minister

Spring 1996

The SWORD



Hon. Dan Burton

## on Mr. Khalra's Abduction by the Indian government

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, UNITED STATES OF AMERICA (Sep 13, 1995)

Mr. Speaker, once again the Indian Government has shown its blatant disrespect for basic human rights. On September 6, 1995, Mr. Jaswant Singh Khalra, the general secretary of the Human Rights Wing (Shiromani Akali Dal) was washing his car in front of his house in Amritsar, Punjab, when he was taken away by police in a van. The police have refused to reveal Mr. Khalra's whereabouts. He has not been brought before a magistrate. Amnesty International has expressed fear that he may be tortured.

Mr. Khalra had been instrumental in exposing the fact that 25,000 Sikhs have been cremated in Punjab, Khalistan, and then listed as unidentified while their families continue to await any word about them. Some of my colleagues and I have brought these cremations to the attention of this house previously. They are being done to destroy evidence of a campaign of extrajudicial killings in Punjab.

The superintendent of police in the Tarn Taran district of Punjab, Khalistan, has been quoted as saying, "we have made 25,000 disappear. It is easy to make one more disappear." According to Amnesty International, this threat was made shortly after Mr. Khalra filed a petition in court on behalf of the cremated Sikhs. This is not an idle threat. The Indian regime is quite capable of making Mr. Khalra disappear without a trace.

Mr. Khalra's "disappearance" appears to be part of a pattern of increased repression instituted by the Indian Government in the wake of the assassination of Punjab Chief Minister Beant Singh. According to newspaper reports and

Sikh leader Simranjit Singh Mann, who has himself been a victim of the regime's repression, both the central government and the state government of Punjab have resorted to mass arrests in the wake of the assassination. But Mr. Mann warned that this repression will be counterproductive, and he is correct. Another wave of massive human rights violations against the Sikh people will only produce more suffering and more hatred.

Amnesty International has issued an urgent action bulletin seeking an independent and impartial inquiry to establish Mr. Khalra's whereabouts and assurances that, if in police custody, he be allowed immediate access to lawyers and relatives and be promptly brought before a magistrate. If India is the democracy it claims to be, these actions are the least the regime can do.

**Since 1984, the Indian regime has reportedly killed more than 120,000 Sikhs. In addition, the regime has killed over 150,000 Christians in Nagaland since 1947, over 43,000 Kashmiri Muslims since 1988, tens of thousands of Assamese, Manipuris, and others, and thousands of Dalits, or black untouchables.** The State Department reported in its country report for 1994 that between 1991 and 1993, the regime paid over 41,000 cash bounties to police officers for killing Sikhs. Mr. Khalra's disappearance is part of a pattern of repression that belies India's claim to be a democracy.

In the face of this **kind** of repression, leaders of the Sikh Nation declared independence on October 7, 1987, claiming

a separate, sovereign country of Khalistan. India's brutal occupation of Khalistan has only led to continued bloodshed and repression. That serves nobody's interest. Mr. Khalra's disappearance demonstrates yet again that the Indian Government has not done anything to bring the human rights abuses to a stop. **Only when the repression and bloodshed end can peace, prosperity, and stability be restored to the Indian subcontinent.** I urge the Indian regime to release Jaswant Singh Khalra and all other political prisoners.



*Mr. Dan Burton has been a strong and vocal supporter of Sikh rights, freedoms and liberties. He has been very influential in making other leaders in the United States aware of the ugly realities existing in India.*

*He has been equally strong supporter of Kashmiris' struggle for their right to self determination. We appreciate the efforts made by Hon. Dan Burton in the past and look forward to his continued support.*

# SIKH HUMAN RIGHTS INTERNET

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Patron: LORD AVEBURY

National Director: IQBAL SINGH

General Secretary: ANGELA DIETRICH

## URGENT

8th December 1995

Dear Sir/Madam

I have just received a faxed message from a journalist based in Ludhiana, Punjab, informing me that two young brothers have been picked up by plain-clothes policemen from their home last night, 7th December. The older brother Ram Singh is aged 18 years, and his younger brother Hari Singh is 15 years old. Both are students. They were picked up from their village Kaunke near Jagraon, District Ludhiana.

Their mother Mrs. Gurmail Kaur informed the Press that her sons were picked up from their home in the presence of the family and the members of the village community by about a dozen plain-clothes armed (some with AK-47 automatic weapons) police. They were travelling in Maruti vans. They neither had warrants for their arrest nor did they give any explanation as to why the boys were being arrested nor did they say to where they were being taken.

The boys father, Gurdev Singh Kaunke, was a very popular Sikh activist and was also the ex official of the Sikh political headquarters, the Akal Takht Sahib at Amritsar. He was not involved in any armed struggle but he politically propagated Sikh rights in Punjab. Mr. Gurdev Singh Kaunke was in police custody when, on the night of 31st December 1991, the police claimed that he escaped from their custody and since that date, he has "disappeared". Amnesty International has been involved in the campaign to determine his whereabouts.

I spoke with the journalist who has sent me this information and he has informed me that Mrs. Gurmail Kaur is participating actively in social and community projects and is gaining popularity and support from the masses in her area and because of her husband's image and popularity with the Sikh people, the Indian State may be getting concerned with her rising status. This could be an attempt to intimidate and pressurise her to contain her activities.

SHRI is gravely concerned about the safety of the two brothers and urgently request you to take urgent steps to intervene for the safety and release of Ram Singh and Hari Singh.

Thanking you kindly

Yours sincerely

IQBAL SINGH

*Sikh Human Rights Internet is an independent voluntary organization working for the release of all prisoners of conscience, fair and prompt trials for political prisoners. an end to torture and executions. promotion and protection of a healthy environment, Rights of Women and Children and the peoples right of selfdetermination Affiliated to Amnesty International and National Council for Civil Liberties.*

Spring 1996

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# India's Ambassador to the U.S. Joins Indian Cover Up of Khalra's Abduction

AMBASSADOR OF INDIA  
2107 MASSACHUSETTS AVE. N.W.  
WASHINGTON, D.C.  
September 19, 1995

Dear Congressman Fazio,

Thankyou for your letter of September 12 regarding Mr. Jaswant Singh Khalra, general Secretary of the human rights wing of the Shiromani Akali Dal. Based on the information received from the concerned agencies in India, it appears that Mr. Khalra has been kidnapped by a group of individuals masquerading as policemen. The local police in Amritsar have registered a case of kidnapping and have circulated Mr. Khalra's description to all Police Districts and are actively pursuing the investigation to locate him. The details provided by local police authorities in this regard are enclosed.

I have been separetely informed that even while these investigations are underway, a petition for Habeas Corpus has beenfiledin the Indian Supreme Court in New Delhi. In response, the Supreme Court has asked the Home Secretary and the Director-General of Police, Punjab, for facts within a stipulated time frame. As such, the matter is now sub-judice.

I am concerned that an incident of this nature has occured soon after Mr. Khalra met your Foreign Affairs Aide in what was otherwise a useful interaction. I will continue to follow up on this issue and keep you informed of further developments as I receive more information.

As usual, I lookforward to working with you on issues of mutual interest. Please do not hesitate to contact me or my office if we can be of any assistance.

Yours sincerely,

Sd/-  
(Siddhartha Shankar Ray)

The Honourable Vic Fazio  
U.S. House of Representatives  
2113 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

*As reported elsewhere in this issue, India's CBI has submitted an interim report to the supreme court, that showed prima facie evidence that Mr. Khalra was indeed abducted by state and police officials. We urge our readers to write to The Honourable Vic Fazio, and Mr. S.S. Ray, to ensure the safety and well being of Mr. Jaswant Singh Khalra, whose whereabouts are still being kept secret by the government of India.*

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# INDIA - THE FACTS

The Indian government Constitution allows the government to suspend the rights of civilians at any time. This is in total violation of International Covenants to which India is a signatory.

