

The 46-year-old Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada with his family is in India for the first time on a week-long tour, and it is drawing out a mountain of comment. I thought I would wait a few days to let the dust settle a bit, and then add my own.

Criticisms and opinions are coming from many quarters, policymakers, experts, think tanks, and journalists from both India and Canada. More interesting are the comments of independent thinkers and their tweets.



Justin Trudeau in India: Justin Trudeau, family visit Taj Mahal | Image: India Today

To a lot of foreign policy participants, it is baffling when a rock-star premier of a country like Canada making no sound and weight on a visit. Normally, when any foreign premier visits India, until their departure the headlines are reserved for the news and dealings they make. Well, in case of Trudeau, the same pattern is being followed, only in a cold way.

Take any newspaper, the buzz word in the foreign policy column are “snub” and “Trudeau”, a more attention is given to the perceived “snub” the present government has given to the Canadian PM.

“Wheels up for India and a busy visit focused on creating good jobs and strengthening the deep connection between the people of our two countries,” Trudeau tweeted before starting from his country.



Trudeau in India: Canadian PM visit Sabarmati Ashram, Akshardham Temple with family | Image: DNA

The perceived “snub” begun at the airport, as PM Modi was not there to receive Trudeau, a typical courtesy he extended to many significant world leaders. Instead, Trudeau was received by the Union Minister of State for Agriculture Gajendra Shekhawat and more shockingly he was received by the local officials when he reached Agra, to visit Taj Mahal. The Indian Government claims that the devised diplomatic protocol has been extended to Trudeau.

It is clear to us that something is perturbed in our bilateral relationship. And this article is meant to unveil the veil.

Sri Harmandir Sahib, known as the Golden Temple. Sacred to Sikhs and open to everyone. I don't think I will ever forget this. Our cabinet ministers, MPs, Sophie and I were profoundly honoured by the welcome & hospitality today.

[pic.twitter.com/Yp5qNfUfDE](https://pic.twitter.com/Yp5qNfUfDE)

— Justin Trudeau (@JustinTrudeau) [February 21, 2018](#)

Whatever India has done so far, “snub” or “not snub”, can be justified to a certain extent, comparing the U-turns made by Ottawa. Prior to Trudeau visit, the foreign policy quarters in Ottawa announced that the Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau will not meet with Punjab Chief Minister Captain Amarinder Singh, while he would visit the Golden Temple. Captain Amarinder is a vocal critic of Canadian approach towards the Khalistan separatists. Captain Amarinder publicly attacked members of Trudeau's cabinet of being connected to the formation of Khalistan, a separate Sikh state movement. “We have nothing planned with him (Amarinder) at this time,” said a Canadian official prior to Trudeau's arrival in India. But tides changed after the “snub” Trudeau faced in India, Ottawa rescheduled the plans whereby, Trudeau met the Punjab CM during his visit to Amritsar.



Canadian prime minister Justin Trudeau on Wednesday arrived at Amritsar where he paid obeisance at the Golden Temple | Image: Firstpost

Getting the Indian dispensation, as a measure to control further damage, Trudeau said “My position and Canada's position has not changed. We support one united India,” in the video released by news agency ‘The Canadian Press’, he further added that “Canada has been unequivocal - myself, all my ministers, my government - on a policy of one united India. We have been very strong on that and will continue to be.”

**What is the backdrop of all these puzzling events? The answer in one**

## word is “Khalistan”.

Canada is a home to one of the world’s largest Indian diaspora, especially the Sikh population, forming roughly 1.4% of Canada’s population, perhaps a minority, but a dynamic minority. It is worth noting, in India Sikhs account only 1.72% of the total population.

It will be a surprise to a first-time learner to know that there are 17 Sikh MPs in Canadian Parliament. And even more remarkable that Trudeau government has four Sikh in the incumbent cabinet including Defense Minister Harjit Singh Sajjan. There is a belief in Indian quarters that, the election of Justin Trudeau in 2015 as Prime Minister has reassured separatist leaders, and that some of these leaders are working hard to revive militancy in the Indian state of Punjab. In India, this militant movement has lost steam since the 1990’s. (During the 1980’s, India-Canada relations faced significant setbacks due Khalistan separatist issues).

Many times, Indian heads raised this as a concern during bilateral talks, recently, former PM Manmohan Singh raised it with his counterpart, Stephen Harper. And Harper’s reply was not persuading to India, “We can’t interfere with the right of political freedom of expression,” he announced.

