

India dispatch: Canadian diplomat summoned by India government after Sikh independence supporters protest outside Vancouver consulate - JURIST

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Dispatches
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India dispatch: Canadian diplomat summoned by India government after Sikh independence supporters protest outside Vancouver consulate

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Indian law students are reporting for JURIST on law-related developments in and affecting India. This dispatch is from Nakul Rai Khurana, a law student at Jindal Global Law School.

On Sunday, March 26, the High Commissioner of Canada was summoned by India to convey the nation's growing concerns after the Indian consulate in Vancouver was the target of a demonstration by protesters supporting an independent Sikh State and challenging the Indian police crackdown on Sikh separatist leader Amrit Pal Singh.

A nationwide manhunt was initiated in India on 18 March against Amrit Pal Singh, chief of the organization 'Waris Punjab De' (Heirs of Punjab). The manhunt comes after a major showdown took place on February 23 which alarmed the nation. In the Ajnala Police Station in Punjab's Amritsar district, a huge mob, dangerously armed with swords, *lathis* (sticks) and weapons had created chaos in the police station. The police officers were disproportionate in number and remained helpless since the mob arrived with the

Sikh holy scripture, 'Guru Granth Sahib' which prompted the police officers to desist from any act of violence. The person in charge of the chaos and the leader of the mob was Amrit Pal Singh. The police managed to detain a few of his associates while Amrit Pal Singh escaped and has been on the run ever since. Internet services in the Punjab were disbanded "in the interest of public safety, to prevent any incitement to violence and to prevent any disturbance of peace and public order".

The prominence of Amrit Pal Singh is marked by his radical activism which involves advocacy for '*Khalistan*' (a separatist movement that calls for an independent nation for Sikhs), especially on social media platforms like Facebook and interviews with news channels. His followers, devout to the cause, also recently attacked the Indian Embassy in the UK. The agitation against "India's operation on Amrit Pal Singh" was so profound that it led to protestors taking down the national flag of India at the High Commission in London which caused agitation amongst political luminaries and citizens in India. In response, the Government of India ('GOI') reduced its security at the British High Commission and the envoy's residence in New Delhi, which was deemed as a "fit response" to the desecration of the national flag. In a follow-up protest again, water bottles and smoke flares were thrown at the High Commission in London, but this time it was met with proper security and stringent provisions by the UK authorities following GOI's "fit response".

The evidence gathered by the police reveals "sinister designs of this nascent militia force", capable of causing disharmony to the peace in the state of Punjab. The cell phone recovered from one of the associates of the organization revealed Khalistan logos, symbols, and a proposed flag for the 'independent nation'. The mainstream media has delved into conspiracy theories, of Amrit Pal Singh being sponsored by Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence ('ISI'). This narrative, I believe, is stereotypical, especially in the recent Islamophobic climate in India, even more so against Pakistan.

Proponents of the idea of an independent Sikh nation believe that for the past decade, India has been governed by a Hindu majoritarian government, which has blatantly expressed its desire to transform the nation within a singular uniform code (see previous coverage by JURIST). Lynching of Muslims, Christians and other religious minorities is rampant within the nation. Amandeep Sandhu, a prolific journalist, writes "the term Khalistan has taken on different meanings in different times. Today, for Punjab, it appears to stand for justice."

The state of Punjab has been through a lot, especially after the farmers' protests of 2020-21 which upsurged anti-Sikh sentiment in the nation during a pandemic. It has often been plunged into militancy while all the economic sources of revenue are controlled by gang uprisings and the mafia. It now ranks 16th in the nation in total GDP output. Sandhu explains that the prominence of a "maverick leader" such as Amrit Pal is only due to the disenchantment of the populace and their fall into penury. It is important for the nation, to recognize the misgovernance in Punjab, and aid in its resurgence both economically and socially if they are to prevent any uprisings of radical extremism from young leaders

like Amrit Pal Singh in the near future. While protests favouring separation from India are dishonourable to the nation, turning a blind eye to the ongoing issues in Punjab is definitely not the solution.

The manhunt for Amrit Pal Singh is ongoing while the mainstream media is pushing forward its 'Pakistan-sponsored terrorism' agenda 24/7.