

Utmost caution: India's Canada travel advisory

Jaishankar briefs PM; banned SFJ asks Hindus to leave Canada

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The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) on Wednesday advised all Indian nationals in Canada, and those planning to visit, to exercise utmost caution in light of growing 'anti-India activities and politically condoned hate crimes'. "Recently, threats have particularly targeted Indian diplomats and sections of the Indian community who oppose the anti-India agenda. Given the deteriorating security environment in Canada, Indian students in particular are advised to exercise extreme caution and remain vigilant," the MEA said.

Students have been asked to register with the Indian High Commission in Ottawa or the Consulates in Toronto and Vancouver to easily connect in an emergency. There are 2,26,450 Indian students in the country, making up 34 percent of all foreign students, and 1.8 million Indian origin citizens in Canada.

The advisory came hours after leaders of banned organization Sikhs for Justice (SFJ) announced plans to hold another referendum on the Khalistan issue on September 29 in Vancouver. Gurbatwant Singh Pannu, designated a terrorist by India, released a video calling for Indian origin Hindu Canadians to leave the country. He also threatened Indian High Commissioner Sanjay Kumar Verma to leave before the 'Kill India' referendum.



SFJ had organized a referendum in Vancouver on September 8, the day PM Modi and Canadian PM Justin Trudeau had been scheduled to meet in Delhi for talks on the sidelines of the G20 Summit.

India's latest move may also be as a reciprocation to Canada issuing a similar travel advisory to its citizens contemplating visits to various parts of India on Tuesday. "Exercise a high degree of caution in India due to the threat of terrorist attacks throughout the country," it had said. External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar met with Prime Minister Narendra Modi to discuss the issue at the New Parliament House on Wednesday.

Jaishankar had raised the continuing threat with his Canadian counterpart Mélanie Joly on the sidelines of an international summit in Jakarta in July. Subsequently, Canadian Federal security

services had beefed up security at the High Commission, and Verma's residence.

Spiral out of control

Relations between both countries have nosedived since Monday night, when Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau told an emergency session of the Canadian Parliament that the country's national security authorities were investigating credible allegations that 'agents of the Indian government' had killed known Khalistani terrorist Hardeep Singh Nijjar. Designated a terrorist by the government in 2020 for plotting to kill a Hindu priest in Punjab, Nijjar became a Canadian citizen in 2015. He was shot down in the parking lot of a Gurudwara in Surrey, British Columbia in June. He was alleged to be the head of the Khalistan Tiger Force, a militant outfit.

Congress joins BJP in dismissing suspicions

The Congress party on Wednesday backed the government's rejection of Canada's suspicions that New Delhi's agents had links to the murder of a Sikh separatist leader, and urged a stand against threats to the country's sovereignty. India had dismissed Canada's assertion as absurd in a row that is worsening. **REUTERS**