

## **Khalistani Issue Clouds the Canadian PM's Visit**

### **What is the issue?**

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- The Khalistan issue has become a big irritant in the India - Canada relations.

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- Issues concerning this dominated the Canadian PM Justin Trudeau's recent visit to India, and it is in the interest of both countries to course correct.

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### **How has the Indo-Canadian relations fared over the years?**

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- The previous decade saw Indo-Canada bilateral relationship going strong and co-operation across multiple sectors were established.

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- This included agreements on - energy, trade, civil nuclear cooperation and a commitment from Canadian pension funds to invest in India.

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- India and Canada have much in common as two pluralistic, diverse democracies with very strong people-to-people ties.

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- Besides this, Indian Diaspora accounts for over 1.3 million in Canada, and an 100,000 Indian students pursue their studies there.

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- Despite these overwhelming commonalities, as the recent visit of Mr. Trudeau showed, the relationship seems to be turning sour.

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### **What has caused the Indo-Canadian tensions?**

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- Liberal Party shepherded a resolution recently in the Ontario provincial legislature calling the 1984 anti-Sikh violence “genocide”.  
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- Canadian PM Justin Trudeau was even attended a rally in Toronto, which was organised by pro-Khalistani Sikh groups.  
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- Such attitudes of Canada’s ruling dispensation didn’t go down well with the Indian authorities who had expressed their apprehensions.  
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- Hence, tensions were simmering in the underneath, long before the Canadian PM’s arrived for an eight-day state visit to India.  
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- Considering these, New Delhi had preferred to keep Mr Trudeau’s state visit a shorter, formal and more business-like.  
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- But Ottawa opted for a five-city tour, with a bilateral meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the penultimate day.  
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### **What were the stress points during the visit?**

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- As a symbolic snub, a junior minister was delegated to welcome the Canadian PM, in clear contrast to how other heads of governments had been received.  
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- **Punjab CM** - The Indian government wanted Mr. Trudeau to reach out to the Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh during the visit.  
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- Notably, this was to make up for the Canadian government’s action in 2016, when it had snubbed Mr.Singh, when he had requested for an official visit.  
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- But as Mr. Trudeau’s office did not confirm a meeting with the Punjab CM till after his arrival in India, this too accentuated the tensions.  
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- **Khalistani elements** - To India’s annoyance, the Canadian delegation also had members suspected of sympathising with extremist Sikh groups.  
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- Notably, Mr. Japal Atwal, who was part of the Canadian delegation, is a suspected Khalistani and is said to have attempted assassinating an Indian minister in 1986.  
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- While the courts in India have acquitted him due to lack of evidence, his presence has caused severe embarrassment during the bilateral meet.  
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- **Overall** - Expect for the final meet with Mr. Modi, throughout the trip, the Canadian PM was unaccompanied by suitably ranked officials.  
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- Ottawa had been insensitive to Indian concerns all along, which seems to have forced the India to be this vocal about displeasure.  
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- Considering the criticality of the bilateral relationship, both sides could've handled the visit better.  
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**Source: The Hindu**

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