Legislation can be passed through Indian parliament with the agreement of only two members out of the 542 members. Yet India still claims to be a functioning democracy.

Orders have been repeatedly issued from officials that require the "censorship of Postal articles" and any other messages issued to specific individuals, groups, human rights activists, lawyers, journalists, any political party members. These communications must be "detained and forwarded to the Deputy Superintendent of Police" (Copy of order issued by Home Secretary, Chandigarh Administration, 05/25/94) indefinitely.

There is substantial documentation of judicial corruption. In addition, Commissions and other supposedly impartial bodies instituted to address human rights concerns are not given either broad responsibility or powers and are not accountable or transparent. The judiciary, government and police have been proven to ignore petitions and court orders.

*Many of the victims of "disappearances" turn up in police controlled cremation grounds and are reported as 'unclaimed' bodies, or the bodies of 'People killed in 'encounters'. In addition, many of these bodies are of the 'People killed in police custody, and who were believed to have "disappeared". Large cremation grounds such as these are spread throughout India.*

Bounties are offered to police personnel

for elimination of human rights activists, journalists, and members of opposition political parties, throughout India. *"Over 41,000 cash bounties were paid to police in Punjab for extrajudicial killings of Sikhs between 1991 and 1993" (US State Department Report).*

Witnesses to disappearances engineered by the police officials are also harassed and threatened. Authorities have failed, in almost all cases, to account publicly for the fate of these innocent victims, and subsequently the fate of the witnesses.

Since December 1993, the whereabouts of only three people, out of 80 that were reported to Amnesty International as "disappeared" have been clarified by authorities in India.

Sixty-eight cases of deaths in custody were reported to Amnesty International in 1994, an increase of nearly 50% compared to 1993. "Despite positive statements made by the central government, the judiciary and the National Human Rights Commission, *custodial violence, sometimes resulting in death, continues to be widespread phenomenon throughout India*" (India - Deaths in Custody in 1994, Amnesty International, August 1995/ASA 20/18/95).

Amnesty International believes that "virtual impunity enjoyed by many of the perpetrators of torture and ill-treatment in custody is a key factor in the continuation of these practices" (Ibid).

For more information, contact WSO (Canada) head office in Ottawa.  
Ph.# (613) 723-20J6, Fax: (613) 723-4290.

## IS INDIA DEMOCRATIC?

While India claims to be the world's largest democracy, there is a need to examine the facts surrounding it.

Division of the sub-continent when the British were relinquishing control in 1947, was entirely due to the intransigence of the Hindu Congress leaders, who did not want to share any governing powers with the Muslims constituting a third of the population at the time.

It would be reasonable to say that the foundations of the present political entity of India were laid on the basis of bigotry, greed and intolerance, and not on secularism as claimed by its leaders.

The Constitution of India does not even acknowledge the existence of the Sikhs. How could the country be democratic, when its constitution demands its Sikh population to proclaim its religion as 'Hindu' for any court functions like registering one's marriage?

Mr. Nehru, and his daughter Mrs Indira Gandhi were the prime ministers until the day they died. Mrs Gandhi's son was the prime minister, and in all probability, would still be, if he was alive today. It is said that Sonia Gandhi, his wife is likely to become the PM. All this looks more like a dynasty rather than a democracy, and the label of 'democracy' is being used as a thin glossy veneer to cover the dynastic rulership practices, for political expediency when dealing with true democracies like the United States and Canada.



# Peace in Punjab ...

## .... Through Power or Persuasion?

*Harpreet Singh Uppal*

*(Text of an address delivered at a WSO banquet on October 28, 1995, at Edmonton)*

Punjab - The Land of Five Rivers and the Sikh Homeland has been up in flames for the past decade and a half.

Even the blood of over two hundred thousand innocent Sikhs has not been able to douse the flames of aggression, oppression and tyranny.

Does aggression or oppression really bring peace, tranquillity, harmony and goodwill? I don't think so!

The most dramatic use of force - Nuclear Force, was at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. What kind of peace did that bring? Do we want that kind of peace - anywhere in this world?

We had the wars in Korea, Vietnam, Lebanon, Iran & Iraq, and more recently in Chechnya, besides the ongoing wars and strife in Bosnia, in Punjab, in Sri-Lanka.

Isn't dialogue the ultimate process of restoration of peace and equity?

Isn't war really a means of acquiring negotiating strength, that the aggressor cannot muster with the force of logical arguments?

So, basically, war or the brutal use of force to stifle the counter-argument, is really, a temporary substitute for reason, logic, justice and equity.

This has been amply demonstrated in case of South Africa. Sustained use of arbitrary powers - legislative, military, propaganda, brainwashing, etc.. could not muzzle, forever, the force of logic, reason and equity.

People in the western world, had all

historical, traditional, cultural, and racial reasons, to continue their support for their cousins in the South African regime based on Apartheid. Yet, to their credit, they overcame all these emotional and historical reasons to support the rights of the Black South African people, to regain their rights, liberties, freedom and dignity.

African National Congress was formed in 1912. It took them almost 80 years, to convince the western nations of the legitimacy of their demands and claims. But to the credit of ANC leaders, they persevered and retained the support of their countrymen, through these very difficult and trying 80 years.

The result - end of Apartheid, end of virtual slavery, end of deprivation and denial of human rights, end of inequality. end of injustice - was definitely worth the 80 years of struggle. Won't you agree?

The Sikh Nation is engaged in a similar struggle for freedom, liberty, and restoration of rights and dignities.

Although it is hard to find agreement on when this struggle started and who started it. but there is no disagreement that at the present time, Sikhs are embroiled in a bitter battle with the government of India on the issue of basic rights and liberties of Sikhs in India as it stands today.

Fundamental points in support of the Sikhs are;

- They are a distinct entity - from the point of view of religion,

language, culture, history, traditions, food habits, and attire.

- They are a Nation - in that all Sikhs are united by commonality of social, economic, cultural, educational, linguistic, and geographic commonality and affinity.
- This distinctiveness is well recognized and respected by all people with an objective viewpoint.
- Sikhs had a distinct territory over which they ruled. The Sikh Raj extended from Afghanistan to Tibet, including whole of Punjab and Kashmir.
- After the death of the Sikh ruler, this territory was annexed by the British, to be governed in Trust.
- At the time of India's independence from the British, this fact was well acknowledged, and the British rulers were prepared to grant full independence to the Sikhs.

The Sikh leaders were lobbied by the leaders of the Muslim Pakistan and predominantly Hindu India. that they should consider joining their countries - as equal partners, instead of opting for an independent small nation, which would be landlocked, and perhaps economically weak.

The leaders of India extended strong assurances to Sikh leaders

that as a part of India, the Sikhs would be free to enjoy all freedoms and liberties, they could expect in an independent country of their own.

No such assurances were offered or negotiations held with leaders from any other province or territory, which became a part of India.

All of the above points prove, not only that the Sikhs are a distinct entity, but a very important fact that the Indian leaders also accepted this fact.

Another set of issues to consider is;

- Sikhs chose to be a part of India, in 1947, at the time of British's relinquishing their rule over the sub-continent.
- The Sikh leaders chose this option, on the basis of promises made by the Indian leaders.
- This became a bilateral agreement between the Sikh Nation and India.
- In the ensuing period, Indian leaders chose to renege on the promises made to the Sikhs.
- Sikh leaders and the people, tried every available peaceful, political, and diplomatic option to secure the basic rights and freedoms for their people, within the existing political framework - but they were unsuccessful.
- As a last resort, they felt compelled to issue a call for an opportunity for exercising the *Right to Self Determination* by the Sikhs.

