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Wednesday, September 15th 2021

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CROSS-BORDER ISSUES

Pakistan's ISI is working to revive the Khalistan cause. India must be vigilant

Some young supporters have remained wilfully ignorant about about Bhindranwale: he was a cold-blooded murderer who desecrated Sikhism's most sacred shrine.

C Christine Fair

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Pro-Khalistan and anti-government slogans are chanted on the occasion of the 37th anniversary of Operation Blue Star, at the Golden Temple in Amritsar on June 6, 2021. | Narinder Nanu/AFP

On November 9, 2019, the Kartarpur Corridor became operational, three days before the 550th birthday of the first Sikh Guru, Guru Nanak.

Sikh pilgrims who possess a special permit can now traverse this 9 km stretch between Dera Baba Sahib, one of Sikhism's most sacred sites situated on the banks of the Ravi river in India, and Gurudwara Shri Kartarpur Sahib, located in Shakargarh in Pakistan's Punjab province.

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Sikhs hold this gurdwara in high esteem as it is built on the site where Guru Nanak founded the first Sikh community.

While many of India's Sikhs are ecstatic that they can now access this holy site in Pakistan easily, scholars and analysts of India's internal security situation are concerned that the Kartarpur Corridor may become a "Khalistani corridor". Their fears are not unfounded.

New focus on Bhindranwale

While the Khalistan insurgency largely ended in 1992 after the deeply flawed Punjab Assembly elections that year, over the past decade, the political legitimacy of the violent movement and its most prominent terrorist leader, Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, is [being recuperated](#) within India.

Enthusiasm for the belligerent icon and the brutal militancy he led has sustained enthusiasm in many Sikh diaspora sub-communities in the United Kingdom, United States, Canada and other settlements of Jat Sikhs.

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some Indian gurudwaras – including the Sikh's holiest of holies, the Golden Temple. In some gurudwaras, [Bhindranwale's photo](#) is included among many of Sikh's historical martyrs.



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A Bhindranwale shirt in Amritsar in August 2019. Photo: Christine Fair

A second reason for alarm is the public nature of the declaration by Pakistani political officials that the Kartarpur Corridor “was the brainchild of [the Pakistani] Army Chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa”.

[Sheikh Rashid](#), a long-time politician who has held several federal ministerial positions since 1991 and who currently holds the coveted portfolio of Federal Minister for Railways, said, “India will remember forever the kind of wound inflicted on it by General Bajwa by opening the Kartarpur Corridor...General Bajwa strongly hit India by opening the corridor.”

As is well known, the Pakistan army does not undertake palliative measures in its relationship with India unless doing so advances its strategic interests.

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Pakistan has long sought to influence Indian Sikhs when they come to Pakistan. As a student in Pakistan, I witnessed the ways in which the Pakistanis used the annual Gurgurabs during which Sikh pilgrims would visit gurdwaras in Pakistan and other historical locations, such as the birthplace of Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

Sikhs would be exposed to an array of Khalistani materials and operatives would attempt to use this as an opportunity to recruit Sikhs to the Khalistani cause backed by the Interservice Intelligence Directorate or ISI, Pakistan's premier intelligence agency. They would ask pilgrims to carry back to India the various recruitment literature they received. Many Indian Sikhs returning to India discarded the materials in expectation that there would be significant adverse consequences should Indian security were to find those publications in their belongings.

With Sikhs coming to Kartarpur from around the world, this is yet a new opportunity for the ISI to continue with a revived campaign to try to persuade Sikhs, especially youth who have forgotten the bloody decades, of the cause.

**Harpreet Kaur**

@Harpre03199052



[#ShameOnKhalistanis](#) for putting banners of [#Khalistan](#), [#Bhindranwale](#) and [#Referendum2020](#) at our sacred [#Sikh](#) [#Gurudwaras](#),. Shame on you people for dragging our Guru Ghars in to your wicked agenda of Khalistan. We [#Sikhs](#) will never forgive you for such acts. [#SikhBrothers](#) and

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A third reason for scepticism about the ways in which this effort could be instrumentalised for harm is the sustained support the Khalistan movement has enjoyed particularly among Jat Sikhs in the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom among other places as noted – even if support for the movement virtually disappeared in India until the recent decade. The Jat Sikh diaspora is perhaps the most vocal and significant lobby for Khalistan throughout the world.

