

Visa to Jaspal Atwal, Blacklisted Khalistani Militant

Why in the issue?

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- Indian visa was granted to a Canadian national Jaspal Atwal, a blacklisted individual.

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- Click [here](#) to know more on Blacklist

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Who is Jaspal Atwal?

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- Jaspal Atwal is a Canadian businessman of Indian origin and a Sikh.

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- He was earlier convicted of trying to assassinate a Punjab cabinet minister in 1986.

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- He is a former member of the terrorist organisation International Sikh Youth Federation (ISYF).

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- ISYF advocated for a separate Sikh state of '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.

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Why was he invited now?

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- The invitation was part of the government's new approach.

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- It aims at engaging with those who have not indulged in any separatist and extremist activities in recent years.
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- This is primarily to marginalise the pro-Khalistan voices.
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- Ministry of External Affairs has clarified that Atwal's name was removed from the blacklist last year.
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- Notably, names of more than 100 Sikh individuals were removed when the list was reviewed in 2017.
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What is the controversy?

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- Jaspal Atwal's presence at a dinner honouring Canadian PM Trudeau has triggered a controversy.
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- Trudeau indicated that Atwal issue had diverted attention from the focus on trade and cooperation to extremism.
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- The Canadian PM also hinted at ordering an official inquiry into this.
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Why were many NRI Sikhs blacklisted?

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- The Operation Blue Star in 1984 involved Army action at the Golden Temple in Amritsar, Punjab.
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- Many Sikhs protested the Army action and were alleged to be involved in "anti-national" activities.
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- Subsequently they sought political asylum in foreign countries.
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- Indian intelligence agencies gave a list containing their names to all Indian embassies and high commissions.
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- Consequently, these individuals were denied Indian visas.
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- In the early 1990s, Punjab leaders received complaints from Sikhs abroad that they were being denied entry into India.
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- The blacklist which was not in the public domain became known after this.
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Source: Indian Express, Firstpost

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