The government of India, fully aware of its own deceitful actions in the past

and realizing that it had not lived up to its obligations in the bilateral agreement with the Sikhs, was not prepared to accept the inevitable verdict of the people.

Instead of finding courage to accept the people's verdict, or to start making amends for the past lapses - which would have been an excellent move in the right direction, the government of India chose the path of confrontation, disinformation, oppression, repression, and genocide.

Some of the actions taken by the government during the past few decades are;

- Sponsoring, funding, and directing the establishment of pseudo religious sects with a view to create confusion in the minds of Sikhs and distract them from the focal point of Sikh religion - Sri Akal Takhat Sahib.
- Infiltrating the Sikh political establishment with the government's paid and trained informers and manipulators.
- Destabilizing the Sikhs social, cultural, and educational institutions through subversion and infiltration.
- Interfering in the operation of Sikh religious, social, and educational establishments.
- Striking at the Sikh psyche, by launching a massive military attack against the Sikhs' holiest shrines.
- Unleashing a reign of terror against the Sikhs and carrying out a country-wide genocide of Sikhs, in the wake of Mrs. Gandhi's political assassination.
- Legislating draconian laws which put arbitrary total powers in the hands of lowest ranking police

personnel and deny even the basic right to life for the Sikhs.

- Launching a campaign of slander against the Sikhs and the Sikh leaders, not only in India but in foreign countries, where Sikhs live in noticeable numbers - Canada has been a prime target of such on-going campaign.

Let us come back to the basic question - what do the Sikhs want?

Essentially, Sikhs want PEACE, with respect and dignity. An environment in which they can enjoy all the basic rights, liberties, and freedoms - the kinds of things we take for the granted in Canada. An environment in which they can practice their religion, culture, social and educational practices, and chosen vocational or lawful economic pursuits, without molestation or arbitrary hindrance.

I don't believe anybody can **fault the** Sikhs for harboring such expectations and hopes in their minds?

I don't believe that it is right and justifiable for the government of India to continually deny these reasonable human aspirations and basic rights & liberties to the Sikhs.

I also do not believe that the Western Nations - Champions of human rights and defenders of democracy, should let such an oppressive and inequitable situation continue, anywhere in the world.

I am certain that the people of the free world - once we are able to convince them of the propriety and legitimacy of our case, would demand of their governments to end such an unacceptable situation in Punjab.

We know that informed public

<p>opinion is the most powerful force in today's world. It has been amply demonstrated in case of South Africa, where people were persuaded to rise above their parochial, historical, traditional and familial affinities and support the call for Justice, Equality, and Truth.</p>	<p>We hope to learn from their painful experiences and try to replicate their success story for the Sikh nation.</p>	<p>existence in the golden cage of India's slavery, but they must understand that while they have the right to live a life of slavery, they do not have any right to subject their children and the future generations to such an unacceptable and undignified state for human existence.</p>
<p>We are absolutely certain that if such changes can be brought about in erstwhile Soviet Union, in South Africa, and elsewhere, the necessary changes can also be brought about in Punjab.</p>	<p>There is a need, not only to make the people in the western world aware of the Sikh cause and its legitimacy, there is a very strong need to persuade our own people to understand and realize that they deserve to live in Peace, with dignity, self respect and full rights and freedoms. They need to be persuaded to believe that their cause is not just legitimate, fair, and just, it is achievable. They also need to be persuaded to believe that it is their duty and responsibility to actively participate in the on-going freedom struggle.</p>	<p>Its is a formidable challenge. We are aware of that. But it is a challenge, no self-respecting Sikh can afford to ignore.</p>
<p>It took people in South Africa, almost 80 years of painful struggle to attain their freedom, and justice.</p>		<p>Our scripture provide the spiritual strength, our history provides the direction, the society we live in provides the example, and the successes of our South African friends, provides the inspiration.</p>
<p>We are thankful to them for having created additional awareness for hwnan rights.</p>	<p>Some of the Sikh people might have been persuaded by the government propaganda to enjoy their material</p>	<p>Is there any doubt in anyone's mind that we will succeed? Not in my mind!</p>

## Eye Witness Account of Mr. Khalra's Abduction

"I, Rajeev Singh, s/o Sri Parkash Singh, aged about 29 years do hereby solemnly affirm and state that I am the eye witness of the incident nanated hereinbelow I am competent to swear this affidavit.

I say that on 6th September, 1995 at about 9.20 A.M., I was present at the house of Shri J.S. Khalra, who was busy in washing his car outside the gate of his house being No. 8, Kabir Park, Amritsar, Punjab. While I was standing near Mr. Khalra I saw that a sky blue colour Maruti Van bearing registration No. DNE-5969 approaching close to where Mr. Khalra was standing. The aforesaid Van stopped near Mr. Khalra and four uniformed policemen jumped out of it. These uniformed policemen were wearing Black parkas and were fully armed with automatic weapons and walky-talky Radios.

I further say that in my presence the aforesaid policemen caught hold of Mr. Khalra, whoprotested on being manhandled but he was pushed into the aforesaid Maruti Van while pointing the weapons at him.

I further say that after throwing Mr. Khalra into the Van they informed some higher officer on Walky-talky that mission has been accomplished and Mr. Khalra has been taken into custody. Thereafter the aforesaid Maruti Van which was being followed by an open police Gypsy wherein 4-5 policemen fully armed with automatic weapons were standing i it while an officer was sitting in front immediately gave cover to the Maruti Van and sped away, taking Mr. Khalra alongwith them."Eye Witness Account of Mr. Khalra's Abduction

*Ahove is an extractfi-om the Affidavit Filed it the Supreme Court of India*

# Taking Stock of Things ...

## ..... A Sikh Perspective

Jasbeer Singh

### **Introduction:**

Twelve years ago, India launched a massive military assault on the Sikhs' holiest shrines in Punjab and elsewhere in India. Although political differences with the federal government had existed, ever since the Congress party assumed power from the British in 1947, none among the Sikhs expected the government to send its military against unarmed civilians assembled to pay homage to the first Sikh martyr - Guru Arjan Dev ji.

The Sikh community responded to this tragic development of June 1984, with anger and outrage. Protest meetings and marches were held in various cities all over the world.

While the government of India had anticipated an emotional outburst and had taken adequate measures to suppress any expression of protest in India, they were not equally successful in preventing such meetings and protests from taking place, say, in New York, or in Vancouver. However, the government of India wasted no time and spared no effort or expense to discredit all Sikh leaders and organizations protesting against India's military and political maneuvers towards the Sikhs.

In Canada, for example, the Indian government quickly mobilized its operatives and sympathizers among the large East-Indian population. They used the most expedient communal approach to turn one Canadian against another.

Unfortunately, the Canadian government of the time, took no notice of India's malicious interference in Canadian society. Instead, some Canadian government leaders also chose to view Sikh Canadians as 'terrorists'. It is relevant to mention the advisory issued by the then Minister of External Affairs, Mr. Joe Clark, to seven provincial premiers, asking them to boycott any functions organized by the Sikh Canadians and avoid any public appearance with them.

**While this particular letter leaked into public domain and caused much anguish to Mr. Clark, the full extent of Canadian government's activities against Sikhs in general, and Canadian Sikhs in particular, may never be known.**

### ***Changes in Sikh perspective:***

While the first response in June 1984, could be characterized as totally emotional, the Sikhs, over the past dozen years or so, have come to understand that people

outside our own cultural or religious fold, may not experience the same anger, outrage or hurt, as we do. Consequently, our manner of communicating with our non-Sikh friends, neighbors, and colleagues, has also undergone a dramatic transition.

