

NO TO SEPARATISM

We stand for united India, says Canada oppn leader Scheer

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TORONTO: Canada's opposition Conservative Party leader Andrew Scheer has said he stands for a "united India" and won't have common ground with those who advocate for "violence" or "division" in the context of the Khalistan movement.

Scheer made these comments in an interview as he completed a week-long visit to India, where he met, among others, Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Asked about conversations he had with Indian leaders during the visit, particularly given the concern that Canada is becoming a staging ground for resurgence of the Khalistan movement, Scheer said he had reassured them that "in our party, we don't support those who are advocating for some type of division like that".

"We stand for a united India," he said, adding his party could provide the political leadership towards "ensuring that we build common ground with those who are focused on making Canada a

better place...and not those who are trying to in any way advocate for any type of violence".

However, he cautioned against painting an "entire community with a broad brush" since only a "small number" were advocating separatism. "We recognise and appreciate the contributions of those of the Sikh faith who have contributed so much to our society," he said.

Scheer received an unusually warm reception in India. Despite being an opposition leader and not a head of government or state, he met Modi, finance minister Arun Jaitley, external affairs minister Sushma Swaraj, home minister Rajnath Singh and minister of state Hardeep Puri, among others. He also met Punjab chief minister Amarinder Singh as he travelled to Chandigarh and Amritsar. The welcome was in marked contrast to the frigid state of relations between India and the Justin Trudeau government in Ottawa. Scheer said he was "honoured" to meet Modi. "The conversation was a lengthy one, he was very generous with his time," he said.