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'Canada committed to help people in J&K'

Parliamentary Secretary to Deepak Obhrai recently led a four-member delegation the flood-hit Jammu and Kashmir region.

By Ajit Jain
TheIndianDiaspora.com
Oct 27, 2014



Deepak Obhrai (second left) doing seva at a gurdwara in Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir (photo courtesy: Deepak Obhrai's office)

Toronto: Parliamentary Secretary to Foreign Affairs Minister Deepak Obhrai, who was a member of the ministerial delegation to India, led a four-member delegation to Kashmir, Jaipur and Hyderabad.

"I was saddened to witness the devastation in the flood-affected region of Jammu and Kashmir. People in Kashmir were demonstrating as we arrived there, they were demonstrating as due to flooding, that has recently affected vast areas in Jammu and Kashmir, there is scarcity of clean drinking water," Obhrai told *The Indian Diaspora*.

"Canada is committed to helping those affected by these floods. We went to Srinagar to announce our support. We are assisting in these efforts through a Canadian NGO..." he added.

Obhrai wouldn't reveal the actual amount committed by the Canadian government. He only said "oh, it is a small amount but through this amount we are able to provide to (affected) people fresh water. There are small devices through which we provide fresh water every day. These devices are being installed all over so that the community is able to get fresh water. These devices are part of the Canadian expertise. There is a Canadian NGO that is providing this expertise."

When asked what the people are demanding there, Obhrai said, "They need assistance but I couldn't and didn't get involved in that. I had a chat about the twin challenges of natural disaster and international security, including cross-border terrorism, with a senior adviser to the chief minister in Srinagar. These discussions were in light of recent incidents of violence on the Line of Control and the international border between India and Pakistan."

The question is elections have been postponed there and people are not happy, explained Obhrai. "The election commission will decide the new dates. I saw the demonstration. I saw the level of frustrations amongst people. They were trying to salvage whatever they could."

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There is a large Sikh community in Srinagar and they have turned a local Sikh Gurdwara into a large relief centre for the flood affected areas. "It was interesting to see that close to 10,000 people go to the Sikh temple every day. I was inspired by the stories of assistance across religious communities; this is the true foundation for peace," Obhrai told *The Indian Diaspora*.

"The Sikh community here is overwhelmingly a force of peace and kindness, just as it is in Canada," he added.

From Srinagar, Obhrai and four other members of his delegation went to Jaipur where they met two Canadian NGOs. That was a quick one-day visit.

From Jaipur they went to Hyderabad to see the eye clinic in which Canada is involved.

"I met key members of the business community to find out from them how Canada has participated in the economic development of the city. "We have a trade office there. We spoke with IIT students about opportunities available to them in Canada."


(Ajit Jain is Canada Editor of The Indian Diaspora. He can be contacted at ajit.jain0410@gmail.com)

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