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# India – Canada relations

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**Why is in news?** A diplomatic standoff erupted between India and Canada, as Canadian Prime Minister alleged a “potential link” between the Indian government and the killing of a pro-Khalistan leader in Canada earlier this year. This was followed by the expulsion of a senior Indian diplomat in Canada. Rejecting the allegations as “absurd” and “motivated”, India, in a tit-for-tat action, expelled a senior Canadian diplomat in Delhi.

## About the issue:

**Hardeep Singh Nijjar**, 46, head of the Guru Nanak Sikh Gurdwara Sahib in Surrey, Canada, was shot by two unidentified men outside the gurdwara in June this year. He was the **chief of the separatist organisation, Khalistan Tiger Force (KTF)**. The NIA had announced a reward of Rs 10 lakh for information leading to his arrest.

Over the past number of weeks, Canadian security agencies have been **actively pursuing credible allegations of a potential link between agents of the Government of India** and the killing of a Canadian citizen, Hardeep Singh Nijjar, Trudeau said in a speech in the House of Commons.

After Trudeau’s remarks in Parliament, Canadian Foreign Minister Melanie Joly said she had ordered the **expulsion of “a senior Indian diplomat”**. “If proven true, this would be a great violation of our sovereignty and of the most basic rule of how countries deal with each other. As a consequence we have expelled a top Indian diplomat.”

In retaliation, the **Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) summoned Canadian High Commissioner to India, Cameron MacKay**, and informed him about the decision to expel a senior Canadian diplomat, who has been asked to leave India within five days.

Delhi said the decision **reflects the Centre’s growing concern over the interference of Canadian diplomats in India’s internal matters** and their involvement in anti-India activities.

“We have **seen and reject the statement of the Canadian Prime Minister** in their Parliament, as also the statement by their Foreign Minister... Allegations of Government of India’s involvement in any act of violence in Canada are absurd and motivated. Similar allegations were made by the Canadian Prime Minister to our Prime Minister, and were completely rejected,” the MEA said.

It also “urged” the Canadian government to take “prompt and effective legal action against all anti-India elements operating from their soil”.

Hours later, Trudeau said he was not looking to “provoke” India or “escalate” tensions, but urged New Delhi to take Nijjar’s killing with the “utmost seriousness”.

While India-Canada ties have been strained over the pro-Khalistan groups, the tit-for-tat measures take it to a new low.

## Bilateral relations:

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Diplomatic relations between India and Canada, though geographically distant yet culturally diverse, have seen evolution and it was **dated back to 1947**.

A significant milestone in this relationship occurred in April 2015 when the Prime Minister of India visited Canada, elevating bilateral ties to a strategic partnership.

In recent times, both nations have been actively collaborating to strengthen cooperation across various sectors of shared significance.

They encompass economic cooperation, educational exchanges, and cultural connections, with a history of cooperation and occasional tensions.

**Bilateral Mechanisms**: Both countries engage in bilateral relations through various dialogue mechanisms, including ministerial-level dialogues such as Strategic, Trade, and Energy dialogues, Foreign Office Consultations, and sector-specific joint working groups (JWG).

**Commercial Relations**: India and Canada have been working to enhance their trade and economic relations. An **annualized Trade Ministers dialogue** was established to review economic ties, and **negotiations for a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)** were ongoing, covering trade in goods, services, investment, and trade facilitation.

**Nuclear Cooperation**: While India and Canada faced a setback in their relations after India's nuclear test in 1974, they signed a **Nuclear Cooperation Agreement (NCA) in June 2010**, which came into force in September 2013. A **Joint Committee on Civil Nuclear Cooperation** was formed as part of this agreement.

**Science and Technology**: Indo-Canadian Science and Technology collaboration primarily focuses on advancing Industrial R&D with the potential to generate new IP, processes, prototypes, and products. An **Action Plan for 2017-18** was jointly crafted, emphasizing cooperation in emerging fields like Artificial Intelligence, Nano-technology, and 3D printing. The **Department of Biotechnology**, through the IC-IMPACTS program, conducts joint research ventures in healthcare, agri-biotech, and waste management.

**Space**: India and Canada have cooperated in the field of space since the 1990s, with collaboration in space science, earth observation, satellite launch services, and ground support for space missions. Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) were signed in 1996 and 2003 between ISRO and the Canadian Space Agency.

**Security and Defence**: India and Canada **collaborate in various international forums**, including the UN, Commonwealth, and G-20. Defence ties have expanded with mutual ship visits and cooperation on counterterrorism issues, particularly through the Joint Working Group on Counter-Terrorism.

**Agriculture**: A bilateral MoU on agriculture cooperation was signed in 2009, leading to the creation of sub-groups on knowledge exchange in emerging technologies, animal development, agricultural marketing, and a separate Joint Working Group for Pulses.

**Education**: Education is a significant area of mutual interest, with India becoming the top source of foreign students studying in Canada. The MoU on Higher Education was renewed in February 2018.

**People-to-People Ties**: Canada hosts a **substantial Indian diaspora**, including Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs) and Non-Resident Indians (NRIs), constituting **over 4% of its population**. The Indian diaspora has made notable contributions to various sectors in Canada, including politics.

**Cultural Exchanges**: Canada was the Country of Focus at the 48th International Film Festival of India in 2017, and there is an India-Canada coproduction agreement in films. Diwali has been celebrated on Parliament Hill for several years.

**Cooperation in COVID-19 Pandemic:** During the COVID-19 pandemic, India and Canada collaborated on repatriation flights for Canadian nationals in India and the supply of essential medicines, including paracetamol and hydroxychloroquine.

### **Challenges:**

**Khalistani separatist factor** is the **single most important challenge** between India and Canada. The Canadian government's Policy of balancing the Sikh assertions and its relations with India, has jeopardised the India Canada Relations.

The **attacks on Non-Sikh Indian Diaspora, Indian Consulates and Temples** have further strained the India Canada Relations.

**Structural impediments** such as complex labour laws, market protectionism, and bureaucratic regulations have been roadblocks for **Indo-Canadian trade relations**. Bilateral agreements, such as the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) and Investment Promotion and Protection Agreements (BIPPA), have been in negotiation for long time and no progress has been reached by both the countries.

There is a **close relationship** between the **Government of Canada and the Chinese government**. This has also strained India-China relation.

### **Way forward:**

India's **growing economy offers opportunities for a G-7 country** such as Canada, e.g. the emergence of a significant middle-class consumer population, improvement in the business climate, a booming service sector and a robust demand for natural resources.

Canada, being an advanced and resource-rich economy can cement better ties with India for a win-win situation

**Energy is another area** of emerging cooperation for the two countries

According to the Oil Processing and Exporting Countries (OPEC), World Oil Outlook Report 2040, India's oil demand will double by 2040

In times of growing pressure from the US to cut oil imports from Iran, Canada could be an alternative energy source for India

The **infrastructure and transport sectors**, too, are potential areas of cooperation and investment.

India's ambitious 'smart cities' initiative creates opportunities for Canadian firms, to undertake infrastructure projects in various Indian cities

Also, Canada's experience in developing environment-friendly urban infrastructure can prove beneficial for India