Symbols of Sikh Separatism

What is the issue?

Symbols of Sikh separatism that appeared at the Himachal Pradesh Assembly complex in Dharamshala suggest that forces promoting it are active and capable of mischief.

What happened in Himachal Pradesh?

- Khalistani banners were found put up and graffiti scrawled on walls near the main gate of the Himachal Pradesh Assembly complex in Dharamshala.
- The announcement of June 6 as Khalistan "referendum day" made the State police seal the border.
- A U.S. based Khalistani separatist has been charged in Himachal Pradesh under the UAPA,the Indian Penal Code and the HP Open Places (Prevention of Disfigurement) Act, 1985.
- The State police chief has set up a special investigation team and ordered heightened vigil at the borders.

> *While Section 13 of the UAPA pertains to the offence of inciting or abetting terror acts, Sections 153 A and 153 B of the IPC deal with the offences of promoting communal or sectarian divides and animosity.*

What was the Khalistan Movement about?

- 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.
- In early 1980s, the movement had emerged as a major separatist movement that was fed on arms under the patronage of Pakistan's ISI who was seeking revenge for creation of Bangladesh.
- Bhindranwale emerged as the extremist voice of Sikhs and declared himself as the protector and arbiter of Sikh rights.
- **Operation Blue star** was conducted to capture Bhindrawale in Harmandir Sahib Complex, but the operation resulted in a strong anti-India sentiment.
- The then PM Indira Gandhi was seen as an enemy of the Sikhs and two Sikh guards of her killed her in 1984.
- Her killing was followed by wide-spread riots against the Sikhs across India, the genocide of Sikhs across India fuelled more anti-India sentiment.
- At the present, Khalistan movement is dormant in India but gets ideological support from Sikhs living in Canada, UK, USA and ISI of Pakistan.

To know more about the Khalistan movement, click here

*Operation Blue Star had two components- "**Operation Metal**"confined to Harminder Sahib Complex and "**Operation Shop**" to capture suspects in Punjab countryside.*

How significant is the current happening?

- Domestic divisions in India, exacerbated by the politics and policy are echoing among the diaspora in the U.S., Canada, Europe and Australia.
- Religious minorities and Dalits have been disconnected from the diaspora mobilisation of the Indian government.
- Thoughtless comments and campaigns against the community, particularly when they are led by powerful political actors, can trigger serious reactions.
- There is an immense scope for India's enemies to inflame passions for which vigilance is essential.
- Though isolated and feeble, Sikh separatism continues to flicker and it must serve as a constant reminder for social cohesion and impartial state policy.

References

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