Today, the Sikhs are not apologetic for the unique attributes of their religious or cultural beliefs and practices. The Sikhs have rightly come to recognize these as a valuable part of their way of life. To their credit, most of our Canadian friends have also responded positively and are much more understanding of Sikhs' cultural and religious beliefs, including their unique appearances.

This change in our perspective has also enabled us to view our on-going conflict with the government of India, from a different perspective.

### ***The Real Cause of Sikhs' Conflict with India:***

#### ***Background:***

Indian sub-continent is home to many nationalities, languages and cultures. While each of these flourished independently, for hundreds and thousands of years, developments in modern science and technology have helped overcome the traditional barriers of space, and



<p>thus insulation, from each other.</p> <p>The Moghuls and the British ruled over this sub-continent for more than a thousand years. They introduced their own cultural and religious practices, to the existing socio-economic and cultural framework, without undermining the existing fundamental, traditional societal pattern that had evolved over hundreds of years.</p> <p>After the departure of the British in 1947, Congress party came to power in India. During the struggle for independence from the British, this party took pains to include the representatives of various religious groups existing in the British India. These included the Muslims and the Sikhs.</p> <p>When it became clear that the British would be granting independence to India, <i>struggle for independence became struggle for power in the post-British period.</i></p> <p>The proposal for 'proportional representation' presented by the Muslim leaders would have meant that a third of the cabinet would be Muslims, and every third prime-ministerial tenure would be held by a Muslim representative.</p> <p>This was not what Mr. Nehru, Mr. Patel and other Congress leaders had in mind. Consequently, with the objective of ensuring undiluted governmental power over the country in their hands, the predominantly Hindu, Congress leadership opted for the division</p>	<p>of the country along religious lines.</p> <p>This presented an opportunity for the Sikhs to claim their own <i>home land</i> in Punjab.</p> <p>While the Muslims constituted nearly a third of the total population in British India and their leadership was determined to secure political equity for them, the Sikhs constituted a microscopically small population group, mostly concentrated in one province - the Punjab.</p> <p>Hindu leaders of the Congress party must have felt confident of assimilating a small population of the Sikhs, and the Sikh leadership was courted by both, the Hindu and the Muslim leadership, to join their larger geographical entities.</p> <p>Based on unequivocal assurances of equality and fairness, given by Mr. <b>M.K.</b> Gandhi, Nehru, and others of the Congress leadership, the Sikh leaders of the time decided to be a part of India, instead of <b>an</b> independent Sikh home land, or becoming a part of Pakistan.</p> <p>Almost a century later, the history was being repeated. It was almost a century earlier that the British had assumed control over Maharaja Ranjit Singh's Sikh empire. The British were to administer the Sikh territories in 'trust', until the heir to the throne, Dalip Singh had come of age.</p> <p><i>A Trust Betrayed:</i></p> <p>As soon as the Congress party</p>	<p>leaders assumed power, they realized that they did not need the Sikhs' support any more. They changed their stance totally. One of the first administrative orders issued by India's home minister and addressed to all senior administrators of the Punjab was to the effect that all Sikh refugees coming in from the Pakistan side of the divided Punjab, were to be treated as criminals and shown no mercy.</p> <p>At one time the Sikh leader, Master Tara Singh tried to remind Mr. Nehru of his solemn promises to the Sikhs, and Mr. Nehru's response was, '<i>Masterji, the times have changed now</i>'.</p> <p>Did the Congress leaders really change soon after assuming power, or they were making false promises only to obtain the Sikhs' support, for their ulterior motives. Would it not be right to say that they never intended to allow Sikhs to enjoy any rights, liberties, or freedoms. Their purpose of having gained control over the Sikh territories having been achieved, they wasted no time to start targeting Sikh ideology and faith. This is quite evident from their drafting of India's constitution, which does not make any mention of Sikh religion, ideology or way of life. This constitution requires a Sikh to proclaim himself or herself to be a Hindu, for the purposes of registering marriages or other similar legal requirements.</p>
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<p>This omission was pointed out by the only two Sikh members of the constituent assembly, who were easily out-numbered and out-voted by other, predominantly Hindu constituent assembly members.</p>	<p>edge Punjabi's status, but not without amputating Punjab to create Haryana and Himachal Pradesh.</p>	<p>scribe to this sect, it is not difficult to see the government's machinations at work.</p>
<p><i>Linguistic Reorganization of States:</i></p>	<p>Even after a badly truncated Punjab was declared a homeland for Punjabi, the central government has not allowed any truly representative government to function more than a few months.</p>	<p>We live in an information age, and one who controls information or the flow of information, can control peoples' thinking, and their organizations. In the case of the Sikhs living in India, they read or hear only what the government would permit. The government of India manipulates various religious minorities to serve its own devious ends. At times it does not spare the majority community also. The case in example is, its military attack on the Sikhs' holiest shrines. It is not possible that everyone of its 800 million Hindu population supported this action, but they were cleverly manipulated to start believing that all Sikhs were rabid terrorists, and thus, military attack on their holiest shrines was a necessary national duty.</p>
<p>The Congress party had accepted that the language was the basis of culture. As such, when they decided to reorganize the country into provinces, based on major languages, it seemed a reasonable initiative.</p>	<p>The constitution of India allows the prime minister to dismiss a duly elected provincial government, if the prime minister so wishes. Any provincial government in India knows that it exists at the mercy of the prime minister and hence, is totally subservient to the prime minister. Some exceptions may be the bigger provinces with large number of M.Ps, whose support is needed by the prime minister to stay in power.</p>	<p>We do not believe that even Adolf Hitler exercised such manipulative control over the German population.</p>
<p>While every other major language was declared to be the primary language in one or more of the newly carved provinces, Punjabi, having been recognized as a major language on the basis of population, was not made the primary language in Punjab.</p>	<p><i>Attacks on Sikhism:</i></p> <p>Division and disruption from within are very potent weapons, particularly in respect of groups or organizations who do not have the powers of the state to reward or reprimand anyone. The government of India can be credited for the emergence of numerous cults and sects within the broad body of the Sikhs. There are a few groups, <i>Nirankaris</i> being one of the largest ones, who have chosen to turn a blind eye and a deaf ear to the dangers facing the Sikh nation and the Sikh faith and ideology. In view of the fact that a large number of senior government officials in New Delhi and Punjab sub-</p>	<p>Even today, twelve years after the infamous military campaign against the Sikhs, some of the so-called Sikhs are reluctant to recognize the writing on the wall. They are still able to lull themselves into a deep slumber, believing in non-existent sense of justice among the ruling elites of India. This only proves the power of India's disinformation campaign.</p>
<p>The main reason appeared to be that it is the language of the Sikhs and all Sikh scriptures are inscribed in Punjabi with Gurmukhi script. According to the primary language status to Punjabi would tantamount to encouraging the study and proliferation of Sikh scriptures. This action negated their desire to eliminate any reference to or any study of Sikh scriptures.</p>	<p>After a 12 year long political battle, during which hundreds of thousands of Sikhs went to jail, the Indian government, very grudgingly, decided to acknowl-</p>	<p></p>

*Bahri Masjid - Dec. 6, 1992:*

The government of India's assault against the Sikh holy places, was preceded by a clever scheme to manipulate the masses for their support. The Sikhs were presented to the masses as uncompromising brutes who could only be straightened with brutish force. Consequently, none of the 800 million Hindus shed one tear as India's military and police butchered thousands of innocent Sikh men, women and children.

