



Weather for Marysvil  
 Clear  
 Time: 7:30 pm  
 Temp: 44 F  
 RealFeel Temp: 6  
 Humidity: 50 %  
 Winds: NNW at :  
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Monday, November 22, 2004

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### Sikhs remember carnage

By Ching Lee/Appeal-Democrat

For Sikhs all over the world, the 1984 attack of the Golden Temple, their holiest shrine, marks the beginning of one of the most historic events in modern Indian history.

Hundreds of Yuba-Sutter Sikhs packed the Sikh Temple Gurudwara in Yuba City on Saturday to commemorate the 20th anniversary of what they consider to be a tragedy without closure and a wound that has never healed.



By Chris Kaufman/Appeal-Democrat  
[ckaufman@appeal-democrat.com](mailto:ckaufman@appeal-democrat.com)  
 Sohan Singh of Live Oak watches a documentary film Saturday about the 1984 massacre in India, where thousands of Sikhs were killed, at the Sikh Temple on Tierra Buena Road in Yuba City.

The program included several guest speakers and a slide show flashing graphic images of Sikhs being killed, tortured and maimed following the Indian government's military attack on the Golden Temple complex in June 1984. Led by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, the Indian army stormed the complex in an attempt to flush out Sikh leader Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale and his followers, which some believed to be terrorists.

Bhindranwale's group had taken refuge inside the complex, and when the army was met with gunfire, Gandhi gave orders to take the temple by force.

The conflict eventually led to the Oct. 31, 1984, assassination of the prime minister by her Sikh bodyguards. Some believe her assassination later erupted into a "blood for blood" massacre of Sikhs by Hindu mobs and those in Gandhi's political party.

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"The Indian government and judiciary have repeatedly characterized these massacres as an emotional response to the assassination of Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards on Oct. 31, 1984, but rather than mournful crowds, India was paralyzed by organized and equipped death squads," said guest speaker Jaskaran Kaur, author of "Twenty Years of Impunity," a book about the 1984 calamity.



She described the "methodical" way in which the ruling political party carried out its plan to burn and desecrate the Sikhs by arming the mobs with weapons and information on the location of Sikh houses and businesses.

*By Chris Kaufman/Appeal-Democrat  
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*Sikhs gather at the temple in Yuba City Saturday in remembrance of the 1984 massacre in India, where thousands of Sikhs were killed.*

"The police participated in and instigated the murders," said Kaur, who is from Santa Clara. "At best, police officers did not respond to calls for help and passively observed the violence inflicted on Sikhs, stating they did not have instructions to save Sikhs."

Yuba City resident Ajit Singh Moonak, a survivor, gave an emotional account of what he saw the night the prime minister was assassinated. He said he was working the night shift in New Delhi, the capital of India, when he first heard the news. When he was on his way to work, the mobs were beginning to form, and the city had closed all the shopping malls.

By the time he was off work, the situation had escalated, and people were chanting "Kill Sikhs" on the streets. A mob spotted him and began to chase him. Being a good athlete, he ran. About the same time, the mob saw another Sikh and his family in a car and chased after them instead. Choking back emotion, Moonak said he saw the family burned alive.

Yuba City resident Jasjit Kang, an attendee at the event, said the 1984 genocide is to Sikhs what Sept. 11, 2001, is to Americans.

"I was in ninth grade when we got news that the prime minister was dead," said Kang, who lived in Punjab at the time. "All the cities were shut down, all the shopping malls were closed. We didn't have any way of knowing what was going on. On TV, the only thing they showed was about the prime minister's death."

He said it took a long time before they learned the extent of the crimes and violence being committed against Sikhs. The only news about the carnage came from the British Broadcasting Corporation and victims who escaped Delhi.

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"I wasn't that little, but I remember I was very scared. I felt very helpless," said Kang. "Within two to three weeks, we had thousands of Sikhs taking refuge at the Sikh temples. A lot of people were coming in injured with stories about how their relatives were killed. The police didn't help them. They were just watching and laughing and saying there's nothing they can do. It's unbelievable how that could happen."

Kaur said while the mainstream public is virtually unfamiliar with the tragic events of 1984, the Sikh community has been organizing events of remembrance to increase awareness.

"Despite the 20 years of impunity, or because of this passage of time, we hope survivors and their supporters will come together to demonstrate the power of personal testimony and community organizing," said Kaur.

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