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ABBOTSFORD GURDWARA DECLARED NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

"Canada a country of tolerance and inclusion"

Shruti Prakash Joshi

Prime Minister Jean Chretien received a taste of typical Indian hospitality, complete with a musical band and dozens of glittering necklaces, at a ceremony to declare the Gur Sikh Gurdwara in Abbotsford a national historic site. It was a veritable who's who, with cabinet ministers, both federal and provincial, MPs, MLAs and other dignitaries descending upon the gurdwara to attend the ceremony on Wednesday afternoon. About 2,000 people attended the ceremony and time and again interspersed the speeches with cries of "Bole So Nihal : Sat Sri Akal". And the historic moment was filled with speeches and references to our forefathers who faced untold hardships and discrimination but slowly managed to carve a niche for themselves in this society. "This is a saga of tolerance and inclusion, an example of what Canada is all about," roared I Federal Natural Resources Minister Herb Dhaliwal, a fact reiterated

many times over by the plethora of speakers. Prime Minister Chretien admitted that the experience of the pioneer Sikhs was not a happy one and that the treatment they received at the hands of the Canadians was one no one could be proud of but he said with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, every Canadian today enjoyed the same rights and was treated equal in the eyes of law, irrespective of their color, religion or gender.

He said the temple, built in 1911 and the only one of its kind in North America, was a gift by the pioneers and it was the duty of Canadians to preserve it for future generations. It was while delivering his speech that Chretien announced the opening of a Canadian visa office in Chandigarh, a long pending issue with immigrants from Punjab, who have to travel all the way to New Delhi to get their cases processed.

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Prime Minister Jean Chretien, Canadian Heritage Minister Shiela Copps and Natural Resources Minister Herb Dhaliwal along with a number of Indo-Canadian dignitaries inside the historic Abbotsford Gurdwara. Standing next to Chretien is Inder Singh Gill, the lone survivor and a witness to the construction of the temple in 1911.

Inset: Prime Minister Jean Chretien wearing the traditional "Saropa" (the saffron colored cloth) around his neck.

Mela Gadri Babian Da

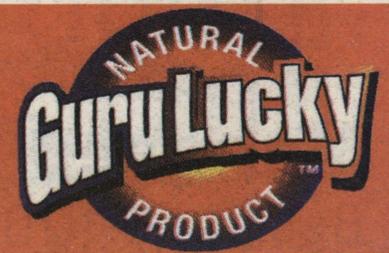
Famous Punjabi folk singers Kuldip Manak and Hazara Singh Ramta along with other famous singers will perform at this year's Mela Gadri Babian Da on Sunday, August 4 at Surrey's Bear Creek Park. The mela, sponsored by Prof. Mohan Singh Memorial Foundation (Canada), is dedicated to the memory of East Indians on Komagata Maru ship who were turned away from Vancouver, the Gadar movement and Indian freedom fighters. According to the President of Prof. Mohan Singh Memorial Foundation, Canada Mr Sahib Thind Federal Minister Alan Rock, Surrey Central MP, Gurmant Grewal, Minister of State for Mental Health, Dr. Gulzar Cheema and other distinguished personalities will attend the mela.

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Malhi peeved at not being formally invited to temple event

Ottawa: Toronto MP Gurbax Singh Malhi, a Paul Martin supporter is upset that he was not formally invited to a major Sikh event in Abbotsford BC. He said that the government should to apologize for not sending him an invitation to the event. Toronto MP Gurbax Malhi, a supporter and organizer of leadership contender Paul Martin, said he didn't receive a formal invitation to the ceremony Wednesday designating a Sikh temple in Abbotsford as a national historical site. Several commentators in the Sikh community lambasted the government of Prime Minister Jean Chretien, who spoke at the dedication, saying Malhi was punished because of his open support for Martin. Malhi refused to speculate on whether the snub was based on party politics, but criticized an official in Chretien's office who said Wednesday that everyone was welcome and that no invitations were issued. Malhi said formal invitations were sent to prominent Sikhs across Canada. "They need some guts to say,

'Yes, we made a mistake. Sorry, we apologize, we made a mistake,' " Malhi, the Liberal MP for the Ontario riding of Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale, said. An official in the office of Heritage Minister Sheila Copps said Thursday that Chretien's officials told Parks Canada to send invitations to all Indo-Canadian MPs. However, Parks Canada sent Malhi's invitation to an incorrect address, he said, and when the mistake was noticed, the invitation was sent Tuesday to Malhi's constituency office. The official, who spoke on condition that he not be identified, pointed out that Copps phoned Malhi late Tuesday evening, urging him to attend the dedication. Malhi, as the only turbaned Sikh in Parliament, said he regularly receives invitations to attend community events throughout North America. He said he didn't attend because he never received a formal invitation, and by the time he spoke with Copps, he felt it came too late.

A momentous day for the Sikh community

Continued from front page

way to New Delhi to get their cases processed. Supreme Court Judge Wally Oppal facilitated the ceremony. In his brief introduction he outlined the hardships faced by the pioneer Sikhs reiterating that declaring the site, as a national historic site was a big win for the Sikh community. "The gurdwara was not only a place of worship and a community center but also a focal point for political action which was necessary at that time in order to secure rights for our people," he said. Messages from MP Gurbax Malhi, Premier Gordon Campbell and Indian Consulate General in Vancouver, B. Jaishankar was read out on the occasion. Gurnam Sanghera talked briefly about the Gurdwara itself saying it was a matter of great pride that the historical structure built in 1911 was being recognized in such a way. He said it was amazing that such recognition had come in Canada while the holiest of Sikh shrines, Harminder Sahib, was still in the process of being declared a heritage monument. Federal Natural Resources Minister, Herb Dhaliwal said it was a very emotional day for him as this day was about "our pioneers, grandfathers and great-grand fathers, about their wins and their losses and about their hardships and passions." He said: "By recognizing this

site we will be able to tell their stories to our future generations and to all Canadians that this is what Canada is all about." Heritage Minister Shiela Copps was lauded for her efforts in creating a legacy for the Sikhs in the country. In her speech she said it was a proud day to be a Sikh, but also an exceptionally proud day to be a Canadian as well. She talked about the strengths and commitments of the multicultural communities in Canada. She also declared June 27 as multicultural day, which will be celebrated in all classrooms in Canada from next year. Finally it was the turn of the Prime Minister to say a few words, and he began in his characteristic style warming up to the swelling crowds saying that his English was a little rickety and he was till putting

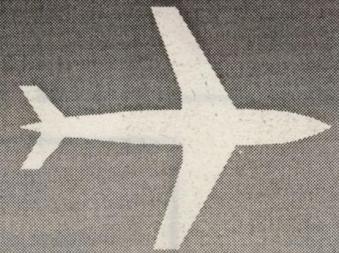
emphasis on the wrong syllable. The Abbotsford Sikh temple is a simple building but this simple building is a place of great history. It serves as a center of community life for the first Sikhs who came to work in the logging and lumber industry and who came here to join in the common project of building our young nations." He called the place a treasured place of memories, of faith, prayer, family and culture. He said he was privileged to join in the celebration of the extraordinary contribution of an extraordinary people. A celebration all the more significant because the welcome Canadians gave to the Sikhs was not always one that did us proud." But he said Canada today was a place where people lived together in harmony."



The Vishwa Hindu Parishad temple in Burnaby had its annual picnic last Sunday at the Peace Arch Park near the Canada-US border

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