

Brief: Qaumi Insaaf Morcha Protests



Qaumi Insaaf Morcha's Violent Protestors attacking Police vehicle in Chandigarh, India

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Context: Protest by Qaumi Insaaf Morcha

The Qaumi Insaaf Morcha has been stationed near the Mohali-Chandigarh border since January 7, 2023, in order to raise the issue of Sikh political prisoners who have purportedly fulfilled their sentences but are still incarcerated. The majority of detainees are Sikhs who were imprisoned during the 1980s and 1990s when Pakistan-backed terrorism in Punjab was at its peak. The Qaumi Insaaf Morcha called for the nationwide release of all Sikh inmates as one of its demands. Other protestors, some armed with swords were also called in gradually by the group, including selected Nihang Sikhs. The protests eventually grew violent, and the violent protesters attacked police officers who had been called to the scene for the maintenance of law and order. As per police statements, tractors were used to dismantle the barriers by the protestors.¹

The goal of the Qaumi Insaaf Morcha, an organisation of organisations, is to open trade routes with Pakistan, free Sikhs who are serving sentences, and advocate for strict punishments to those responsible for sacrilege and the Bahibal Kalan firing. The Qaumi Insaaf Morcha is a conglomerate of 12 pro-Khalistan bodies,² such as Waris Punjab De.³

Moreover, the protester demands the release of Sikh inmates, including Balwant Singh Rajoana, a leading member of the proscribed terrorist organisation Babbar Khalsa International (BKI) and a convict in the killing of former Punjab Chief Minister Beant Singh, and Devinderpal Singh Bhullar, a member of the banned separatist organisation Khalistan Liberation Force (KLF) and a felon in the 1993 Raisina Road car bombing.

Violence perpetrated by Qaumi Insaaf Morcha protestors

1. Protesters attacked Harjinder Singh Dhama, the current head of the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC). His vehicle was vandalised, and he was compelled to flee the scene in a damaged vehicle to save his life from YPS Chowk in Mohali, Punjab.⁴
2. A young person was beaten, and cars were vandalised near the Qaumi Insaaf Morcha protest site in YPS Chowk. Naresh Pal and Bunty from the village of Kumbhara said their vehicle had been damaged by swords, clubs, and spears.

¹ <https://www.sundayguardianlive.com/news/protesters-punjab-seek-release-bandi-singhs>

² <https://www.indiatoday.in/cities/chandigarh/story/protesters-snatched-teargas-handgun-ammo-tried-to-kill-policemen-chandigarh-police-fir-2332793-2023-02-09>

³ <https://www.therisingpanjab.com/new/article/amritpal-singh-reaches-kaumi-insaaf-morcha-at-mohali>

⁴ <https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/chandigarh/sgpc-chief-harjinder-singh-dhamis-car-attacked-8389867/>

3. A second young man was assaulted, and his vehicle was vandalised at the site. Jeevanjot Singh, a resident of Sahnipur village, filed a first information report (FIR) with the Chandigarh, Phase 8 police station. He indicated that five or six Morcha youngsters created everyday disturbances and that the group responsible for the protest site had no control over them.⁵
4. Violence erupted near the Sector 52-53 dividing road in Chandigarh on February 8, 2023, far from the initial protest site at Dolphin crossing, where morcha protesters had camped. 29 Chandigarh UT police personnel and hundreds of Mohali police officers were injured during the conflict. Protesters alleged that they were prevented from reaching the official residence of Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann in Chandigarh due to a prohibitory order issued by the city's district magistrate under Section 144 of the CrPC.⁶ Without police prodding, a portion of the protestors turned violent and attempted to storm barricades. The Director General of Police in Chandigarh, Praveer Ranjan, reported that a large number of demonstrators, including Nihangs on horses, possessed lethal weapons such as swords, iron rods, and sticks. When police tried to stop them, they fought back with swords.⁷

Support offered to Qaumi Insaaf Morcha protestors

1. The Quami Insaaf Morcha demonstration in Mohali has received backing from the Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee (DSGMC), which has stated its support of the protests.⁸
2. Amritpal Singh, the head of Waris Punjab de, travelled to the Qaumi Insaaf Morcha protest sites, where he offered support for the protests.
3. The Kisan Mazdoor Sangrash Committee participated in the Qaumi Insaaf Morcha protest in Mohali on February 1.
4. On February 4, members of the Krantikari Kisan Union joined the morcha.

⁵ <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/chandigarh/youth-thrashed-cars-vandalised-near-morcha-site-479474>

⁶ <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chandigarh/morcha-stir-police-announce-reward-for-info-on-attackers/articleshow/97833870.cms>

⁷ <https://www.timesnownews.com/mirror-now/in-focus/watch-armed-nihangs-attack-police-vehicles-in-mohali-demanding-release-of-sikh-prisoners-at-least-30-cops-hurt-article-97746901>

⁸ <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/amritsar/dsgmc-to-join-quami-insaf-morcha-469093>

5. On February 7, 2023, the largest farmer union in Punjab, Bhartiya Kisan Union Ugrahan, extended their support to the Qaumi Insaaf Morcha by organising a state-level conference in Bathinda to demand the release of inmates who have served their sentences but remain imprisoned.⁹
6. Former President of the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC), Bibi Jagir Kaur, Extended her support to the Qaumi Insaaf Morcha.¹⁰

Additional Points of Interest

- On the eve of the 550th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev, October 11, 2019, the Government of India announced to free eight Sikh prisoners and reduced one death sentence to life imprisonment for offences committed during the peak of Pakistan-backed terrorism in Punjab.
- Under the special exception scheme, prisoners were freed from prisons across the nation. In addition, the government also decides and release the prisoners on the 150th anniversary of the birth of Mahatma Gandhi.
- Jal Shakti Minister of the Indian Government, on his two-day visit (January 25, 2023) to Bathinda for the BJP's Lok Sabha pravas yojana, met Akal Takht Jathedar Giani Harpreet Singh in Talwandi Sabo's Takht Damdama Sahib. Minister filled out a form to petition for the release of "Bandi Sikhs" who have served their separate sentences but remain imprisoned.
- The Union Minister said the Modi Government in the past had released nine out of 11 Sikhs who were languishing in jails despite completing their respective time, while the sentence of some was decreased.¹¹

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⁹ <https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/chandigarh/bku-ugrahan-demands-release-of-prisoners-who-have-completed-terms-backs-qaumi-insaaf-morcha-8430550/>

¹⁰ <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chandigarh/kaur-backs-qaumi-insaaf-morcha-on-bandi-singhs/articleshow/97509602.cms>

¹¹ <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chandigarh/min-fills-release-bandi-singhs-form/articleshow/97337208.cms?from=mdr>

