Khalistan Movement and Indo-Canada Relations

What is the issue?

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An Indian-origin businessman with ties to the Khalistan movement, has become the new thorn in the relationship between India and Canada.

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What are the historical events responsible for Khalistan?

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- **1947 Partition of India -**Independence of India was not a joyful event for Sikhs, partition left Sikhs in a lot of discontentment with regard to their traditional lands being lost to Pakistan.
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- **Punjabi Suba movement -** A movement was initiated in 1955 under Akali Dal a Sikh dominated political party.
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- It seek re-organisation of Punjab along linguist lines, seeking division of the state into Punjabi and non-Punjabi speaking areas.
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- However, the division acquired communal overtones, with Sikhs voting for Punjabi as mother-tongue (even if they spoke Hindi) and Hindus voting for Hindi as mother-tongue (even if they spoke Punjabi).
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- The State reorganisation commission made its recommendations and it rejected Akali Dals demand which seeks separate statehood.
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- The movement resulted in trifurcation of Punjab into Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh.
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- The disputes of Chandigarh and Sharing of waters of Ravi-Beas and Sutlej between the two states, Punjab and Haryana were the foundation on which the Khalistan dispute was created.
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What was the course of Khalistan Movement?

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- The Khalistan movement is a Sikh nationalist movement that wants to create an independent state for Sikh people, via armed struggle or political, inside the current North-Western Republic of India Such a state existed in Punjab from 1709 to 1849.
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- The idea of Khalistan was an idea first created in 1940s, remained idle but was revived by an NRI seeking a separate homeland for Sikhs.
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- In early 1980s, the movement had emerged as a major separatist movement, fed mostly by bias of Indian Government against Punjab in the case of Chandigarh and sharing of Ravi-Beas waters.
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- There was intense political rivalry between Congress Party and the Akali Dal, Akali Dal was gradually gaining ground as the political representative of the Sikh community.
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- Congress leadership of that time tried to divide the Akalis by propping up diverse groups of people within the Akali Dal.
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- Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale led the Khalistan as an extremist movement, he was initially used by Congress to counter Akali Dal but later he was inspired by the Khalistan ideology and turned against Indian government.
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- The movement was fed on arms under the patronage of Pakistan’s ISI who was seeking revenge for creation of Bangladesh.
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- Bhindranwale emerged as the extremist voice of Sikhs, over-ruling the moderate voices of leaders declared himself as the protector and arbiter of Sikh rights and acquired arms.
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- Demands for separate nation-hood for Punjab was carried out through violent protests and killings of high profile persons in Indian government.
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What are the events which intensified Khalistan movement?

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- Operation Blue star was conducted to capture Bhindrawale in Harmandir Sahib Complex, but the operation resulted in a strong anti-India sentiment.
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- The then PM Indira Gandhi was seen as an enemy of the Sikhs and two Sikh guards of her killed her in 1984.
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- Her killing was followed by wide-spread riots against the Sikhs across India, the genocide of Sikhs across India fuelled more anti-India sentiment.
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- From early 1980s to early 1990s, Punjab went through a phase of wide-spread terrorism.
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- Manifold extremist groups like the Khalistan Liberation Force, Khalistan Commando Force, Babbar Khalsa and umpteen others gained prominence and roamed around freely across Punjab.
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- Sikhs being a patriotic group started to act against the protracted terrorist struggle and chose to side with the Indian nation, the then Punjab Police department succeeded in defeating the movement in 1990s.
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What is present status of the movement?

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- At the present, Khalistan movement is a dormant movement in India.
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- It does not hold much traction in the urban or local populace of Punjab. .
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- But the movement gets ideological support from Sikhs living in Canada, UK or USA.
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- They pump money, ideological support to the struggle, ISI of Pakistan is still pumping money and effort in reviving the movement.
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What are recent tremors in Indo-Canadian relationship?

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- An Indian-origin businessman Jaspal Atwalwas involved in shooting Punjab Minister as part of Khalistan movement, was claimed to be in Canadian

delegation to India.
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- He was formerly associated with the banned Sikh separatists outfit International Sikh Youth Federation (ISYF), Itseeks to establish a separate country for the Sikhs of India called Khalistan.
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- India declared the ISYF as a terrorist outfit and banned it under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act in 2001.
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- The outfit is also banned in Canada, United Kingdom and USA, which have sizeable Sikh populations.
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- Recently he visited Canadian Prime Minister office and the Indian PMO as a part of the delegation’s events in Mumbai and he was personally invited to a reception by the Canadian High Commission in Delhi.
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- The Ministry of External Affairs has not responded yet on how Mr. Atwal was granted a visa, despite being charged with a former State Minister's murder attempt.
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What was the clarification from Canadian side?

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- The Canadian PMO clarified that Mr. Atwal was not part of official delegation to PM’s visit to India, nor was he invited by the Prime Minister’s Office.
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- It also claimed that as is the case with international trips, individuals sometimes travel on their own to the location of the visit.
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- Mr. Atwal he himself clarified that he travelled to India on his own on February 11.
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- Canadian PMO said the invitation to Jaspal Atwal was sent by a member of the Canadian parliament and the invitation was sent by mistake.
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Source: The Hindu, The Quint, Live mint

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