However, they did not see any need for such propaganda against the Muslims. There are multiple reasons for this. A massive propaganda campaign against the Muslims of India has been going on since 1947, and no one among the majority community would protest if some one were to propose a *Hitlerian Final Solution* for India's 120 million Muslims. Secondly, the government of India had successfully contained any criticism from other countries of the world. No world leader of any stature had rebuked India for its unwarranted military aggression against the Sikhs. Consequently, the Indian government felt quite comfortable giving a *go-ahead* to its field force to demolish the historic mosque.

In 1984, the actions were aimed at 20 million Sikhs, in 1992, its attention was directed towards 120 million Muslims.

In 1947, it attempted to gobble up

Kashmir, and still continues to ignore United Nations' resolution calling for a referendum in Indian occupied Kashmir.

In 1948, it attacked and took over Muslim ruled states of Jind, Junagarh, and Hyderabad.

In 1961, India sent its military to take over Portuguese holdings of Goa, Daman, and Diu.

In 1971, it sent its forces to dismember a neighboring Commonwealth nation of Pakistan.

In 1974, India exploded its Nuclear Bomb, sending a challenge to and chill among its neighbors.

In 1975, India annexed Sikkim.

In 1984, it sent its military forces to desecrate and destroy Sikhs holiest shrines in Punjab.

In 1985, the government of India sent its supporters on a murder spree and virtually oversaw the brutal massacre of thousands of innocent Sikhs all over India. Until this day, not even one of the culprits has been punished for their most heinous crimes against humanity. Regrettably, some of the culprits were rewarded for their murderous actions - one with a ministerial post in the government.

1984 - To date, Indian government has terrorized the Sikh masses in Punjab which is under India's military occupation. India has en-

acted numerous draconian laws denying the Sikhs their basic freedoms and rights to life and property.

### ***Is There a Light at the End of the Tunnel?***

It is like the proverbial question asking whether the cup is half empty or half full. The Sikhs in Punjab, having suffered as much as they have, want respite from governmental excesses at any cost. At this time, they do not care about the color of political stripes of the government, or even if there is any government at all. Having expressed their opinion and suffered in the past, they do not trust any body and are not willing to speak their mind at all.

The Sikhs in India today express a silence of opinion. It is not a silence of peace, but rather a silence of troubled and tortured mind.

It is unfair for anyone to expect a clear answer from the Sikhs in India. Not too many people are willing to lose their life for the pleasure of speaking their mind. The ones who will be willing to do that, should not do so, because the Sikh nation needs them to lead the masses out of the present morass.

This silence on the part of the **Sikhs** in India provides excellent propaganda material for India's government. They use this uncharacteristic silence to slander

the T's lvmgm Cana a, A, Europe, or in other free countries, for their efforts to acquaint our Canadian and American friends with the plight of Sikhs at the hands of the Indian government.

Merely because the Sikhs in Punjab are not able to speak their mind for fear of death or deprivation, it does not mean that they are able to enjoy their basic rights and freedoms.

In fact even the Sikhs living in Canada are not free from Indian government's oppression. Sikh Canadians supportive of the activities of the World Sikh Organization, are not granted visas by

the Indian government, to even attend funerals and memorial services for the very near and dear family members. The real reason is, perhaps, not to deny an opportunity to attend funerals or weddings, but a more sinister motive, to muzzle and inhibit the potential support for organizations like the World Sikh Organization.

It is regrettable that a truly democratic country like Canada would allow a fellow commonwealth country like India, to exercise so much influence on society in Canada.

While it is true that the Sikhs living in India are continuing to suf-

fer the loss of their ancestral land in their own homeland, the Sikhs living in Canada, the United States, United Kingdom and in other free countries, have become aware of the true nature of *not-so-democratic India*, and are just beginning to acquaint their freedom loving friends and neighbors of Sikhs plight.

While emotional outbursts are justified in times of great stress, modern nations must be built on the foundations of logic, reason, compassion, goodwill, education, learning, knowledge, technology and above all, in keeping with Sikh ideology - *Truth*.

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## ALL THAT WERE LEFT

## WERE THE HANDCUFFS

On the morning of April 29, 1992, Harjit Singh, a 22 year old family man, was abducted by a group of Police officers. There was no warrant for his arrest. Police have denied that Harjit Singh was arrested on that date. Harjit has twice been seen alive by his father, in police custody, after the date on which the police claim he had been killed in an "encounter". By the time witnesses were permitted in the building where Harjit was held, all that remained, were the handcuffs. His whereabouts are still unknown, after numerous court representations for justice.

Similarly on September 6, 1995,

Jaswant Singh Khalra, a well respected human rights activist in India, was also abducted by plain-clothes police officers. He was taken away in a police van and has not been heard from since. Police deny having arrested him, in spite of the witness testimony. All the police officers involved in Mr. Khalra's abduction have been identified, but no investigation of these officers has been undertaken.

These cases are just a small example of the typical method of operation used by Indian officials to ensure hundreds of people disappear in India on an annual basis. Such methods ensure that the In-

dian government is not taken to task over cases of custodial violence, as bodies can never be located for evidence.

As of December 7, 1995 two teenagers were abducted by Police officials, using AK-47's to tear the children from their peaceful home. Witnesses and family were not provided with a warrant for their arrest or substantiation for their illegal abduction by police officials. These youths now face the threat of "disappearing" before the eyes of the world, and like the many before them, must also suffer torture, ill-treatment and violence, from Indian offi-



class. Their father disappeared in 1991 and has not been heard from since.

In June, 1995, Jaswant Singh Khalra visited Canada to advise Canadian dignitaries about an investigation into the cremation grounds found in various districts of the Punjab. Having discovered 6,000 unidentified bodies in one district alone, it is estimated that there are well over 25,000 bodies of civilians located in cremation grounds throughout the one state. Many of these bodies were proven, by official records, to be the victims of police torture, fake encounters, and "disappearances". When Mr. Khalra made these documents public, and filed for appropriate court proceedings, Police Superintendent from Tam Taran (alleged to be involved in these crimes against civilians) threatened Mr. Khalra by stating: "if 25,000 have disappeared, it will be easy to make one more disappear". True to his word, the Superintendent ensured Mr. Khalra disappeared shortly thereafter.

Despite international pressure to produce Mr. Khalra, Indian officials continue to deny involvement in these abductions, heedless of the documented evidence to the contrary. Canada's Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs - South Asia Division, Mr. Raymond Chan, informed Parliament on October 30, 1995 that Mr. Khalra's case has been raised

with In a s oreign mm1sters. Many parliamentarians have supported effortstobringhuman rights groupslike Amnesty International to the Punjab where unhindered access is forbidden.

There are many states in India where police practices of torture, enforced disappearances, and extrajudicial murder is condoned and supported by officials. Bounties are offered by government for the heads of journalists, lawyers, and human rights activists alike.

Canadians can make a difference! Ask your member of parliament to support initiatives that will bring the rule of law to India. Ask that Canada become more clear in it's priorities and it's commitment to human rights and more forceful in it's approach to obtain the legitimate rights of civilians in India.

Join other citizens of democracy who are horrified that a purportedly "democratic" country like India could continue to perpetrate the crimes against Christians, Muslims, Dalits, and Sikhs. Ask the Canadian government why our nation would choose to deal with a country where police are allowed (and often supported) to commit human rights violations with impunity?

