



Jasbir Singh Saini: Says act was symbolic, not criminal.

Globe and Mail, Thomas Szlukovenyi

Smashing pictures was symbolic act, accused man says

The one-armed, Grade 12 student accused of smashing photographs of Mohandas Gandhi and of India's President and Prime Minister at the Indian Consulate in Toronto on Wednesday says the incident was symbolic, not criminal.

"I am not guilty of any crime," Jasbir Singh Saini said in an interview yesterday.

"I was getting news on the radio that 200 and 300 Sikhs were killed in Punjab . . . I was so upset, I went to the Indian Consulate . . . I broke pictures of (Prime Minister) Indira Gandhi, Mahatma Gandhi and (President) Zial Singh," he said.

Last week, two Sikhs armed with swords ripped fixtures at the Indian Consulate in Vancouver.

Mr. Saini described himself as an ardent separatist and said he would like to fight in India to get a separate Sikh country. He said he lost his arm in an accident at a factory in India.

Asked about smashing the photograph of the non-violent Mahatma Gandhi, called "the father of India," Mr. Saini said:

"He is the father of their (the Hindus') nation, not our nation."

Zail Singh, the Sikh president of India, "cannot be a Sikh if he says that the army can go and attack in the temple," Mr. Saini said. (Indian troops raided the Golden Temple in Amritsar, the capital of Punjab, this week, in an assault on Sikh militants.)

Indira Gandhi's photograph was huge and he could not smash it with his hand like the others, Mr. Saini said, so he ripped it off, threw it on the floor, and used his foot.

"I went there quietly . . . I broke the pictures . . . I waited there five to 10 minutes for the police, but no police came," Mr. Saini said.

He said he did not want to hurt anybody but wanted to "symbolically smash the pictures."

Metro Toronto Police arrested Mr. Saini at the home of his brother, Darshan Singh Saini, one of the key figures in the Sikh separatist organization in Canada. He was charged with mischief to private property.