

Canada

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RECONCILIATION



Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and his wife, Gursharan Kaur, lay a wreath at the Air India memorial. FRED LUM/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

Singh meets Air India families

Indian PM calls on Indo-Canadians to 'move ahead' from crimes of the past

BY BILL CURRY
AND ANTHONY REINHART TORONTO

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh wrapped up his historic visit to Canada by paying respects to Air India victims and urging Indo-Canadians to move on from the divisive homeland events that preceded the terrorist attacks a quarter-century ago.

Mr. Singh, who is the first Indian Prime Minister to visit in 37 years – the last was Indira Gandhi – made two stops before leaving Toronto after the G20 summit. The first was a candid meeting with Indo-Canadian MPs and provincial legislators at Toronto's Royal York hotel, where he expressed India's pride in their political successes and those of Indo-Canadians in general.

Mr. Singh then visited Toronto's Air India memorial, where he laid a wreath and briefly met with relatives of the 331 victims of the 1985 bombings. His visit coincided with the 25th anniversary of the bombings and came just over a week after Mr. Justice John Major's sweeping report into the tragedy.

The gesture by Mr. Singh took place just days after Prime Minister Stephen Harper stood at the same spot

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Balpreet Singh Boparai of the World Sikh Organization

and formally apologized for Canada's failure to stop the worst terrorist attack in the country's history.

Monday's event was a much smaller and lower-key affair, apparently due to the Indian government's insistence on tight security. Only nine relatives were in attendance – each personally invited by India, with no explanation of why they were chosen and others not.

Deepak Khandelwal, whose two sisters were killed aboard Flight 182, said he appreciated that Mr. Singh made time for a brief visit to the memorial.

"When he talked to the families he reiterated his commitment to stand against terrorism globally, which I was pleased to hear," he said.

Family members also asked Mr. Singh to erect a memorial to the victims in India, to add to those in Canada and Ireland.

The masterminds of the 1985 Air India bombings supported a separate Sikh state in India, a movement that had led a year earlier to an Indian army attack on the holiest Sikh shrine, the Golden Temple. Months later, the assassination of then-prime-minister Indira Gandhi by Sikh bodyguards set off anti-Sikh riots in which 2,700 people were killed.

Sikhs have long complained that India hasn't done enough to bring the perpetrators to justice, but on Monday Mr. Singh said he has apologized and that it is time to move on.

"These are horrible crimes. They should have never happened," he said about the anti-Sikh riots during the gathering of nearly two dozen Indo-Canadian federal and provincial politicians. "We cannot take away from our past, but the challenge is how to move ahead."

The Prime Minister, a Sikh

himself, said "constant reminders" of the period are not helpful to Sikhs or the wider Indian community.

The leader's comments did not sit well with Sikh groups, who said they have worked hard to marginalize extremists, renounce violence and promote Canadian-style human rights. India, as a growing power on the world stage, needs to make the same effort, they said.

"You can't move forward as a democracy unless you address past wrongdoings," said Balpreet Singh Boparai, a Toronto lawyer and World Sikh Organization spokesman.

Ontario Government Services Minister Harinder Takhar and Liberal MP Ujjal Dosanjh gave Mr. Singh a warm welcome, but raised several bilateral irritants. Mr. Takhar said Indo-Canadians sometimes run into problems with business and marriage fraud in India. Mr. Dosanjh, who has challenged Sikh extremism throughout his career, welcomed Mr. Singh's comments on the issue during his visit.

"There are elements both in India and abroad that continue to undermine both the unity and integrity of India and in fact the fabric of the community abroad," he said.

ESPIONAGE

MP denounces Fadden's claims of foreign influence

'That is wrong,' says senior Tory

BY BILL CURRY TORONTO
AND WENDY STUECK AND
REBECCA LINDELL VANCOUVER

A senior Conservative MP says he is "very disappointed" with CSIS head Richard Fadden's controversial remarks about foreign governments wielding influence over Canadian politicians.

Alberta MP Deepak Obhrai, who regularly speaks on behalf of the government in the House of Commons as parliamentary secretary to the Foreign Affairs Minister, became visibly agitated Monday in Toronto when asked for his reaction to what Mr. Fadden said in a recent CBC interview. In that interview, Mr. Fadden suggested that hostile foreign entities – possibly China – had infiltrated Canadian politics, including at the municipal level in British Columbia.

"That is wrong," Mr. Obhrai said. "We all are here to promote relationships. That does not mean you are in the pocket of the government."

In B.C., municipal politicians with family roots in Asia say they are angry at the comments, even as they poke fun at the notion that China might seek to influence city councils dealing with such mundane matters as patching potholes.

Last week, B.C. Premier Gordon Campbell condemned the remarks as "unprecedented and completely unprofessional."

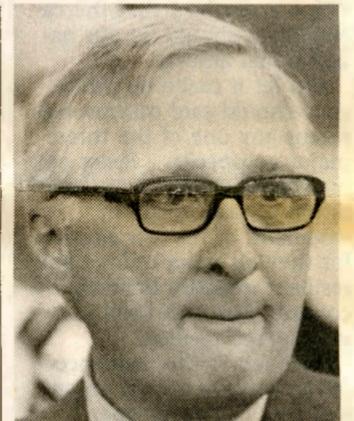
Meanwhile, another Conservative came to Mr. Fadden's defence Monday. Monte Solberg, a former Tory cabinet minister who had Mr. Fadden as his deputy minister in the Citizenship and Immigration Department, said in a syndicated column for the QMI Agency that he gives credence to the comments by the veteran public servant, one of "Canada's most competent bureaucrats."

"I also think it's wildly irresponsible to speculate about firing him based on a single interview, especially after such a long and distinguished career of public service," Mr. Solberg said.

Mr. Obhrai's remarks in Toronto came immediately after he and nearly two dozen other Indo-Canadian federal and provincial politicians met for nearly an hour with visiting Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

During the meeting, the Canadian politicians and the Indian Prime Minister spoke about strengthening ties between the two countries and on working to resolve concerns over such issues as business fraud.

In British Columbia, municipi-



Outrage has greeted Richard Fadden's remarks. BILL GRIMSHAW FOR THE GLOBE AND MAIL

pal politicians said they are baffled, angered and amused by Mr. Fadden's comments.

At Vancouver City Hall, lyrics for the 1960s hit *Secret Agent Man* have been reworked as "Secret Asian Man" in reference to councillors Kerry Jang, George Louie and Raymond Chow, who danced around as another councillor sang the new anthem.

But the reaction to Mr. Fadden's comments is not uniformly merry: Mr. Jang questioned the CSIS head's competence as the country's top spy. "I was dumbfounded by the allegations and then I was angered when there was no evidence," Mr. Jang said. "If he could show that much lack of judgment, is he really competent enough to run our security services?"

Burnaby Councillor Anne Kang – now affectionately dubbed "Agent Kang" by colleagues – wondered how safety bylaws and road work could be the stuff of espionage.

"I grew up here," Ms. Kang said Friday. "I was educated here and I don't have ties to the Chinese government. They didn't even say who these governments are. It's very ambiguous."

There is occasional contact between municipal politicians and Chinese officials, typically at banquets to mark the relationship between sister cities or similar events, councillors said.

Underneath the jokes, there is an undertone of hurt, and a sense that any Chinese-Canadian municipal politician in B.C. is now under a cloud of suspicion.

"They marked us," said Richard Chang, a Burnaby councillor. "If you counted the councillors in B.C., it is very easy to know how many are Chinese. Not many. If CSIS knows something, they should just let the public know. They can't just throw something out and say we are investigating."