**Canadian PM Supports Khalistan**

**A huge number of Sikhs voted in favour of an indepen-dent Khalistan, reflecting that their demand for an indepen-dent homeland is gradually being accepted globally.**

[Sajjad Shaukat](https://www.nation.com.pk/columnist/sajjad-shaukat)

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Khalistan Zindabad slogans were raised on the occasion of Khalsa Day festivities this year in Toronto when Canadian Prime Minister Justin addressed the Sikh community, and assured “nearly 800 thousand Canadians of Sikh heritage” that his government will always be there to protect their rights and freedom. Tensions accelerated between Canada and India on September 18, 2023, when Canadian Prime Minister Trudeau stated that Canada was investigating “credible allegations” linking India to the June killing of Canadian citizen and prominent Sikh leader, Hardeep Singh Nijjar.

PM Trudeau elaborated: “He brought up the slaying with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the G20…told Modi that any Indian government involvement would be unacceptable and that he asked for cooperation in the investigation”. Canada has also kicked out an Indian diplomat whom foreign affairs minister Mélanie Joly described as the head of the Indian intelligence agency in the country. In response, India expelled a senior Canadian diplomat based in India.

Notably, the leading Canadian Sikh leader of the Khalistan movement Nijjar was killed on June 18, 2023. According to local police, he was gunned down in his truck by two masked gunmen outside a Sikh temple in Surrey, British Columbia. In a video statement, foremost pro-Khalistan separatist group Sikhs For Justice (SFJ) General Counsel Gurpatwant Singh Pannun had condemned the killing of SFJ’s Canada leader Nijjar.

He had disclosed: “Indian intelligence agency Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), acting under the instructions of Narendra Modi—his close associates Amit Shah and Ajit Doval assassinated Hardeep Singh Nijjar—in charge of Khalistan Referendum in Canada.”

In this regard, the US and some of its allies urged India to cooperate with Canada on the Sikh leader’s assassination probe.

The Washington Post on April 30, this year reported: “An officer in India’s intelligence service was directly involved in a foiled plan to assassinate a citizen of the United States, who is a vocal critic of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi”—the RAW officer was also involved in the assassination of a Sikh activist last June in Canada.

A day later, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) published another report, saying a nest of Indian spies was uncovered and expelled from the country for trying to steal defence secrets. In fact, after the brutal operation Blue Star launched by the Indian Army in 1984 at a highly sacred Sikh religious place Golden Temple complex (Harmandir Sahib) in Amritsar, Punjab where their spiritual leader Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale had taken shelter, the international community had thought that perhaps Sikhs have become lethargic in connection with their demand for an independent state in the Indian Punjab, named Khalistan.

But, the participation of almost 208,000 Sikhs in the Khalistan referendums held in recent years in four countries—a huge number of Sikhs who voted in favour of an independent Khalistan reflected that their demand for an independent homeland is gradually being accepted globally.

On March 18, 2023, prior to the launching of the crackdown by the Indian police and paramilitary forces, section 144 was imposed, and mobile phone service was suspended in Sri Muktsar Sahib and Fazilka districts of the Indian Punjab. Ever since Amritpal Singh Sandhu took over as the head of ‘Waris Punjab De’ after the death of its founder head Deep Sidhu, state machinery started harassing him by canceling the arms licenses of his guards and detaining his friends. Police arrested a large number of Sikhs including members of ‘Waris Punjab De’ and Amritpal Singh.

Sikh freedom followers expressed serious concerns over this crackdown harassing the Sikh population in the Indian Punjab, and elsewhere in India, including those living abroad. Gagmeet Singh, Party leader of the New Democratic Party in Canada, stated: “I am deeply concerned by reports that India has suspended civil liberties and imposed an internet blackout throughout the state of Punjab—These draconian measures are unsettling for many given their historical use to execute extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances during the 1984 Sikh Genocide”. The World Sikh Organization of Canada (WSO) and their various organizations as well as their leaders condemned the security operations in Punjab—arrest of Sikh leader, Bhai Amritpal Singh as well as India-gross human rights violations.

However, the targeting of Sikh youth in Punjab was once again causing huge concerns in the Sikh community across the world. In this context, Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann has been urged to stop the deployment of army or paramilitary services.

Meanwhile, Sikhs had taken to the streets in London and gathered at the Indian High Commission to deliver the note of protest to the Indian envoy.  Thus, one of the enraged Sikhs pulled down the Indian flag and replaced it with that of Khalistan. And EU Sikhs had held an anti-India protest demonstration in front of the Brussels Parliament in Brussels on March 27, 2023, calling on the European Commission to challenge India’s massive security crackdown.

Similarly, the California state assembly passed a resolution on April 10, last year, which said that the Sikh community in the US had not yet recovered from the physical and psychological trauma of the riots, urging the US Congress to formally recognise the 1984 anti-Sikh riots in India as ‘genocide’, and to condemn the violence.

It is mentionable that Amritpal Singh, who has revived calls for an independent Sikh homeland in Punjab, captured national headlines in February 2023. He emerged in 2022 in Punjab and began leading marches calling for protecting the rights of Sikhs, who account for about 1.7 percent of India’s population. His speeches have become increasingly popular among supporters of the Khalistan movement.

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Nevertheless, the Sikhs have been fighting for a separate homeland since 1947, but the movement gained impetus through the efforts of Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale who was killed by the Indian Army in 1984.

Sajjad Shaukat  
The writer focuses on international affairs and is the author of the book, “US vs Islamic Militants, Invisible Balance of Power: Dangerous Shift in International Relations”. He can be reached at sajjad\_logic@yahoo.com