

It is in India's interest to work with Canada in curbing terrorism

From disaster to goodwill

Canada's new high commissioner to India is an extremely lucky man. Peter Sutherland, who presented his credentials to president K.R. Narayanan in October, begins his tenure in New Delhi with unprecedented goodwill generated by the recent arrest of two Canadian Indians accused of masterminding the mid-air bombing of an Air India Jumbo aircraft 15 years ago, killing 329 people. Canada is one of those countries which practised nuclear double standards following the Indian nuclear tests in 1998 and then ate crow after three of the five permanent members of the United Nations security council decided that it was best to accept the reality of India's nuclear status and engage New Delhi instead of trying to isolate it.

But alone among the envoys of those countries which preached nuclear hypocrisy in May 1998, the new Canadian high commissioner will not have to pay for the folly of his foreign office. It is one of the paradoxes of diplomacy that envoys, who are otherwise upright and well-meaning persons, often have to pay for the bad judgment of their bosses back home. In the wake of Australia's farcical outrage after Pokhran II, for instance, neither Canberra's high commissioner in New Delhi nor his deputy — then an Australian Indian with impeccable diplomatic lineage in the Indian foreign service — could get anybody anywhere in the vicinity of South Block for months on end to give them the time of day. Alas, Australia's envoy could not even get appointments with the chief minister of Delhi or with lieutenant governors of small Union territories for almost a year after the nuclear tests.

New Zealand is another case in point. There are not many in New Delhi's diplomatic enclave who share A.G. Simcock's sensitivity for India or his understanding of the country. But the high commissioner had to pay for Wellington's tragic error in having boorishly berated the Indian high commissioner to New Zealand in public a day after the nuclear tests. But unlike its treatment of Canada, Australia or the United Kingdom, the prime minister's office decided that New Zealand was not preaching one thing and practising another. Wellington's opposition to the nuclear bomb was not a sham: it did not allow nuclear-armed American ships to even call at ports in New Zealand. So, relations between New Delhi and Wellington were on the road to recovery within months of the Pokhran tests.

Stories like this are legion in Chanakyapuri, but to get back to Indo-Canadian relations: two of Sutherland's predecessors were unfortunate not to have enjoyed any goodwill during their tenures, thanks largely to Canada's penchant for sermonizing India. The subject of these ill-advised sermons was not just nuclear or missile proliferation: it covered child labour, human rights and so on. Because of this short-sighted policy drafted in Ottawa, the visit of the prime minister, Jean Chretien, to India was, to say the least, unproductive. In fact, the disasters that surrounded Elizabeth II's visit to India

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during I.K. Gujral's prime ministership pale into insignificance compared to the effect that Chretien's gratuitous advice on child labour and nuclear issues during his visit had on South Block. Like Sutherland now, his predecessor thrice removed was lucky in having enjoyed unprecedented goodwill in New Delhi. His tenure coincided with the P.V. Narasimha Rao government's decision to unburden India of its mishandled so-

Indo-Canadian relations as a united voice.

It is clear that the long-awaited arrests have produced a sense of relief not only among Canadian Indians, but among all Canadians. There is a sense across the country that justice is well and alive in Canada even if the temptation may be strong to fall back on the adage that "justice delayed is justice denied". After all, according to the *Guin-*



cialist baggage.

The short-lived honeymoon in Indo-Canadian relations that came in the wake of Rao's economic liberalization was reminiscent of the bonhomie between New Delhi and Ottawa in the Fifties and the Sixties, which did not survive Indira Gandhi's first Pokhran test in 1974. This honeymoon also opened many eyes to the potential of Indo-Canadian ties. With the goodwill that the arrests in the Air India bombing case is bound to generate in India, Sutherland has the unique opportunity to attempt the realization of the full potential of this relationship.

In the wake of the arrests in British Columbia, the high commissioner has an unlikely partner in this enterprise — the Punjab chief minister, Prakash Singh Badal, who is visiting Canada this week. Since Badal is not a Congressman and does not carry any baggage associated with Operation Bluestar, he will have a chance to apply a much-needed balm on the restive Sikh community in Canada. It would be stating the obvious to say that the potential of Indo-Canadian ties will remain under-exploited until the large and affluent Indian community is brought back into the mainstream of

It was because of Canada's nuclear double standards that Chretien's visit to India was unproductive

ness *Book of World Records*, the bombing of Air India flight 182 is still the worst-ever single terrorist attack. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police describes the mid-air crash as "the most serious act of terrorism perpetrated on Canadian soil in the history of the country".

