

ROW OVER PROBE INTO NIJJAR KILLING ESCALATES

# India pulls out top envoy, expels 6 Canada diplomats

ARCHIS MOHAN

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India's diplomatic relations with Canada hit a fresh low on Monday following New Delhi's decision to withdraw its High Commissioner, Sanjay Kumar Verma, along with other diplomats and officials, from the North American nation and expel six of its diplomats. India said the Canadian government, led by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, had been targeting its representatives for "vote bank politics".

In a late night development, New Delhi asked the six Canadian diplomats, including Acting High Commissioner Stewart Ross Wheeler, to leave the country by or before 11.59 pm, October 19. The tensions escalated after Ottawa conveyed to New Delhi its intention to question Indian diplomats and officials as part of its probe into the killing of Sikh extremist Hardeep Singh Nijjar.

Earlier in the afternoon, in a statement issued by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), India revealed it had received a diplomatic communication from Canada on Sunday identifying Verma and other diplomats as "persons of interest" in the Nijjar case. New Delhi firmly rejected these "preposterous imputations", attributing them to a "political agenda" from the Trudeau government aimed at serving its "narrow political interests".

The ministry underscored that High Commissioner Verma is a senior diplomat with a distinguished career spanning 36 years, having served in various countries, including Japan, Sudan, Italy, Turkey, Vietnam, and China.



Canada's Acting High Commissioner to India Stewart Ross Wheeler leaves the external affairs ministry office in New Delhi

PHOTO:PTI

## Pannun case: Indian enquiry committee visiting US today

An Indian enquiry committee established to investigate the American allegations of the involvement of an Indian government official in a foiled plot to assassinate a US national will be visiting on Tuesday, the US Department of State said. "The Enquiry Committee will be travelling to Washington, D.C. on October 15th, as part of their ongoing investigations to discuss the case, including information they have obtained, and to receive an update from US authorities regarding the US case that is proceeding," an official media release said. **PTI**

India denounced the "ludicrous" accusations made against him by the Canadian government, calling them deserving of contempt.

By evening, the MEA summoned Canada's Charge d'Affaires (CDA), Wheeler, in New Delhi, informing him that the "baseless targeting" of Indian diplomats was "completely unacceptable". India expressed that the actions of the Trudeau government had fostered an environment of extremism and violence, jeopardising the safety of its diplomats. It conveyed a lack of confidence in the current

Canadian government's commitment to their security, warning that India reserves the right to take further measures in response to what it described as the Trudeau government's "support for extremism, violence and separatism against India".

Tensions between India and Canada had already heightened after Trudeau alleged last September a "potential" involvement of Indian agents in the killing of Nijjar, a Canadian citizen. Nijjar was shot dead in Surrey, British Columbia, in June 2023 by two masked assailants.

New Delhi then had rejected Trudeau's allegations as "absurd." In October 2023, Canada withdrew over 40 diplomats from India after New Delhi asked Ottawa to reduce its diplomatic presence. Subsequently, India suspended visa issuance to Canadian nationals.

In its statement, the MEA hit out at the Trudeau government for executing a "deliberate strategy of smearing India". It cautioned Ottawa about the "activities" of the Canadian High Commission in India "serve the political agenda of the current regime".

New Delhi stated that it has begun to apply the principle of reciprocity regarding diplomatic representation. However, it indicated that in light of Canada's recent "efforts" to fabricate allegations against Indian diplomats, India "now reserves the right to take further steps".

India asserted that the Canadian government has failed to share "a shred of evidence" to support its claims, despite multiple requests following Trudeau's allegations in September 2023.

Trudeau and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi met on October 11 during the East Asia Summit in Laos, where India contested Canada's characterisation of their discussions. The Canadian government claimed that the leaders had a "brief exchange".

At a press conference in Laos, Trudeau emphasised his focus on ensuring "the safety of Canadians", while MEA sources dismissed his claims, asserting there was "no substantive discussion" between him and Modi.