

Sikh cleric lauds Vaidya killers, embarrasses Akalis

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The ruling Akali Dal (Badal) which has always been known for its moderate stance even during the height of militancy in Punjab in the 1980s, was embarrassed by a top Sikh cleric who eulogised the killers of former army chief Gen A S Vaidya at a village near Amritsar last evening.

Giani Puran Singh, Jathedar (head) of the Akal Takht, the highest spiritual and temporal seat for the Sikhs, who was appointed as jathedar by the supporters of Chief Minister P S Badal in the SGPC in February this year, eulogised the killers of Gen Vaidya as 'quomi shaheed' (national martyrs) at a function organised to mark their seventh death anniversary in village Gadli in Amritsar last evening.

Harjinder Singh Jinda and Sukhdev Singh Sukha were hanged in 1992 for killing Gen Vaidya whom they held responsible for the Operation Blue Star in the Golden Temple in 1984.

Giani Puran Singh describing the two as national martyrs justified their action in killing Gen Vaidya saying the latter was responsible for Operation Blue Star. The top Sikh cleric earlier also held an 'ardaas' (prayer) for the two executed killers at the Akal Takht which was an unprecedented step by an Akal Takht jathedar.

The newly elected MP, Simranjit Singh Mann, who has been known for his extremist views, some other extremist organisations like the Damdami Taksal of the slain Khalistani ideologue Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale and members of some human rights organisations were also present to

mark the death anniversary of the two.

No leader from the ruling Akali Dal (Badal) attended the function. Even Bibi Jagir Kaur, president of the SGPC, and a close Badal aide stayed away.

Giani Puran Singh was appointed jathedar of the Akal Takht by a majority of Badal supporters in the SGPC replacing the hardliner jathedar, Bhai Ranjit Singh, who has often aired his radical views publically. The giani's participation and speech eulogising the two killers may embarrass the government which has the BJP as its ally in Punjab.

Interestingly, while Giani Puran Singh felt compelled to attend the function to eulogise the two killers, the former SGPC President G S Tohra, who heads a radical Akali faction, AISAD, stayed away.