

The Indo-Canadian VOICE

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A HISTORIC MOMENT FOR INDO-CANADIANS: Thousands of joyous young and old Indo-Canadians turned out to greet Prime Minister Jean Chretien as he declared the Abbotsford Khalsa Diwan Society Gurdwara a National Historic Site of Canada on Wednesday.

Photos by CHANDRA BODALIA

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 TOP STORY

ABBOTSFORD KHALSA DIWAN SOCIETY GURDWARA

Historic site designation: the event and the politics

Continued from front page

by RATTAN MALL

In spite of all the negative propaganda that some supporters of former federal finance minister Paul Martin indulged in to spoil the dignity of Wednesday's declaration by Prime Minister Jean Chretien of Abbotsford's Khalsa Diwan Society Gurdwara, built in 1911, as a national historic site of Canada, the event proved to be a roaring success for the proud Sikh people and, indeed, for all Canadians.

Thousands of Indo-Canadians and VIPs galore turned up to greet Chretien and participate in a historic event, ignoring the mainstream media's attempts to ruin the occasion with its emphasis on Liberal party politics.

Besides federal Natural Resources Minister Herb Dhaliwal and Canadian Heritage Minister Sheila Copps, there were Senator Mobina Jaffer, Surrey Central M.P. Gurmant Grewal, B.C. Supreme Court Judge Wally Oppal, philanthropist Asa Johal, B.C. Health Planning Minister Sindi Hawkins, Minister of State Gulzar Chheema, many M.P.s and MLAs and Abbotsford Mayor George Ferguson. Sikh leaders included Abbotsford Temple President Nachhattar (Norm) Sangha and Surrey's Guru Nanak Sikh Temple President Balwant Singh Gill.

The conduct of the Martin camp people caused a lot of revulsion even among Martin's supporters who felt that the gurdwara event was something to be cherished - after all, it was none other than the prime minister of Canada

As federal Natural Resources Minister Herb Dhaliwal told The VOICE on Thursday: "It was a great day for the Indo-Canadian community and for Canada. We've never had a sitting prime minister come to a gurdwara.

leadership that we got the first Indo-Canadians in Parliament, the first Indo-Canadian Cabinet minister, and if you go beyond that, the first member of the Chinese Canadian community to become governor-general in this

nity - Canada Place, the Export Development Corporation, the Prime Minister's Round Table on the Economy and the Environment, Canada Pension Plan Review Board, Immigration and Refugee Board, Farm Credit Corporation. I can you give you lists and lists of people across the country from our community who have been appointed to boards and commissions and Crown corporations.

"The stamp on 100 years of Sikhs in Canada - the prime minister was there to unveil it himself.

"The prime minister has a record of working for minority rights and why? Because he himself was a minority. As (federal Canadian Heritage Minister) Sheila Copps said he didn't speak a word of English - he learned it. And the prime minister told us of when they couldn't play on the local golf course if they were French. So he's experienced that (discrimination) himself.

"And our community should recognize all that he's done for us and I know they will and they will support him in the (federal Liberal party leadership) review. And if there are some people who want to support (someone else) when there is a leadership race, they are free to support whoever they want to.

"But when we have a leader who's been elected by the people, I know that our community will be supporting the prime minister and I urge them to support him because of all the things he's



Jean Chretien flanked by Herb Dhaliwal, Justice Wally Oppal, Sadhu Singh Samra (Senior Vice President of Surrey's Guru Nanak Sikh Temple), Sindi Hawkins, Balwant Singh Gill (President of Surrey's Temple) and Sheila Copps in a Punjabi suit inside the historic gurdwara.

Photo by CHANDRA BODALIA

himself who was coming to honour the Indo-Canadian community in general and the Sikh community in particular.

This was not the time for meanness, especially as Chretien has always supported the Indo-Canadian community in real terms.

Never, as far as I know. It's the first time and I think that's historic."

Dhaliwal went on to point out: "But if we look at the prime minister, he appointed the first Indo-Canadian to the bench - Wally Oppal (now a B.C. Supreme Court judge). It was under his

country. These were all breaking new grounds.

"More women have been appointed to the Senate than ever before, more women appointed to political patronage positions, and contrary to what some people are saying, many appointments from our commu-

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