

Making up for lost time

Justin Trudeau, Canada's youthful, popular and telegenic Prime Minister, begins his much anticipated seven-day, five-city state visit of India on February 17. This is his first trip to India after he became Prime Minister in 2015, but he has always had India and Indians around him. He is familiar with Indian rituals and customs. He and his spouse are practitioners of yoga. He can even perform bhanga. He has several friends, advisors and colleagues of Indian origin, given that the Indian diaspora comprising 3.6% of the Canadian population is well-educated, affluent and politically suave.

He is particularly close to the Sikh community, which affectionately calls him 'Justin Singh'. Never in Canadian history have at least 19 persons of Indian origin been elected to the House of Commons, of which 17 (15 Sikhs) represent Mr. Trudeau's Liberal Party. He has rewarded four Sikhs with key Cabinet berths. As such these should have been heydays for India-Canada ties, but for the fact that this phase has also coincided with a resurgence in anti-India activities by emboldened Khalistani elements in Canada.

In a first, the Ontario Provincial Parliament adopted a resolution moved by the ruling Liberal Party's MPP (Member of Provincial Parliament) Harinder Malhi, on April 6, 2017, terming the 1984 anti-Sikh riots as 'genocide'. She was promptly rewarded with a cabinet berth. A peeved India described it as a "misguided motion based on a limited understanding of India, its Constitution, society, ethos, rule of law and its judicial process."

Next, on April 30, 2017, Mr. Trudeau himself showed up at the Toronto nagar kirtan where Khalistani flags and pictures of slain terrorists like Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale were conspicuously displayed. Former Prime Minister Stephen Harper had consciously shunned such platforms during his years in office.

Not to be outdone, in December, self-appointed radical leaders imposed a ban on the entry of Indian officials in Canadian gurdwaras, which goes against all tenets of the inclusive, benign and liberal Sikh faith. It is heartening that several sober and influential Sikh voices have criticised and disassociated themselves from the move.

The 'Khalistani' issue has figured prominently between India and Canada at all levels. However, Canadian political leaders and parties continue to mollycoddle the Khalisanti elements in the quest for electoral gains. What is incongruous is that the current Liberal government seems to be going beyond the needs of political and electoral arithmetic in courting the radicals. Naturally bilateral relations cannot but be impacted.

Sensing the delicacy of the situation, the Canadian government appears to be strategising to contain the fallout. Infrastructure Minister Amarjeet Sohi, who has impeccable credentials, stated: "Throughout my life, I have been one of the strongest opponents of the Khalistani movement." It is high time to put the issue to rest, though this may be unlikely given that Canadian leaders only seem to be looking at a tactical recalibration.

That said, Canada has truly been a land of opportunity for the Indian diaspora. They have earned the affection and respect of Canadians, who are very inclusive. There many iconic rags-to-riches stories, like that of Prem Watsa, Chairman of Fairfax Financial Holding, who migrated from Hyderabad in the 1970s with a few dollars and is now known as the Warren Buffett of Canada. His company has invested over \$1 billion in India during the last 30 months or so.

Another welcome development in recent years has been a spike in investments by the well-

endowed Canadian Pension Funds like CPPIB and CDPQ into India. Together, Canadian companies have pumped in some \$12-15 billion Canadian in India in sectors including real estate, financial services, distressed assets, modern logistics facilities and e-commerce.

Early conclusion of the bilateral Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) and Investment Promotion and Protection Agreements (BIPPA), which have been under negotiation for several years, would boost our economic partnership. It would particularly open up the services sector allowing highly skilled Indian professionals, for whom there is a ready demand, to work in Canada. However, this is not likely to happen in a hurry. BIPPA is closer to finalisation, but India would prefer that both agreements be operationalised in one go.

During Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Canada in April 2015, both sides agreed to elevate their bilateral relations to a strategic partnership. Truth be told, the strategic content remains wafer thin. The ties essentially rest on 3Es — economy, energy and education. India has started importing uranium from Canada, beginning 2015. Canada also has sizeable reserves of oil and gas. Over time Canada could become a key partner in India's quest for energy security.

With declining interest in Britain and some uncertainty over the U.S.'s policies, Indian students have begun heading for vocational and higher education to Canada in larger numbers. An added attraction for them is that Canada routinely provides a three-year work visa upon completion of studies, which opens up avenues of gainful employment and citizenship. Canada also continues with a liberal immigration policy. In 2016, some 40,000 Indian immigrants were admitted into the country.

Till recently, knowledgeable Canadians would say with pride that there was a little of their country in every Indian home, as significant quantities of Canadian pulses were being imported by India. Both nations also have some collaboration in agri-tech and much more can be done. We are fortunate to have complementary economies and capable human resources. There is enough potential for stepping up cooperation in areas like information technology, science and technology, clean and green tech, aviation and outer space, cold-climate warfare, cybersecurity, counterterrorism and tourism. The need of the hour is to strengthen mutual trust and confidence, by taking a long-term view of the relationship.

Vishnu Prakash is a former Indian High Commissioner to Canada (2015-16)

Receive the best of The Hindu delivered to your inbox everyday!

Please enter a valid email address.

Marriage is a civil contract — adultery or divorce should have only civil consequences

END

Downloaded from crackIAS.com

© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com