The United Nations Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances, makes it clear that: "No circumstances whatsoever, whether a

threat of war, a state of war, internal police instability of any other public emergency, may be invoked to justify enforced disappearances." It is therefore an insult to all peace-loving Canadian Parliamentarians who respect and uphold the altruistic efforts of Mr. Khalra, for the Indian government to continue to deny him his fundamental rights. It is horrifying to many of these Parliamentarians that a well-respected human rights activist like Mr. Khalra ends up brazenly abducted by a system of government that supports the perpetuation of oppression, genocide, and intimidation. What ever happened to the "World's largest democracy"? Where is the rule of law in India?

PLEASE HELP THOSE WHO CANNOT HELP THEMSELVES



*".....if all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail."*

# Peace in Punjab

## ..... WSO Perspective

*Mohinder Singh Jawanda,  
President, World Sikh Organization of Canada*

Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa,  
Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh

I have been the President of the WSO of Canada for over two years now, and as I look around the room this evening, I see many who have contributed to the continuing success of the WSO. Based on the achievements of the last decade, this last year has been no exception.

Peace in the Punjab is the theme of this evening and likewise has been the goal of the WSO for over ten years now. These last few weeks we have been involved in demonstrations at the United Nations, lobbying the Canadian Parliament and American Congress, and intimate discussions with diplomats in both countries. Our focus has always been the same: bring peace and dignity to the lives of all our friends and family in the Punjab who still suffer the abuses of a tyrannous government.

Jaswant Singh Khalra's recent disappearance is not the exception but the rule in India, where freedom of speech, freedom of association, and other inherent human rights are never guaranteed. Mr. Khalra has been held by

police since September 6, without being brought before any magistrate, health official, or legal counsel. The Indian government remains typically uncooperative as pressure from International governments to ensure the safety of Mr. Khalra, has increased dramatically. We have been made to understand that, once again, corrupt court systems in India have prevailed to disallow any progress in obtaining Mr. Khalra's release. Once again, a human rights activist has disappeared into the hands of state forces in the Punjab, while the international community looks on in horror. The Indian court system prevented an immediate investigation of a police station, allowing the police enough time to once again move Mr. Khalra from the piercing eye of the public and media. Petitions have repeatedly been delayed, and rescheduled.

Mr. Khalra was a guest at the WSO Annual Parliamentary Dinner in Ottawa, where many diplomats and politicians had the opportunity to meet him. Many of these distinguished representatives have undertaken to assist the WSO in obtaining Mr. Khalra's release. Many Canadians have committed themselves to the cause of justice and freedom in the Punjab, and with

this support - we will succeed.

We have made it clear to international governments that violations of the rule of law in India should not be tolerated, particularly by those who are intent on dealing with India economically. What protection or safeguards are available to those who wish to invest in India, work in India, or live in India? We remind the business community around the world of the dangers of participating in any agreements with a government that does not uphold the principles of democracy and unequivocally enforce the rule of law.

Sikhs around the world are instrumental in obtaining dignity for their brothers and sisters in the Punjab. Those of us who enjoy living in a true democracy must promote economic sanctions, commercial boycotts, foreign trade and aid policy revisions when dealing with the Indian government. In this manner, the Indian government will hear from Sikhs world-wide through their home governments, that such atrocious behavior committed against civilians in India will not be tolerated by the International community. It is only by participating in

all these debates and discussions that the Sikh voice will be heard. We cannot be heard if we are not invited to the discussion table.

Over the last few years, the WSO has been instrumental in ensuring these messages are passed from Canadian Parliamentarians to Indian officials. Our campaign has been so effective, the Indian government has been forced to respond in their traditionally ridiculous manner, by increasing propaganda campaigns, and infiltrating Sikh communities that are strong and maintain good relations with governments. Looking to discredit the Sikh community in all facets of life, the Indian government has done nothing but fail. Our sound and steadfast reputation as peace-loving people has been proven in

western democracies where the rule of law prevails. Stigmas and stereotypes that label Sikhs as militants and terrorists has waned in the growing public awareness of the extent of state terrorism perpetrated against civilians in India. There is a growing consciousness by international partners that Indian methods of operation clearly do not demonstrate a functioning democracy. Mr. K. Lalra, and the many human rights activists, journalists, lawyers who have disappeared before him, are the human measurement of brutality by which India is being assessed. Such definitive statistics cannot be ignored any longer - the world is watching.

The true sentiment and integrity of the Sikh people, and the WSO is self-evident. These truths, cannot be denied by any government. Our educational programs assist in bringing the Sikh history and heritage to all Canadians. It is our important task to ensure that the voices of all Punjabis are heard. It is imperative that the WSO maintains its well earned integrity to ensure Canadians continue to rely upon us as a sound source of information to international governments.

Knowing that we must bring the circumstances of the twenty five states in India to the attention of the international community and our domestic representatives, the WSO has been consistent in its approach and dedicated in its policy and programming. Our commitment to peaceful pursuit of justice in the Punjab is essential to our success. Though many in our community may feel that such an approach is time-consuming and less effective in the short term, in the long run, such an approach will guarantee that Sikhs are afforded the dignity and respect that we have earned over the last five centuries. Our cause is similar to that of many nations around the world - it is the call to be recognized as a distinct society, and treated with the respect and consideration that is inherent in such recognition.

In Canada the WSO has been involved in land-mark, precedent

setting cases in the Federal Court, Human rights commissions, provincial and municipal courts. We have participated in many forums where the Sikh religion and the Sikh people were finally heard. We have successfully lobbied the Canadian government for assistance on many issues, including the Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty, Immigration and Refugee issues, and the provision of services to the Sikh community of Canada.

Our network of representatives who strive, daily, to communicate with Canadians has brought us all together. Indeed, the abhorrent behavior of the Royal Canadian Legion brought together many communities across Canada in a common cause for justice. The cooperative effort between the WSO and the Canadian Jewish Congress will continue this year until such time when the issue has come to an amicable resolution.

Police Forces across the country seek our assistance in educating them, as do Universities and High Schools. In every case where our expertise has been sought, the WSO has consistently responded. We are now held in high regard around the world as a sound source of information with a responsible and positive approach to conflict resolution, education, and as a valuable impetus for positive change in society. Our recently released documentary film is also

a cooperative effort that will bear fruit in the number of people who will view it and learn the truths of life in the Punjab, and the plight of Sikhs around the world who continue to worry for the safety of their families.

Our efforts to participate in the UN Conference on Women's Rights in Beijing, received great support from the Canadian Sikh community. Many women face constant barriers to participation in society, including barriers to participating in organizations like ours. Many other women face health and welfare discriminations, domestic violence, and other forms of degrading or dehumanizing treatment. It is these women, from all faiths, whom must be heard by the international community. Sikh women are no exception - they must surely not be further marginalized. To ensure they weren't ignored, the WSO invited Sikh women to play a vital role in the domestic cooperation of the WSO and in developing strategies for our international efforts. Such participation from women will go a long way to eliminate continuing discrimination against women around the world. It is our belief that Women from all faiths should be able to count on their spiritual community to support them in their rightful demand to be treated equally in all aspects of life. The Sikh community is one of the few religious communities that wholeheartedly supports the efforts towards sub-

stantive changes in societal attitudes towards women. Much of our international networking has involved establishing ties with other non-governmental human rights organizations. The cooperation and support of these organizations has also been exemplary over the last year. Indeed our communiques concerning Jaswant Singh Khaira were taken up by many of these groups including, Amnesty International, SOSTorture, and Asia Watch. We have brought the messages of our brothers and sisters to all areas of the Canadian and international community. We have articulated the needs of the Sikhs people so that human rights in India will become the focus of future international agendas for action. Such an accomplishment cannot be achieved or maintained without your valuable assistance.