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Equally discomfiting, the ISI has worked to mobilise [Khalistani supporters in the diaspora](#), often in conjunction with purportedly Kashmiri groups protesting India's various actions in Kashmir.

Fourth, the Indian state of Punjab has been deeply affected by drug addiction and drug trafficking. The All India Institute of Medical Sciences published a report in 2015 asserting that more than 200,000 persons out of 28 million in the Punjab are addicted. While many in the state accuse [Pakistan of waging a new proxy war](#) by flooding the state with drugs, the state's local security agencies are also alleged to be involved.

Finally, there is ample and growing evidence of active collusion between the [Lashkar-e-Tayyaba](#)

terror group and key Khalistani activists, who were also integral members of the Kartarpur Corridor process. The reasons for this are practical: Pakistan has been increasingly constrained in its use of the Lashkar-e-Tayyaba and other proscribed Islamist militant groups because of the sustained international attention on Pakistan's recalcitrant commitment to these groups under the aegis of the Financial Action Task Force or FATF.

The FATF is an obscure international watchdog of countries suspected of taking inadequate action to crack down on terrorist groups operating in their countries. Should Pakistan receive a "blacklisting" by the organisation, it would be ineligible for International Monetary Fund lending.

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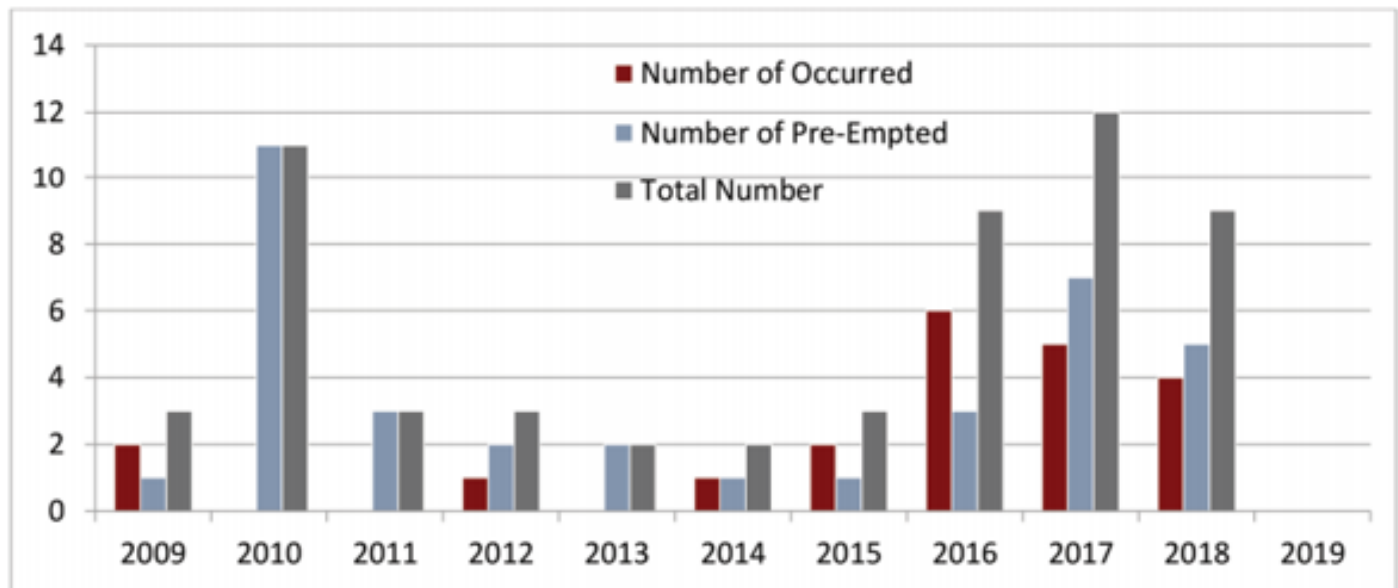
This also likely means that Pakistan will continue to sustain a [“grey” listing by the FATF](#) because it has deftly cultivated a perception that it is too dangerous to economically fail. Nonetheless, this does put pressure on Pakistan to maintain the illusion that it is working to constrain these groups.

This puts a premium upon Pakistan’s less-well-known non-Islamist proxy assets, such as the Khalistanis it has worked to cultivate over many decades.

