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- ❖ **Implications for Indian Foreign Policy:  
Russia-Ukraine Crisis**
- ❖ **Relevance of Mahatma Gandhi's Basic Education**
- ❖ **Environmental Ethics and Indigenous Culture**
- ❖ **Indo-Myanmar Border Trade**
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### India-Canada Bilateral Issues

**D**ecimation of Khalistani terrorist Hardeep Singh Nijjar in June 2023 has pushed Indo-Canada bilateral ties to nadir. Nijjar was gunned down by unidentified attackers outside a temple in Canada. He was a Sikh separatist leader advocating for Khalisthan as homeland for Sikhs and has been operating from Canada. He was designated as terrorist by India in 2020. The incident ensued a 'war of words' between India and Canada.

It was diplomatic unbecoming of Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau when he alleged on September 18, 2023 in the House of Commons, that an agent of Indian government was involved into the mayhem. Five Eyes Intelligence partnerships of US, UK Australia, New Zealand and Canada claimed of 'shared intelligence' on the issue. New York Times reported that the US had provided the context and the Canadian intercepts of Indian communications may have been the 'smoking gun.' Though, Trudeau's allegations were baseless for lack of supporting evidence. India sought concrete evidence to support the allegations made by Canadian Prime Minister and also claimed that India has made demands for extradition of tainted people from Canada to India at least on 26 occasions during last five to six years.

India had no choice but to call the allegations as absurd and motivated. The row continued with expulsions and counter-expulsions of diplomats by both sides. Canada had to withdraw 41 diplomats and their family members under pressures from India. Suspension of visa services by India was responded by Canada with similar actions. Canada too halted visa and other consular services at Chandigarh, Mumbai and Bengaluru. Later India resumed the visa services on October 26, 2023 for business, medical and conferences, but continued the suspension for tourists, employment, students, film, missionaries and journalists.

Implications of worsening bilateral relations are numerous: Firstly, Canada has largest Sikh Diasporas of over 770,000 which is highest after Sikh's population of Punjab, hence a vote bank with determining electoral prospects for many leaders in Canada including Trudeau. Secondly, Indian students in Canada are huge source of revenue to Canada (nearly Canadian \$20 billion (USD 15 billion)) having potentials to inflict harm to Canadian revenue. Thirdly, the ongoing Free Trade Area (FTA) discussions have come to a halt. This may have repercussions to Canadian economy. Canada has been endeavoring to diversify its trade to China, India and Japan, to reduce its overdependence on America. This endeavor would get derailed with the stopping of FTA discussions. Fourthly, the crisis also has potentials to hinder and derail Canadian Indo-Pacific plans, where India's role is crucial to contain China's ever-growing assertions.

USA and UK along with other western powers are asking India to cooperate with Canada, without blaming and condemning India, as India is crucial to counterbalance their Asian rival China in the region. Hence, West seems to be on the side of Canada without being anti-Indian. However, their support may have rhyme, as well as reason, but continues to be baseless motivated by being West.

The row prompted the strategic analysts to question the continuation of foreign-policy tilt of India towards the West as it has contributed to mistrust of India towards both the USA and Canada as both have failed to provide any evidence to support their accusations. India expects US should prevail on Trudeau to rein in the Khalistani separatists and check their anti-Indian operations from their territory. The incident is not an isolated instance, rather an organized on-going separatist activity against India from foreign land. India has rational towards expecting severing of support to anti-Indian sentiments on foreign lands.

Both the countries seem to be interested not to escalate the crisis any further; yet are devoid of strong incentives to overcome their ego and mend the worsening ties. Probabilities are there that quiet diplomacy may be happening to de-escalate the ongoing crisis, which is in larger interests of both the countries. Conflicts must give way to cooperation and peace.

— BK



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