Success does not come easy. The WSO has grown and improved over the years by learning the hard way. Criticisms of our policies and procedures are essential to our growth and development. It is the actions, dedication, and commitment of each of you that has made all our successes possible. We have many more goals to achieve, and we know we will be able to count on all of you to do your part. From distributing our newsletters, to informing our offices of pertinent information, to volunteering legal briefs, or participating in training programs. All of this has made the WSO the success

that it is. There are some in this room have gone above and beyond the call of duty - forever to be remembered as self-less, self-sacrificing individuals who gave all so that the rest of us could live with dignity.

We ask all of you to communicate with the WSO! Participate! Take action! Give us your opinions, ask the questions for which you want answers. Do not rest until your brothers and sisters are treated with the dignity and respect that they have earned. Include your name among those who have served their community well and faithfully, without interest in personal goals, but instead, with a dedication to principles of freedom and justice for all peoples.

I thank you for your continued support and remind you to ensure your name is counted among the members of the WSO.





## The Path to Sikh Nationhood

Many simple minded Sikhs tend to believe that, traditional supporters of human rights, freedoms, and liberties - the nations of the western hemisphere, will naturally and automatically support the Sikh movement for freedom, because their struggle is based on justice, truth, and fundamental human rights.

Unfortunately, the world is not so simple. The people or the governments, we wish to seek help and support from, do not know our cause and our struggle as well as we would like them to. And unless they understand our point of view, our pain & suffering, our reasons for the struggle, and justifications of such reasons, we should not fault our friends in western countries, for not expressing their support with us in as strong a measure, as we would like to see.

One of the most important things for a new nation to come into existence is, recognition of this new nation by a group of existing and recognized independent nations. For the sake of simplicity, we may view the world body of nations as a powerful and established international club or organization. When we want to become a member of any social, professional, or business organization, we need to meet a set of

requirements and pay certain prescribed fees. If the management of the organization is satisfied of one's credentials and worthiness to belong to the group, he *may be* accepted as a member. In the case of the world body of nations, the requirements are very stringent and the pre-admittance scrutiny is very rigid.

In most situations the emergence of a new nation is the result of territorial adjustments in one or more existing nations. The affected existing nations are more than likely to resent any loss of territory, population, economic base, and power. They would, invariably, resent and oppose the admittance and recognition of the new nation. The existing nations, through their associations, friendships, alliances, pacts and military or trading agreements, have forged strong ties with multiple number of other nations. So, it is not just one affected nation member who opposes the changes to the status-quo, it becomes a concerted group effort.

Fortunately, the situation for the aspiring new nations is not as hopeless as it may seem. Developments in Eastern-Europe, in Africa, in Middle-East, and elsewhere, provide hopeful precedents and signs that the seemingly impenetrable body of nations can be persuaded

to open its doors slightly, to admit deserving new entrants.

The key word here is *persuaded*, and not *forced*. Force, if any, has to be the force of the arguments, reason, compassion, and logic. The leaders of the aspiring new nations must remember that even if they are engaged in a justifiable, local struggle for the preservation of the rights of their people, they or their people are not at war with the entire body of nations. In this rapidly changing world of ours, *no* nation can *force* its will on *all* other nations. Leaders of the world are increasingly relying on *power of persuasion* to solve an array of complex international disagreements and problems. They are discovering that this approach is more effective, requires less time & resources, and generates mutually acceptable results without any political bloodshed.

The process of persuasion is quite simple but it requires concerted effort on many fronts, by a large number of people.

Success of persuasive efforts depends a great deal on the sincerity, commitment, dedication, perseverance, and knowledge on the part of the person who is trying to convince someone else. It would be quite appropriate to say that

<p>before one can go and convince somebody to lend support to one's cause, movement or the objective, one must;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• believe in the cause;</li> <li>• be committed to the cause;</li> <li>• be well informed in all aspects of the cause, the struggle or the movement;</li> <li>• be willing to make sacrifices, of time and materials;</li> <li>• be willing to persevere in pursuit of one's cause.</li> </ul> <p>In a way, the process of nation building begins with tremendous amount of courage, commitment, and sacrifice on the part of the leaders who initiate the movement. Mr. Nelson Mandela, the President of South Africa, provides a wonderful example of vision, courage, determination, organizational abilities, ability to inspire others, personal sacrifice and commitment. He was born in the midst of injustice of every kind, yet he was able to see beyond that and felt inspired to make a commitment to bring about the desired change.</p> <p>Guru Nanak saw the pitiable state of ignorance, exploitation, tyranny and injustice, and triggered a revolution for change. Change for Justice, Equality &amp; Truth. This revolution gave birth to Sikh religion and the order of Khalsa - an order based on the values propagated by Guru Nanak. On the way, the ten Sikh Gurus provided excellent examples of dedication, commitment, struggle, and sacrifice.</p>	<p>Today, once again, the followers of Sikh ideology and traditions, face the formidable challenges posed by an autocratic, tyrannical, exploitative, morally bankrupt, and criminally inclined Brahminical regime of India. Are today's rulers much different from Bahar, the Moghul ruler at the time of Guru Nanak? I don't think so.</p> <p>In a worldly sense, Guru Nanak was alone when he conceived the revolutionary idea and committed himself to the struggle for reformation and emancipation of the oppressed. Mankind had not yet invented electronic communication and air transport. Undaunted by the logistic difficulties confronting him he set off on his mission and successfully braved all the hardships in his way. Compared with the situation existing at the time of Guru Nanak, we enjoy tremendous advantages. Some of these are;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Freer access to education and institutions of learning.</li> <li>• A nearly universal language for exchange of information, ideas, and developments.</li> <li>• Electronic speeds for transmission of words, data and images, almost all over the world.</li> <li>• Wide acceptance of principles of Justice and Equality, in large parts of the world, and incorporation of these ideals in constitutions and laws of most nations of the world.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A general social environment of reason &amp; logic and an underlying urge to resolve differences through discussion and negotiations instead of brute military or nuclear force.</li> <li>• An awareness of their destiny and the challenges, in the minds of many educated and learned Sikhs and a general consensus to follow the footsteps of our Gurus in pursuit of our national objectives.</li> </ul> <p>It is sad that we don't often hear of Sikhs finding inspiration from these factual advantages. Perhaps, not too many people think of these, in an appropriate context. We live in a very materialistic society and it seems easy to view our surroundings in that context. It appears that far too many people are preoccupied with the advantages enjoyed by the big corporations, national governments, and large armed forces. Some of these, which discourage and demoralize people, thus, successfully dissuading them from embarking on a corrective revolutionary path, are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability of the governments to pass restrictive and prohibitive legislations and to enforce the same through committed administrative, judicial, and executive organs of the state.</li> <li>• Intelligence and subversion.</li> </ul>
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sive activities that can be undertaken by governments to penetrate & disrupt peoples organizations, to slander and discredit its leaders, and to intimidate its membership.

Governments' ability to mobilize military and police power to silence peoples' voices.

Strong influence or control over mass media.

Ability to undertake *historical revisionism*, through misuse of resources of the state.

Governments ability to *reward* human behaviour and activities supporting its authority and to *punish* individuals and groups propagating changes to the status-quo.

These are very strong reasons to dissuade most people from participating in processes and activities for various necessary changes. In the initial stages of any movement opposing the entrenched government, a large number of people do not participate in any public expression of such opposition. However, it does not mean that they are opposed to it, the majority of people take a cautiously conservative approach to things. It has happened in many other mass movements that people who were not involved in the early stages of the struggle, carry a disproportionately heavy burden of responsibility towards the end of the struggle. There is no reason to believe that Sikh intellectuals, academics, professionals and business people, who are, at this moment, conspicuously absent from the front ranks of the Sikh struggle, will be enthusiastically supporting and participating in

nation building project, as it nears fruition.

