



## The Khalistan shadow on India-Canada Ties

**For Prelims:** The Khalistan shadow on India-Canada Ties, [Khalistani Movements](#), [Operation Blue Star \(1984\)](#), Sikh extremism, [Redicalism](#).

**For Mains:** The Khalistan shadow on India-Canada ties, its Implication on Bilateral Relations.

[Source: IE](#)

### Why in News?

Recently, the tensions between India and Canada escalated when the Canadian Prime Minister alleged Indian involvement in the killing of a Khalistani Leader designated as a terrorist by India, in Surrey in June 2023.

- India rejected these allegations and accused Canada of sheltering Khalistani Extremists.

### What is the Khalistan Movement?

- The [Khalistan movement](#) is a fight for a **separate, sovereign Sikh state** in present day Punjab (both India and Pakistan).
- The demand has **resurfaced many times**, most prominently during a violent insurgency in the 1970s and 1980s which **paralysed Punjab for over a decade**.
- The movement was crushed in India following [Operation Blue Star \(1984\)](#) and Operation Black Thunder (1986 and 1988), but it continues to **evoke sympathy and support among sections of the Sikh population**, especially in the **Sikh diaspora in countries such as Canada, the UK, and Australia**.

### What are the Recent Anti-India Activities in Canada?

- **Recent Anti-India Activities:**
  - **Operation Bluestar Anniversary Parade (June 2023):** In Brampton, Ontario, a parade seemed to celebrate the assassination of former **Prime Minister Indira Gandhi**, displaying a blood-stained figure and advocating revenge for the attack on Darbar Sahib.
  - **Pro-Khalistan Referendum (2022):** Sikhs for Justice (SFJ), a pro-Khalistan organization, conducted a **so-called "referendum" on Khalistan** in Brampton, claiming significant support.
  - **Sanjh Savera Magazine (2002):** In 2002, the Toronto-based Punjabi-language weekly Sanjh Savera **greeted Indira Gandhi's death anniversary** with a cover illustration celebrating her murder, glorifying those responsible.
  - The magazine received government advertisements and is now a prominent daily newspaper in Canada.
- **Indian Concerns Over such Activities:**
  - Indian diplomats based in Canada have on numerous occasions said that Canada's failure to **tackle "Sikh extremism"**, and the constant harassment of Indian diplomats and

- officials by Khalistanis, is a **major foreign policy stress point**.
- The Indian Prime Minister (PM) raised **strong concerns about Sikh protests in Canada** with the Canadian PM on the sidelines of a [G20 summit in New Delhi](#).
  - Canada has paused talks on a **proposed trade treaty with India**.

## How will Khalistan Radicalism Impact India-Canada Relations?

- **Strained Diplomatic Relations:**
  - The allegations and counter-allegations can strain diplomatic ties, affecting the overall **relationship between the two nations**.
  - Trust and confidence may **be eroded, making it difficult to collaborate** on various bilateral and international issues.
- **Security Implications for India:**
  - The Khalistan movement is considered a security threat to India's Sovereignty getting grounds in Foreign Countries.
    - In April 2023, India arrested a Sikh separatist Leader for allegedly **reviving calls for Khalistan**, sparking fears of new violence in Punjab.
  - Earlier in 2023, India hit out at **Canada for allowing a float in a parade** depicting the **assassination of Indira Gandhi**, perceiving this to be a glorification of Sikh separatist violence.
    - It is also concerning for India about frequent **demonstrations and vandalism by Sikh separatists** and their supporters at **Indian diplomatic missions** in Canada, Britain, the U.S. and Australia causing threat to Indian Sovereignty and Integrity.
- **Impact on Trade and Economy:**
  - Trade relations might suffer as the accusations could **affect business partnerships and investment flows** between India and Canada.
  - Businesses may exercise caution or reassess their engagement due to the heightened political tension.
    - India-Canada bilateral trade in goods reached **approximately USD 8.2 billion in 2022**, showing a 25% growth compared to 2021.
    - The services sector was emphasised as a significant contributor to the bilateral relationship, with bilateral services trade valued at around USD 6.6 billion in 2022.
- **Reduced Cooperation on Key Issues:**
  - Cooperation on critical global challenges such as climate change, counter-terrorism, and international security might be adversely impacted.
  - Both countries may find it challenging to align their positions and work together effectively on these shared concerns.
- **Potential Travel and People-to-People Impact:**
  - The escalating tensions could affect travel and interactions between Indian and Canadian citizens, making it more cumbersome or less appealing to travel to each other's countries.
- **Reassessment of Immigration Policies:**
  - Canada **may review or tighten its immigration policies**, especially concerning individuals associated with Khalistani separatism, in response to India's concerns about sheltering such elements.
- **Long-Term Bilateral Cooperation:**
  - The recent tensions could have a lasting effect on long-term bilateral cooperation and partnerships.
  - Rebuilding trust and reestablishing a constructive relationship might require substantial efforts and time.
    - India established diplomatic relations with Canada in 1947. India and Canada have a **long-standing bilateral relationship based on shared democratic values**, the multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi religious nature of two societies and strong people-to-people contacts.

## What is the History of Khalistan Movement and Terrorism in Canada?

- **Early Khalistan Movement in Canada:**
  - The Khalistan movement traces back to **Surjan Singh Gill's establishment of the 'Khalistan government in exile'** office in Vancouver in 1982, with limited local Sikh

support.

- **Connection to Punjab Militancy:**

- The militancy in Punjab during the **1980s had repercussions in Canada.**
- Canada's handling of individuals like Talwinder Singh Parmar, accused of terrorism in Punjab, was criticized by India.

- **Air India Bombing (1985):**

- Canada witnessed a horrific act of terrorism with the bombing of Air India Kanishka in June 1985, orchestrated by the Babbar Khalsa, a Khalistani outfit.

## What are the Previous Instances of India-Canada Tensions?

- **Early Tensions (1948):**

- The strained relations trace back to 1948 when Canada supported a plebiscite in Kashmir, reflecting early discord.

- **1998 Nuclear Tests:**

- Canada's recall of its high commissioner to India following India's nuclear tests marked a significant downturn in relations.

- **Recent Developments:**

- PM of Canada expressions of concern regarding India's response to farmers' protests and his Liberal Party's alliance with the New Democratic Party (NDP), which endorsed the Khalistan Referendum, further fueled tensions.

## Way Forward

- The Indian government **should invest in the economic development of Punjab** and ensure that it gets its fair share of resources, opportunities, and benefits.
- The government should **also address the problems of unemployment**, drug abuse, environmental degradation, and agrarian distress that plague Punjab.
- The Indian government should ensure justice for the victims and survivors of the violence and human rights violations that **occurred during the Khalistan movement.**
- Both countries should maintain open lines of communication at various levels of government to discuss concerns and grievances openly.
- Engage in constructive and respectful dialogue to **address the Khalistan issue, clarifying each other's perspectives**, and finding common ground.