



Memorial unveiled for Air India victims

Families wait for justice

By CP

TORONTO — Twenty-two years after the worst mass murder in Canadian history, a memorial commemorating victims of the Air India bombings was unveiled Saturday on a serene stretch of waterfront.

But while family members and friends of the bombing victims applauded the memorial as a place for peaceful reflection, many wondered if justice would ever be served.

"There is work to do still; hopefully with the inquiry, we'll get some kind of closure. I don't think we'll ever get justice," said Jayashree Thampi, who represents the Air India Victims' Families Association and lost her daughter on the flight.

"It's very serene, very beautiful — they couldn't have chosen a better place," she said, adding that it was the first site the association looked at.

'We have got no justice'

However, she said the revelation recently that some witnesses at the public inquiry into the bombings were too afraid to testify is typical of the kind of fear and silence that has surrounded the tragedy since the beginning.

"After 22 years, things haven't changed. I only hope the security people can give them the protection that they need so they can come forward," Thampi said.

As mourners calmly lit incense and laid flowers on the granite memorial, other family members became emotional.

Sundra Aurora, whose 26-year-old daughter Shyla was working as a flight attendant on the Air India flight, came from New Delhi for the commemoration.

She called the memorial "very, very touching.

"But we have got no justice. Who is the culprit? We are waiting for the inquiry commissioner," she said.

Rattan Kalsi, who lost his daughter Indira in the bombing, said the monument brings peace but not justice.

"I hope something will come out of the inquiry," said Kalsi, whose lapel was adorned with both a photo of his daughter and a maple leaf pin.

"I want to see where the mistakes were made," said Kalsi, 77, referring to the failure of police and intelligence to stop the attack.

He added that several days before the bomb detonated and killed 329 people flying over Ireland, CSIS watched Sikh militant Talwinder Singh Parmar, Inderjit Singh Reyat and an unidentified man walk into the woods near Duncan, B.C., to test explosives.

"They were there. How much proof do they want? They should have stopped them and saved so many lives."

Reyat was later convicted of building the bomb that killed two baggage handlers at the airport in Narita, Japan, and Parmar was reportedly killed by Indian police in 1992.



Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Anita Gupta lay a wreath at the unveiling of a memorial for the victims of Air India flight 182 at a waterfront park in Toronto on Saturday. (CP photo)

Canada not immune to terrorism: Harper

Prime Minister Stephen Harper, Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty and Toronto Mayor David Miller joined more than 200 people at the ceremony.

Harper said the bombing reminds Canadians that our country is not immune to terrorism.

"On that dark day, we got a shocking glimpse of (what) lurks at the core of some of our fellow human beings," Harper said.

The memorial is a place where all Canadians can go to pay their respects and remember those who were victims of terror, he added.

'A Canadian event'

McGuinty paid tribute to the families and friends of the victims by honouring their quest for answers about what happened in the days and moments leading up to the bombing.

"Your strength and courage are proof that even when the road is long, when the light is dim, when the pain can be overwhelming, there is hope," McGuinty said.

Family and friends on hand for the ceremony remembered their loved ones and spoke of their hopes for the ongoing Air India inquiry.

The memorial is comprised of a sundial, gardens and a granite inscription wall in Toronto's west end that bears the names of the 329 people who lost their lives when Air India Flight 182 exploded off the coast of Ireland on June 23, 1985.

It also commemorates two baggage handlers killed by a bomb in a related attack at Tokyo's Narita airport the same day.

The memorial resembles a similar memorial built in Ireland 22 years ago.

Lata Pada, who lost her husband and two daughters on the flight, called the memorial "a beautiful sanctuary" and "a place of pilgrimage" for the families and friends who lost their loved ones.

"And also, for all Canadians to recognize the enormity of this tragedy and how important it is to recognize it as a Canadian event," she said.