

'A Canadian atrocity'

AIR INDIA DISASTER 'Culture of complacency' still leaves air travellers vulnerable, says head of inquiry into deadly bombings. After 25 years, families are promised compensation and apology

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OTTAWA—Families of the Air India bombing victims will receive compensation and an apology after a special inquiry report blamed a turf war between the RCMP and Canada's spy agency for failing to prevent the disaster.

Dabbing away tears afterward, Toronto's Shipra Rana, whose sister Shyla Aurora was on the ill-fated Flight 182, said what bothered her most was that there were so many signs a terrorist attack was going to happen and that so many people ignored them.

"The government knew exactly what was going to happen, they knew exactly what kind of bomb that was going to be put on the flight and they just ignored it..." Rana said after the damning report was released Thursday.

Former Supreme Court of Canada justice John Major led a four-year inquiry into the June 23, 1985, explosions that killed 329 crew and passengers, and two baggage handlers working on another Air India flight at Tokyo's Narita airport.

In a scathing report that delves into the investigative and prosecutorial failures in the terrorist attack, Major blasts a culture of "complacency" that still threatens air travellers today.

"I stress that this is a Canadian atrocity," Major said, adding it is the federal government's responsibility to see it doesn't happen again.

Within two hours of the report's release, Prime Minister Stephen Harper met privately with victims' families and lawyers in his third-floor Centre Block office.

"The destruction of Air India Flight 182 remains the worst terrorist attack in Canadian history. It was a cowardly, despicable and senseless act," Harper said.

Even so, Harper warned that "there would be pushback" on some of the recommendations and many would take time to phase in.



SEAN KILPATRICK/THE CANADIAN PRESS

Shipra Rana wipes her eyes as she talks to reporters after she and other relatives of Air India victims met with Prime Minister Stephen Harper.



DAVID COOPER/TORONTO STAR FILE PHOTO

But he said his government would seriously review the report, according to Rob Alexander, 40, whose father Matthew Alexander died aboard Flight 182.

Harper also told the dozen or so family members — many of whom have been demanding answers for years — that the government would

respond "positively" to a special fund being set up and to Major's observation that no government official has ever apologized.

In the Prime Minister's office, several urged Harper to be vigilant about homegrown Sikh extremism, flagging that, in Vancouver, Sikh extremists and "martyrs" are to this



Above, the Star front page June 24, 1985. Left, families visit Ireland in the days that followed.

25 years later, problems still exist, **A6**

The vindication of James Bartleman, **A8**

The Star's view, **A30**

Anger 'entirely legitimate,' Bob Rae says, **A31**

day publicly glorified in parades.

The report suggests better co-ordination between police and security agencies might well have prevented the bombings.

"A cascading series of errors contributed to the failure of our police and security forces to prevent this atrocity," said Major.

"The government needs to take responsibility to avoid further failure and to prevent a return to a culture of complacency."

Major said the findings are so important the government should establish a watchdog to ensure recommendations are implemented.

One recommendation calls for beefed up powers for a national security czar to resolve "turf wars" that erupt over the conflicting interests of the RCMP and Canada's spy agency.

The National Security Adviser would decide whether to disclose threat warnings on the basis of the "public interest," not the interests of the intelligence agencies involved.

The RCMP and the Canadian Security Intelligence Service refused to respond immediately, referring all questions to the public safety minister.

INQUIRY continued on **A6**