Badal is visiting Canada at a time when radicalism within the Canadian Sikh community has ebbed. Four months before the Air India bombing, Ujjal Dosanjh, a Canadian politician of Punjabi origin, was attacked with an iron by a man outside his law office in Vancouver. Dosanjh was taken to hospital and stitched up 80 times for head wounds and a broken arm. The moderate Canadian Indian survived the attack, and earlier this year, became prime minister of British Columbia, the first non-white to head the government of any province in Canada.

Dosanjh's government has cut "community development" funding which used to go to Khalistani-run *gurdwaras* at the height of terrorism in Punjab. Although hate transmissions continue from Punjabi radio stations, there is an effort to put a stop to these. British Columbia is also home to Herb Dhaliwal, a Punjabi member of Canada's federal cabinet. The biggest change that will strike Badal, though, is that moderates in his community have regained control of the big *gurdwaras* in Vancouver.

South block and Indian missions abroad normally tend to look at foreign trips by chief ministers merely as a nuisance. To be fair to the ministry of external affairs, it is difficult to fault such an attitude because many chief ministers look at their foreign trips either as mere junkets or as an opportunity to pamper their domestic constituency or to raise election money. It is, however, vital that South Block should use a different yardstick to measure Badal's trip to Canada. The visit may present a rare opportunity at the political level to rebuild bridges with Canada's Sikh community, which are still in a state of disrepair even though governments have changed several times both in New Delhi and in Chandigarh since Operation Bluestar. Such an initiative on India's part is vital if only because Canada has become a "supermarket" for terrorists across the world. Such an incredible description of Canada is not the figment of this columnist's or any other journalist's fertile imagination.

A report just tabled in Canada's House of Commons by the security intelligence review committee which supervises the Canadian security intelligence service said: "Canada has become a so-called 'supermarket' for terrorists because of its open refugee policies, its proximity to the United States and its diverse ethnic population, which provides both a cover and a pool of victims for financiers". According to a testimony before a parliamentary committee by Ward Edlock, who recently retired as head of CSIS, one can name any terrorist organization in the world and it has an active presence in Canada. Now that the Air India tragedy is once again in public focus on account of the arrests, this is the time for New Delhi to take up with Ottawa more seriously and in-depth the way terrorists enjoy a free run of Canada. South Block can then have the satisfaction of turning tables on the Canadians who have been preaching them the virtues of human rights, nonproliferation and so on.

But such satisfaction is a minor matter. It is in India's interest to work with Canada in curbing the terrorist menace emanating from that country because the tentacles of the sinister network in Canada poses a threat not merely to India but to the whole of south Asia, especially Sri Lanka. In this sense, it is perhaps more important to work with Canada on the issue of terrorism than to set up working groups or create an institutional framework between India and the US to deal with counter-terrorism.

Kanishka bombing arrests in Canada

Vancouver, Oct. 28 (Agencies): Canadian police yesterday arrested two men for the 1985 bombing of the Air-India plane, *Kanishka*, over the Atlantic Ocean that killed 329 people.

Ajaib Singh Bagri and Ripudaman Singh Malik, members of Sikh militant groups, are also accused of a related 1985 bombing that killed two men at Tokyo's Narita Airport. The bomb was intended to destroy another Air-India flight with 177 people on board. More arrests are expected,



Malik and Bagri. (AP/PTI)

the Royal Canadian Mounted Police said.

Malik, 53, is a wealthy Vancouver businessman and is believed to have helped fund the bombings. He was preparing to flee to Pakistan at the time of his arrest.

Bagri, 51, a resident of Kamloops in British Columbia, was reportedly a key aide of Talwinder Singh Parmar, a leader of the militant Babbar Khalsa group, who was shot by the police in India in 1992.

"We spent the last 15 years collecting evidence so that all of the charges will be supported," constable Cate Galliford said.

Kanishka, scheduled to fly from Toronto and Montreal to New Delhi via London, blew up off the coast of Ireland on June 23, 1985, killing everyone on board. The passengers, many of whom were going to India to visit relatives, included 82 children.