Above all, a fresh controversy has now surfaced the already troubled visit, media reports say that Jaspal Atwal, an Indian-origin businessman with links to the Khalistan movement had been invited to an official dinner reception in New Delhi and photographed with the Trudeau’s wife Sophie Trudeau. Atwal was previously working with a banned Sikh separatists outfit called “International Sikh Youth Federation” (ISYF), notorious for the 1985 Air India bombing. This outfit pursues to establish a separate country for the Sikhs of India called ‘Khalistan’. In 2001, India listed ISYF as a terrorist outfit and banned it under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act. The outfit is also banned in Canada, UK and US.

The Hindu reported today that, “Ministry of External Affairs” said it has sought details from its Mission in Canada on how Jaspal Atwal, a Khalistan separatist charged with a former State Minister’s murder attempt, was granted a visa to travel to India.



India probing how Khalistani separatist Jaspal Atwal got visa, Justin Trudeau says he should never have been invited | India news | Hindustan Times

India and Canada share a strategic partnership underpinned by shared values of democracy,

pluralism, a system of government. At the political level, the relations in recent years have been marked by regular high-level interactions. The two-way trade has increased from USD 3.21 bn in 2010 to USD 6.05 bn in 2016. But, not to the true potential, it is only a sluggish pace, as India accounts for only 1.95% of Canada's global trade.

Also in political level, India Canada relations are not in complete gravity, but in 2015, hopefully, PM Modi reached to Canada, met Trudeau's predecessor, Stephen Harper, laid down a foundation for a reinvigorated strategic partnership, which was a positive signal after decades of neglect, expecting to reap the benefits of geopolitical convergence on Trade and potential areas. The reciprocate interest from Canada has always been a low key level to the proposed plan. The much anticipated Free trade negotiations, which began in 2010, are lying on the sidelines of the negotiation table blanketed with dust.

Canada is a haven to over 1.2 million Persons of Indian Origin, who encompass more than 3% of its population. This highly trained, affluent and industrious PIOs, is one of the largest immigrant groups in Canada, well blended with the mainstream population and also hot politically.

Back in 2015, while addressing an estimated over 10,000-strong Indian diaspora at Ricoh Coliseum in Toronto during his visit, Modi said "India has all the capabilities it needs, it just needs opportunities", emphasizing the potential of the Indian diaspora. The Indian policymakers since then had been trying to foster the diaspora and give them a stake during the bilateral talks.

Canadian Defense minister Harjit Saajan in May 2017 said that Canada will extend its commitment to maritime security in the Red Sea, the Arabian Sea, and the Indian Ocean. "The government of Canada's renewed commitment to counter-terrorism efforts is vital to building a safer and more prosperous world," Sajjan added in his report. Today, if any country desires a footprint in the Indian Ocean, India's strategic partnership cannot be ignored, considering the latter's strategic proximity and engagement in the ocean. Needless to say, a stable balance of power in the wider Indo-Pacific will serve both New Delhi's and Ottawa's national interests, which is currently under an intimidation from assertive [China](#).

Except for Donald [Trump](#), everyone would agree on the consequences of global warming, as the looming climate change is melting the permanent and thick ice fields in the Arctic Ocean. A deep-sea water route has now opened up linking the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. Moreover, a latent deep sea oil and mineral exploration, in the region may be 40 percent of current global reserves of oil and gas, has now become feasible to exploitation. In simple words, the imminent explorations of the Arctic Ocean region will redraw the geopolitical

atlas of the world. Considering the vicinity, Canada has a greater leverage to this region, and India needs to increase its engagement to wedge its own axe on explorations. To Canada, India is a more engaging partner, as India always keeps the door open to partnerships if it's a win-win deal.

Trudeau visiting India should have been of a high-level strategic importance, enhancing and reinforcing the bilateral cooperation, unfortunately, it is now clouded with suspicion, distrust, and discomfort. On the Indian side, things, (I mean the "snub") are very clear, conveying a signal of political unity on a matter of utmost national security interest. Besides India is not convinced from Trudeau's statements made on the "support to the unity of India", both countries are well aware that it is a mere statement, and will remain so until Canada makes something tangible upon the Khalistan elements hiding behind the so-called phrase by Harper "freedom of expression".

No sovereign country can overlook this sort of a point while engaging bilaterally, both India and Canada need each other in the contemporary times where the balance of power of the world is at risk.

If Canada fails to make a concrete response to appease India's suspicion, then India will be left with no choice to push back Canada from its foreign policy priorities. Which is not going to be good for both countries.

Both India and Canada are sailing on the wrong course, and for sure Canada is to be held responsible prima facie.



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India and Canada sailing the wrong course, who is to be blamed?



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