While public demonstrations, flag waving, inspirational speeches, public pronouncements etc., serve a very useful purpose of raising public awareness to the issues and for mobilizing support in the community, such demonstrations are not for everyone. A very interesting characteristic of the process of persuasion is that at a time when it is extremely effective, it is devoid of almost all common risks. No one, not even the most powerful and the most oppressive government, can stop one from acquiring knowledge, on almost any subject or issue. Everyone in the affected segment of the human society can, and must acquire information pertaining to all issues affecting and concerning them. It is through the acquisition, analysis, and the distillation of this knowledge, that people develop beliefs, convictions and commitments.

Once a person feels strongly enough about something and finds that the existing situation is not consistent with one's reasoned beliefs, he or she is likely to feel an urge to do something to bring about the desired or the required change. This urge, growing out of knowledge and reason, leads one to seek change through persuasion and other diplomatic or political processes.

In the case of Sikh struggle for autonomy, freedom, independence, self rule self determination, or more appropriately, *nationhood*, the Sikhs engaging in the process of persuasion will arm themselves with such a potent dose of information, history, spiritual knowledge, cultural & political awareness, economic and geographic

understanding that it will fortify their own beliefs and convictions to a rock solid position. It is not hard to imagine the effect of this power of knowledge, reason and logic, on the minds of justice & freedom loving people in the western nations.

Mr. Nelson Mandela deserves full credit for leading his people to freedom and self rule. However, all his efforts and beliefs would not have been successful without the support and understanding of the peoples of the free world. It is important to have a worthy, noble and just cause based on spiritual or political ideals, but it is equally important to have the support and understanding of the committed people with enough power of persuasion to change the course of political rivers.

Five hundred years ago, Guru Nanak did not need any military weapons of offence or defence. He launched his campaign for social and economic uplift, armed with his convictions and the belief that Truth, Justice and Equality will, eventually, prevail. He did not seek an army of supporters.

Today, we can also free ourselves from fear of the establishment or the bigger fear of our own weaknesses, so that we feel powerful and be effective in our

pursuits. Guru Nanak had a much bigger mission - to rid humanity of ignorance, inequality, injustice and exploitation, we are merely seeking to re-establish our homeland. We just need to believe in our cause and plug-in to the source of all energy and inspiration - Almighty God.





## An Update to Mr. Khalra's Disappearance

*Based on conversation with Mr. Jaspal Singh Dhillon, General Secretary, Human Rights Wing of the Shiromani Akali Dal*

On the 15th of March, 1996 a court hearing for Khalra's disappearance case was held. CBI submitted an interim report, that showed prima facie evidence that Mr. Khalra was indeed abducted by state and police officials. However, the judge would not divulge the particulars of the report until its full completion. The CBI asked for more time in completing the final report and were afforded until April 30, and hear at court on May 6th.

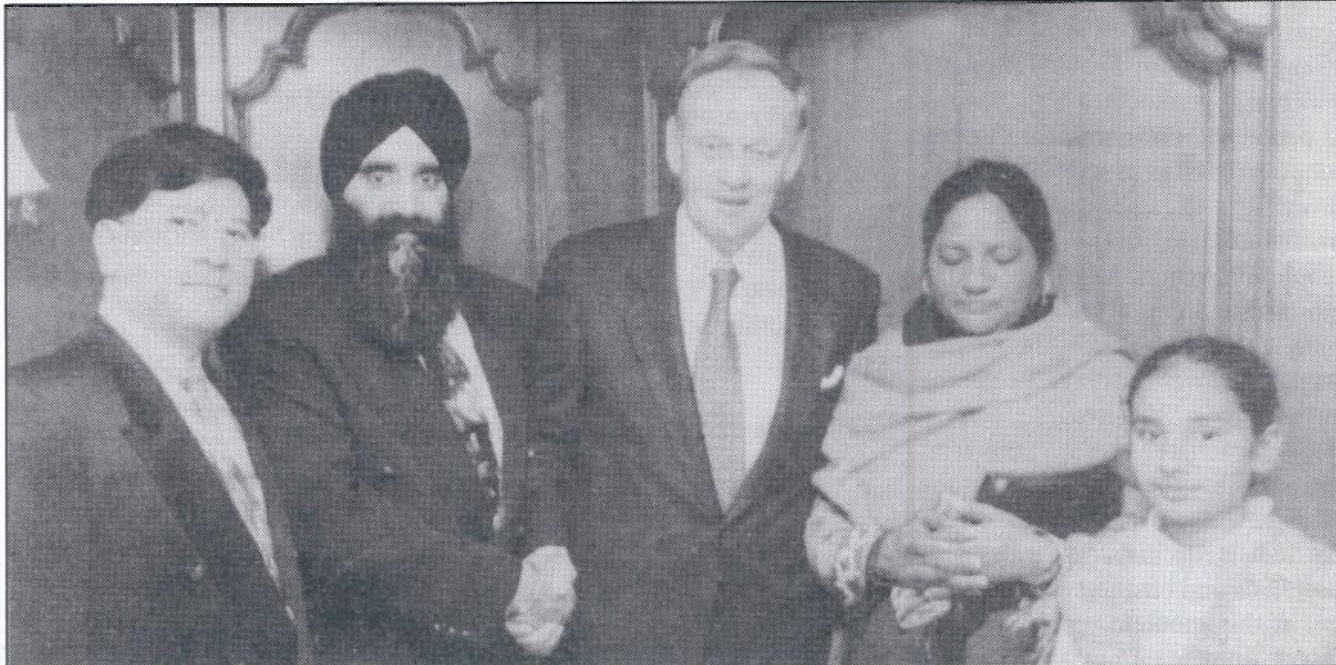
On April 30, the CBI again asked for more time to complete the report. According to eyewitness testimony - the judge was clearly upset - and admonished the CBI for not pursuing the investigation in the time provided them. With the suspects listed in the preliminary reports submitted earlier, the judge queried investigators as to why no arrests had been pursued or made.

In addition, CBI representatives responsible for the investigation into the cremation grounds found by Mr. Khalra (the case he was bringing to the supreme court when he disappeared) has also made little progress. Both CBI teams were granted an extension to submit a final report by the 30th of June to be heard in court on July 22. Both cases are expected to be dealt with on that date. (Supreme Court closes from May 9 - July 9)

Affidavits filed by SAD - Human Rights Wing in March requested that the SSP allegedly responsible for Khalra's disappearance, and the four other junior officers who have been accused, be removed from the area. This request was granted by the court - ordering their removal within the next two weeks - however, we have not been informed as to whether or not this order was administered. We have been made to understand that witnesses are still being terrorized by police officials.

Affidavits filed by SAD - Human Rights Wing in March requested that the investigating officers of the CBI include NGOs and public figures in the investigation to guarantee some credibility to the report. In addition, protection by non-Punjab police officers be afforded to witnesses who come forward. The court saw fit to allow this as well. We have not been informed that this protection was offered or supplied or whether or not independent NGOs have been included in the CBI investigation.

We are still very concerned for the safety of Mr. Khalra, particularly with these continuing delays in due process. We are also deeply concerned that CBI may not be attending to their duties to fully investigate the case of Mr. Khalra.



*Prime Minister Mr. Chretien with Mr. Khalra's family, in New Delhi, in January 1996. Also in the picture are Mr. Raymond Chan, Secretary of State for Asia & Pacific, and Mr. Prem Singh Winning from Vancouver.*