

A QUICK RESET: ON INDIA'S G-20 PRESIDENCY

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As India ramps up its international outreach in the year of its [G-20 presidency](#), better ties with Canada are clearly on the agenda for the government, with the External Affairs Minister, S. Jaishankar, hosting [Canadian Foreign Minister Melanie Joly](#) for bilateral talks in New Delhi. This visit of Ms. Joly, who will be in Delhi again for the G-20 Foreign Minister's Meeting in March, and later again to accompany Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau for the G-20 summit, will be followed by several other Ministers for other G-20 meetings. Another reason for the acceleration in relations is Canada's deteriorating ties with China. In November, Canada announced its new Indo-Pacific Strategy that marked out China as an "increasingly disruptive global power", while referring to India as a "critical partner" with shared traditions of democracy and pluralism. In addition, Canada's search for new markets to diversify its considerable economic engagement with China coincides with India's push to conclude free trade agreements with many countries. While officials have been working to announce an "Early Progress Trade Agreement" this year, they are also hopeful of securing a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement soon. The flurry in bilateral activity is in contrast to past developments, especially after Mr. Trudeau's disastrous India visit in 2018, and his criticism of the Modi government's handling of the farmers' agitation in 2020-21 that led to the cancellation of diplomatic activity. The ties began to be reset after he met Mr. Modi on the sidelines of the G-7 summit in Germany last year.

Several issues remain to be sorted out — New Delhi has continued to express concerns over the resurgence of Khalistani separatism and calls for a "referendum" amid the Sikh community in Canada as well as incidents of vandalism and violence targeting the Indian community there. In addition, Canadian pronouncements on developments in India, including on rights and freedoms can always set off diplomatic landmines. This has been a running thread in bilateral ties, which have seen many ups and downs over the past decades, despite a massive Indian diaspora population and student links. Canada was among the first countries associated with India's nuclear programme, but the relationship ruptured after India's nuclear tests in 1974. When ties began to improve in the 1980s, it was Indian anger over Canadian shelter to separatist Khalistani groups behind the 1985 bombing of an Air India flight and the prolonged trial. Relations were restored in 2010, with the visit of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to Canada, and an agreement on civil nuclear cooperation, and Mr. Modi in 2015. But they flagged after 2018. This year, timing and intent seem on course for a leap in ties which could bring strategic and economic gains, provided both sides also focus on side-stepping the possible political pitfalls along the way.

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