

Amnesty suggested for once rebel Sikhs abroad

The National Commission for Minorities (NCM) has urged the government to grant amnesty to Sikhs who fled the country after the 1984 anti-Sikh riots and got involved in anti-India activities abroad.

In a report submitted to the central government, the NCM has said that these Sikhs 'have realised their faults' and want to return to India and be part of the 'mainstream'.

According to NCM member Harcharan Singh Josh, the government has blacklisted these people and they were unable to procure Indian visa and passports.

Josh told IANS that he had met a large number of Sikhs living in London where many who once sympathised with the separatist Khalistan movement aired their grievances.

Their main grouse was that although they had realised the folly, they were unable to return to the country of their birth because of legal hurdles.

Josh has suggested that their cases be 'reviewed favourably on individual basis' - that is if they were not involved in anti-India activities.

Josh said in his report: 'The migrants admitted that being disturbed by the Bluestar operation and the 1984 (anti-Sikh) riots in India, they joined extremist groups and terrorist camps.'

Operation Bluestar was codename of the Indian Army assault on Amritsar's Golden Temple, the holiest Sikh shrine, in June 1984. It was directed against Sikh militants led by Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale who had taken refuge there.

Subsequently, following the Oct 31, 1984, assassination of then prime minister Indira Gandhi by two of her Sikh bodyguards, a wave of anti-Sikh violence left nearly 3,000 innocent Sikhs dead, many in the national capital.

Both events further ignited the Sikh separatist campaign, which was eventually put down in 1993, by when it had claimed some 25,000 lives.

According to Josh, these migrants were now primarily settled in Canada, the US, Britain, France and Germany and number around 15,000. At one time, Khalistani protagonists even had offices in Washington and lobbied actively among Western diplomats and MPs.

'They are well settled in these countries and are financially supporting their families in India. They are separated from their families for the last 24 years and want to come back home,' Josh said.

In their meeting with Josh, Sikhs living abroad demanded that those who killed Sikhs in [New Delhi](#) and other places in October-November 1984 should be punished.

Although many in Western countries have bid goodbye to the Khalistan cause, Indian officials believe a small section is still active.

Josh said he visited Britain in August and submitted his report to the Indian government late last month.

Richa Sharma (© IANS / India eNews)