

'Carabram Must Celebrate Cultures, Not Separatism'

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau Has Affirmed Canada's Support For A United India - HFC

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groups and individuals from the GTA — including several Punjabis — opposed the Carabram board's decision to introduce the "Punjab" pavilion. They said it was in bad taste and went against the festival's claims of promoting unity amidst diversity.

HFC spokesperson Prof. Azad Kaushik submitted that allowing a Punjab Pavilion to participate separately gives the impression of Carabram's lack of sensitivity to problems arising out of separatist activities which are being pursued by some elements in Canada.

HFC made it clear that the Punjab Pavilion was nothing but a camouflaged presentation of a separatist idea.

The Carabram board clarified that the Carabram festival, under their constitution, was a celebration of cultures, as expressed in dance, music and traditions and not a national presentation. They argued that the constitution of Carabram mentioned celebration of cultures and therefore they did not find anything wrong in allowing the Punjab Pavilion. They said the issue had been discussed with concerned decision makers last year including Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland.

(A couple of days ago, Freeland had, in an email to the *Globe and Mail* said it was "inappropriate" for Indian diplomats to interfere in the cultural festival. Some Indian consular officials had informally met Carabram officials



to request them to not give permission for separate Punjab and India pavilions.

Brampton Mayor Linda Jeffrey wrote to Ms. Freeland on Aug. 18, 2017 saying she was concerned about "unwarranted and unwelcome interference" by the Consulate General of India in the festival.

Globe and Mail says Jeffrey also alleged that consular officials tried to pressure organizers to change the name to 'Punjabi' cultural pavilion. "This type of unwarranted interference by Indian officials in a local cultural festival in Brampton was shocking," Ms. Jeffrey wrote.

The Carabram Board allowed the Punjab pavilion to go ahead and be featured in the festival.

HFC appreciated the argument forwarded by the Carabram board but insisted that if the Punjab Pavilion was allowed once again this year, it would represent a lack of understanding of the current perception of a disruptive

separatist presence on Canadian soil. "Prime Minister Trudeau has just completed a visit to India which ran into controversies because of this discordant element. Trudeau has affirmed Canada's support to a unified India and a separate Punjab pavilion does not follow the PM's sentiments," Kaushik said.

HFC members also told the board that there is a large presence of non-Sikh Indo Canadian Punjabi diaspora, cutting across religion and linguistic lines. "They are not represented in this Punjab Pavilion travesty and are aggrieved," Kaushik said.

Last year, Brampton businessman Piyush Gupta told the *Brampton Guardian*: "I have been objecting about the Punjab pavilion being a Punjabi myself."

"I explained to Carabram board members that Punjab has two parts, one in India and the other in Pakistan. Most people from northern parts of India, like myself, are Punjabis and we each

follow different religions. Punjab is not a land of one religion."

In fact, the Punjab pavilion is not even presented by a Punjabi cultural group. It is being pushed to the fore by a non-profit NGO formed for a different purpose, probably also getting grant for whatever purpose it was formed. The members of the NGO are not even all Punjabis. "We did not understand how the permissions were granted, and this could come under legal scrutiny," the HFC said in a statement.

The Globe and Mail quoted Sanjeev Malik, president of Uttar Pradeshies in Canada, which represents a state in northern India, who said his group had approached the Consulate General's office to try to merge the Punjab pavilion with the Indian pavilion.

"There are some separatists here in Canada. They want Punjab to be separate from India. And that's the reason they want their separate pavilion," Mr. Malik was quoted by the paper as

saying. HFC felt that there was a political agenda being pushed by supporters/organisers of the pavilion, to which Carabram has unwittingly become a part. HFC cautioned Carabram of such activities as these may hurt the festival.

"We are proud Canadians and residents of Canada and we felt hurt when Indo Canadian relations seemed to plunge during Trudeau's visit to India. We would like Carabram and all Canadian organisations to stay away from such vote bank politics. Current political perceptions play a leading role while deciding future actions," Kaushik said.

The Carabram team presented two options which they proposed to present to the Board. The first would be including the Punjab pavilion within the India pavilion or rename 'Punjab' to 'Punjabi' pavilion. While the first option was accepted by the HFC, the second option suggested naming all other pavilions on cultural lines eg: Indian, Nepalese, Filipino etc instead of just the country name. Kaushik said the forum would be waiting for a response/decision from the Carabram Board.

Pic on page 3 shows the Punjab Pavilion at Carabram 2017. Pic on this page shows a dance in the India Pavilion. - Twitter.

For more info, contact: Bhavesh Kothari or Harveena Sandhu of the Carabram India Pavilion - email: starglamenter-tainments@gmail.com

Observers Say Jagmeet's Distance From Ottawa Is 'Creating A Disconnect'

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that we need to do with Jagmeet as leader."

Singh had faced a backlash last week for not taking a stronger stance against the use of violence by Sikh separatists and backtracked last year after saying a judge who speaks an Indigenous language but not French should

be eligible for the Supreme Court.

Some observers have suggested that Singh, who doesn't have a seat in the House of Commons and has instead spent much of his time as leader crisscrossing the country, doesn't spend enough time in Ottawa.

They argue that aside from being away from the cameras, the

distance has created a disconnect between Singh and the caucus.

Other NDP MPs also closed ranks around Singh and called the recent controversy a learning experience for him as well as caucus members, who are having to figure out how to operate without their leader in the House of Commons.

"With the experience and the weeks going on, we're seeing what can be improved on," said Guy Caron, who serves as the NDP's leader in Parliament. "So we'll be adjusting. And I'm sure he will be adjusting as well."

Former NDP national director Karl Belanger nonetheless said that it is imperative Singh and his

MPs resolve their issues now if they want to have any hope next year.

"As we get closer to the election," he said, "people are eager to have a sense of where the party's going and they hope that the kind of problems that we've seen in the past few weeks will not become a common occurrence."



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