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Victims' families keenly anticipating Prime Minister's words

» In a 4,000-page report, Mr. Major chronicled officials' incompetence and callous insensitivity in their handling of the tragedy. "The families in some ways have often been treated as adversaries," he said. "The time to right that historical wrong is now."

Mr. Major did not recommend an apology, but remarked that successive federal governments – in part out of concern about exposure to lawsuits – had failed to do so.

Mr. Harper called the findings a "damning indictment" of the federal government, and promptly told families he would be apologizing for the errors.

There is no better forum to do so than during the memorial ceremonies this week.

The annual gatherings typically draw relatively small groups. But the 25th anniversary of Canada's worst terrorist attack is poised to attract much larger crowds. Hundreds of victims' relatives are expected to attend the evening ceremonies.

The country's largest Sikh temples – the Ontario Khalsa Darbar in Mississauga and Guru Nanak Sikh temple in Surrey, B.C. – began two days of prayers Monday to commemorate the disaster.

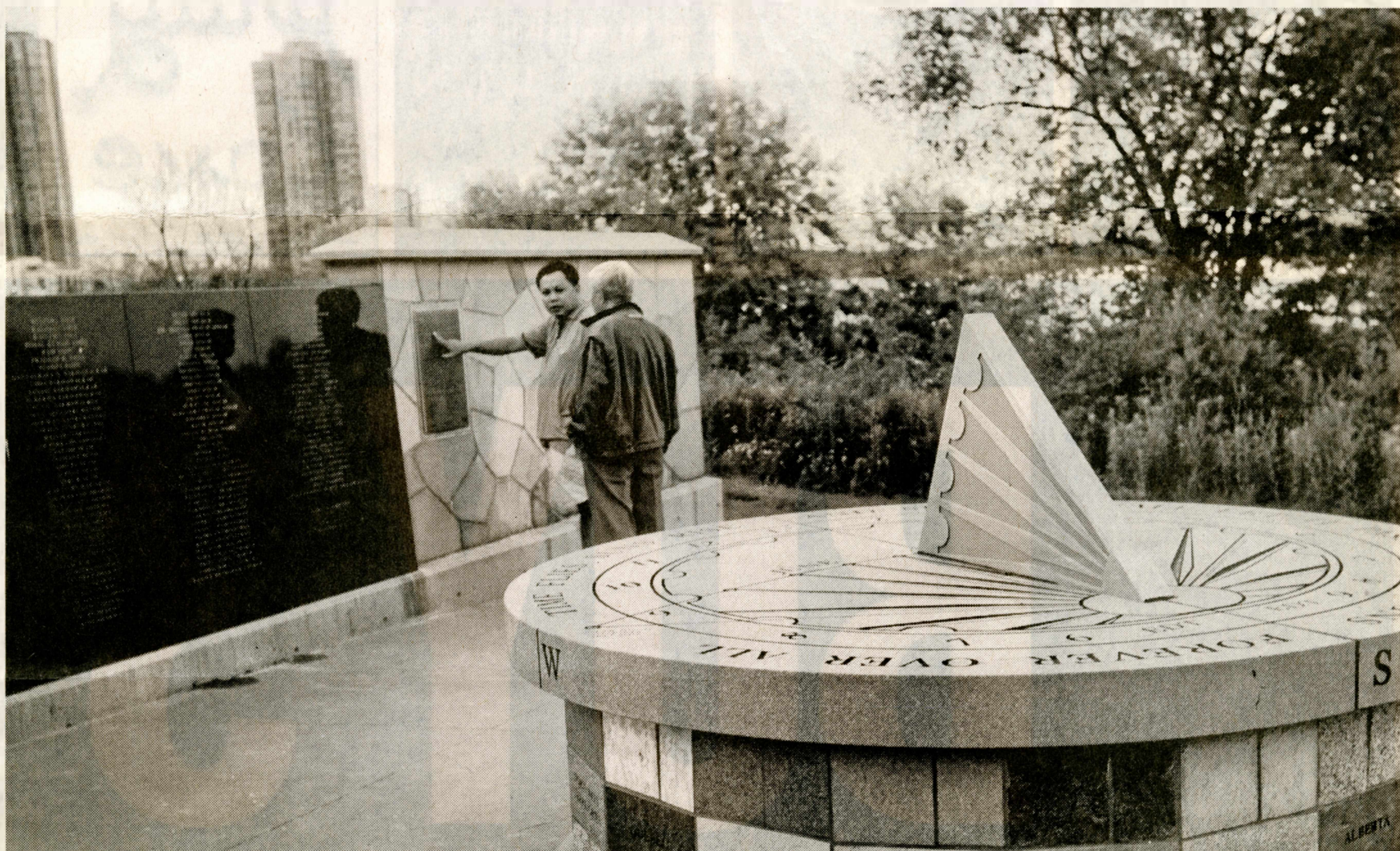
Victims' families are keenly anticipating what the Prime Minister has to say.

David Hayer, a member of the B.C. Legislature whose father was killed after speaking to police about the terrorist conspiracy, said he will be waiting. "Mr. Harper is the first prime minister who really seriously cared about it," he said. "People have waited 25 years to have government agencies acknowledge that they made mistakes."

Bal Gupta, whose wife died on Air India Flight 182, said he hoped the renewed attention will lead to changes in policing, security operations and the justice system. "Air India did not kill 331 people. The government did not kill 331 people. Those who killed them are still roaming free," he said. "We have to find a way so people like that may not come up in the future."

Attendance at this year's memorials may indicate whether the wider public accepts the Air India bombing as an act of domestic terrorism against Canadian citizens. For years, officials played down its significance by casting it as a foreign tragedy.

"I stress this is a Canadian atrocity," Mr. Major said as he announced his findings. "For too long the greatest loss of



Visitors read the names on the Air India memorial at Toronto's Humber Bay Park, where Prime Minister Stephen Harper is expected to offer an apology for the failure of federal agencies to prevent and effectively investigate the worst terrorist attack in Canada's history. JENNIFER ROBERTS FOR THE GLOBE AND MAIL

MEMORIAL

People have waited 25 years to have government agencies acknowledge that they made mistakes.

David Hayer, a B.C. MLA whose father was killed after speaking to police about the Air India bombing

Canadian lives at the hands of terrorists has somehow been relegated outside the Canadian consciousness."

The Toronto Humber Bay Park memorial was built in 2007 – and vandalized just last month.

The monument is designed in the shape of a sundial. Vandals spray-painted graffiti across and removed its shadow caster. A manager of parks with the City of Toronto said the memorial was repaired last Friday at a cost of \$5,000.

» With a report from Ann Hui

Prayers for the dead



A Sikh granthi reads from the Sikh holy book, the Guru Granth Sahib, during a prayer vigil at the Khalsa Barbar temple in Brampton, Ont., for those killed in the 1985 Air India bombing. The largest Sikh temple in North America, the Khalsa Barbar will join the Guru Nanak Sikh temple in Surrey, B.C., in the 48-hour vigil, which will culminate in a call for justice for the victims.

JENNIFER ROBERTS FOR THE GLOBE AND MAIL