A database of violence

These concerns are justified by the events occurring on the ground. My team, which included Kerry Ashkenaze and Scott Batchelder, assembled a database of incidents of Khalistani violence that occurred between January 1, 2009, and January 25, 2019, drawing from a variety of sources including the Global Terrorism Database, the South Asia Terrorism Portal, as well as a NexisUni search of the *The Times of India*, the *Hindustan Times* as well as manual search of the archives the Punjab-based *Tribune*.

We found a total of 57 events in which Khalistani groups were suspected and 48 in which they were confirmed. Of these 21 attacks, 11 were perpetrated by the Khalistan Liberation Force/Front, five by Babbar Khalsa International, and one by the Bhindranwale Tiger Force. The last three years in our sample were the most dangerous years, suggesting an increasing trend in Khalistani violent activist.

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Incidents Per Year Between 1 January 2009 and 25 January 2019 (Suspected and Confirmed).

Source: In-house tabulations of our dataset.

There is adequate evidence to suggest that India should remain vigilant about a potential resurgence of violence in the Punjab. India's Punjab presents a target-rich environment just as it did in previous decades. However, the ongoing narcotics problem in the state renders it even more vulnerable than in the 1980s.

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coupled with the fact that Kashmiri and Sikh separatist organisations such as the Babbar Khalsa and the Khalistan Liberation front are increasingly working together to antagonise the Indian state, there is ample evidence that terrorist groups and narcotics gangs have much to offer each other.

Some among the current generation of young Sikhs – born after the tragic violence of the 1980s – have recuperated Bhindranwale and his image as a valiant warrior defending the long-suffering Sikhs from a predatory state while remaining wilfully ignorant of the darker truth about Bhindranwale: he was a cold-blooded murderer who desecrated Sikhism's most sacred shrine for his personal gain and launched a predatory ensemble of terrorist groups who terrorised the Punjab with rapes, killings, bank robberies, kidnapping and extortion.

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Taiwan Excellence is steering social change by seeking and funding projects aimed at creating social and environmental impact at a

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Solving for global challenges is multifaceted in nature. It requires collaboration between and within countries, governments, businesses, citizens and third-party organizations. In India itself, issues like hygiene and sanitation, gender-based violence, poverty, pollution remain unsolved owing to their complex nature. But making the world a better place can start with creating change at the grassroots levels. A small idea aimed at improving the lives of few, can end up making large scale impact. From promoting climate change to settling conflicts within nations - the dream of living in a sustainable and peaceful future has its foundation laid in the efforts taken by its proponents today.

But, to breathe life into that idea, one needs resources like manpower, funding, knowledge and expertise, with funding being the most crucial, as the other three can be sourced out using those funds. While there are several avenues to seek funding like

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Taiwan Excellence launched a global campaign on 11th August titled “Sharing Is Caring” Philanthropic Events - a corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiative to support ideas aimed at making a difference to society. The initiative will provide philanthropists a platform to address and solve for social issues and environment protection. To facilitate the same, various social institutions, individuals and NGOs are invited to participate and share the causes they would like to work on.

Watch the video below to find out more about how this initiative can help you bring your ideas to life.

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*For applicants under the age of 20 or declared minors under the law of their country, a letter of consent must be submitted by a parent or legal guardian along with the proposal.

Guidelines for proposal submission:

Applicants are to propose philanthropic events specific to their countries or nationalities and catering to social and environmental issues.

Each proposal must be drafted in English and mention the goal, implementation methods, previous awards or recognition received, long-term impact, timeframe, and the budget plan (not exceeding US\$150,000).

Selection method and criteria:

A 7-member selection committee will evaluate the submitted proposals in four categories for a total of 100 points: (1) impact on society, benefits to the public, and environmental sustainability (30%); (2) innovation (25%); (3) feasibility and reasonableness of budget allocation (25%); and (4) expression of Taiwan Excellence (20%).

Up to 12 proposals will be shortlisted by the committee. Top 3 winning proposals will be awarded USD 10,000 each along with an execution budget of USD 150,000 each. Additionally, each of the winners will be assigned a partner by TAITRA to execute their respective ideas.

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3. Online Voting activity: 13th – 27th January, 2022

4. Announcement of winners: 30th January, 2022

Taking small steps today to make a difference will go a long way in changing many lives and inspire others to do the same. If you have an idea with such potential, send in your proposals at the earliest and make your dream a reality for yourself and many more.

To know more about Taiwan Excellence: Sharing Is Caring, click [here](#) or give a call on +91 9987263186.

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