

Vandalized Air India memorial to be fixed

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The monument to the Air India crash victims at an Etobicoke park has been desecrated. Thieves somehow unbolted and made off with the ornate arm of the sundial. (DAVE ABEL/Toronto Sun)

A vandalized monument that honours 329 victims of an Air India terrorist bombing will be restored in time to mark next month's 25th anniversary of what was Canada's worst air disaster.

Members of the East Indian community are outraged that someone has stolen a stainless steel "gnomon" or "shadow caster" that produces a shadow on a memorial sundial when lit by the sun. The thieves also used black paint to spray graffiti on the face of the sundial.

The monument has been in a remote corner of Humber Bay East park in Etobicoke since 2007.

Police said the gnomon was unbolted from the sundial and stolen earlier this month.

"An act like this is totally unpalatable," said Sheela Spohn of the India Canada Association of Waterloo Region. "Some people have lost families (on Flight 182) and have suffered enough, and now this."

The Boeing 747 was on a flight to India from Canada when destroyed by a suitcase explosive over the Atlantic Ocean beyond the shores of Ireland on June 23, 1985.

The names of the victims are etched into nine panels of polished black granite fronted by the sundial. It faces a memorial in Ahakista, Ireland, near where the plane went down.

Toronto Police Det-Sgt. Madelaine Tretter said the incident is being probed and there are no suspects.

"It appears to have been a random incident," Tretter said Tuesday. "It is a popular park that is used by many people."

Kevin Bowser, the city's manager of parks, said another gnomon is being built and officials hope to have it installed by about June 10 in time for the anniversary.

"The site is popular and is visited by a lot of people," Bowser said. "This part was specially made for use on this sundial."

He said it'll cost \$4,800 for a new gnomon.

Barrie designer Ralph Boumeester said the gnomon was made using elements of the Indian flag.

"It lines up with the sun on every anniversary," Boumeester said. "I was surprised, shocked and saddened when I heard what happened."

Air India families joined Prime Minister Stephen Harper, Premier Dalton McGuinty and Mayor David Miller at the unveiling ceremony in June 2007.

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