

2. Khalistan Movement

Why in News?

- Recently, a follower of the Sikh militant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale who has been preaching the Idea of Khalistan Separatist Movement in Punjab for a few months, has managed to escape.

Highlights

- The Khalistan movement is a fight for a separate, sovereign Sikh state in present day Punjab (both India and Pakistan).
- The movement was crushed in India following Operation Blue Star (1984) and Operation Black Thunder (1986 and 1988), but it continues to evoke sympathy and support among sections of the Sikh population, especially in the Sikh diaspora in countries such as Canada, the UK, and Australia.
- The origins of the movement have been traced back to India's independence and subsequent Partition along religious lines.
- The Punjab province, which was divided between India and Pakistan, saw some of the worst communal violence and generated millions of refugees.
- Lahore, the capital of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's great Sikh Empire, went to Pakistan, as did holy Sikh sites including Nankana Sahib, the birthplace of Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism.
- Punjab has long been peaceful, but the movement lives among some Sikh communities overseas.
- The diaspora is composed predominantly of people who don't want to live in India.
- These people include many who remember the bad old days of the 1980s, and thus the support for Khalistan remains stronger there.
- The deep-rooted anger over Operation Blue Star and the desecration of the Golden Temple continues to resonate with some in the newer generations of Sikhs. However, even as Bhindranwale is viewed as a martyr by many and the 1980s remembered as dark times, this has not manifested into tangible political support for the Khalistan cause.
- There is a small minority that is clinging to the past, and that small minority remains significant not because of popular support, but rather because they are trying to keep up their political influence with various political parties both from the left and the right.