The 1985 bombings were thought to be intended to avenge Operation Bluestar.

India said the arrests were a positive development. "Any person who is involved in terrorism has to bear the consequences of the law," an external affairs ministry spokesman said in Delhi.

Authorities said they believe both bombs were made in British Columbia and placed inside luggage loaded in Vancouver.

Canadian investigators believe the Narita bomb was supposed to destroy an Air-India flight from Tokyo to Bangkok, but blew up accidentally when it was being transferred from another plane.

Police said Bagri and Malik conspired with Parmar and Inderjit Singh Reyat in connection with the bombings. Reyat was convicted of manslaughter by Canada in 1991 for making the Narita bomb.

Bagri was also charged with the 1988 attempted murder of Tara Singh Hayer, an Indo-Canadian journalist who had been outspoken against the Air-India bombing (Picture on Page 6).

Canadian police said the investigation was complicated by the number of countries involved and witnesses that had to be interviewed.

Indians slighted by MEA's refusal

BY SHUBHABRATA BHATTACHARYA

India Canada
New Delhi, Aug. 30: Canadians of Indian origin, mostly hailing from Punjab, have taken umbrage at the refusal of external affairs minister Jaswant Singh to allow Canada to setup a consulate in Chandigarh.

Reacting to the reply sent to Canadian foreign minister Leon Axworthy, Canada's federal minister for oceans and fisheries Harbans Singh (Harb) Dhaliwal, in a statement from Vancouver, has said that this decision will harm the interests of Punjabi migrants, who are the largest ethnic group among Indians settled in Canada.

The feelings of the Indian community in Canada have been conveyed to Mr Jaswant Singh by vice-chairman of the National Commission on Minorities Tarlochan Singh, who has enclosed clippings of news items.

Seeking a review of the decision to turn down the Canadian government's request, Mr Tarlochan Singh pointed out that the Canadian move had come as a result of the pressure mounted on the authorities in Ottawa by the Indian community.

There are five MPs and one federal minister (Mr Harb Dhaliwal) of Indian origin in Canada. The Prime Minister of the province of British

CANADA CONSULATE

Columbia is Mr Ujjal Dosanjh. There are many provincial ministers of Indian origin as well.

Talking to *The Asian Age*, Mr Tarlochan Singh said that while the enthusiastic and warm reception accorded to deposed Prime Minister of Fiji, Mr Mahendra Choudhry, was a fine gesture to persons of Indian origin, a positive gesture towards Indians in Canada too is called for.

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This non-resident community has total affinity towards India and wants to participate in its economic progress as well, he said.

The ground for turning down the Canadian request, according to the ministry of external affairs, is that as per present policy, diplomatic and consular offices are confined to the four metropolises of New Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai and Calcutta.

The Canadian high commission has a visa collection centre and information office, entirely manned by Indian staff, at Chandigarh. Ottawa had requested New Delhi to upgrade this setup to a consulate.

The move for a Canadian consulate in Chandigarh is also backed by Punjab's political establishment. When contacted, the external affairs ministry officials confirmed having received representation from a wide cross-section of people in Punjab.

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India, Canada meet on terrorism ends

Apratim Mukarji
New Delhi, February 16

THE INDO-CANADA Working Group on Counter-Terrorism wound up its third meeting here today, identifying terrorism as a crime that could not be justified on political, ideological, religious or any other grounds.

The Working Group met close on the heels of the February 8 meeting of the India-US Counter-Terrorism Working Group in Washington. The group condemned unequivocally "all acts, methods and practices of terrorism as criminal and unjustifiable, whatever the considerations of a political, philosophical, ideological, racial, ethnic, religious or any other nature that may be invoked to justify them."

Bilateral exercises are leading

upto global negotiations expected to be underway under the auspices of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) on the Indian proposal for a "comprehensive" Convention on International Terrorism in September.

India has been working closely with the P-5 countries (the five permanent members of the UN Security Council) and especially in tandem with the US and Russia on coordinating a UNSC action against international terrorism.

The Indian draft of a Comprehensive Convention of International Terrorism, put forth in 1994, tries to address the relevant problems sponsored by states and fills an important gap in the existing international conventions which focus largely on the responsibility of individuals and groups for terrorist acts.

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