



Carney hails India as a 'natural partner'

PM sidesteps issue of alleged violence and interference

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MUMBAI Hailing India as a “natural partner,” Prime Minister Mark Carney pitched his vision of more lucrative ties with the rising economic superpower in a speech Saturday that dodged all reference to ongoing controversy over his government’s stance on New Delhi’s alleged ties to violent crime in Canada.

That stance prompted India’s top diplomat in Ottawa to applaud what he sees as the federal government’s new-found understanding that India is not behind any ongoing violence, repression or political meddling — an assertion that has sparked blowback from Sikh activists, intelligence experts and some MPs in Carney’s Liberal caucus.

“It’s not a question of ‘no longer.’ It never happened ... and I’m glad that people are realizing that,” said Indian High Commissioner Dinesh Patnaik.

“People have to look deep into seeing where the problem is happening, where extortion is happening, where all the illegal activity in Canada is happening,” he said. “I’ve been telling from the very beginning: it’s a problem Canada has to resolve itself. We are there to help you. And so let’s look at it very clearly.”

The high commissioner was placed at a central table in the ballroom of a swanky colonial-era hotel in Mumbai on Saturday, mingling with high-ranking Canadian officials, including Carney’s chief of staff and the government’s top bureaucrat, and cabinet members like International Trade Minister Maninder Sidhu.

On stage, Carney delivered an address focused exclusively on his push to more than double two-way trade to \$70 billion by 2030, with a goal to strike a comprehensive economic accord with New Delhi before the end of the year.

Taking questions afterwards from an Indian broadcast journalist, Carney did not directly address the question of ongoing Indian links to violence and political interference in Canada.

But he said the two countries have engaged in “good faith” on security co-operation since he took office in the wake of significant tensions over the previous Liberal government’s allegations against New Delhi.

Those included public claims of “credible” evidence that tied the Indian government to the shooting death of Sikh activist Hardeep Singh Nijjar in 2023. The RCMP has alleged India is linked to violent crimes and threats targeting advocates for Khalistan — an independent Sikh state carved out of India — while a public inquiry found New Delhi is the second-biggest perpetrator of suspected foreign interference in Canadian politics, after China.

Then, the day before Carney em-

barked for his trade mission to India, a senior government official told reporters that Ottawa believes the country is no longer engaged in transnational repression and political meddling inside Canada.

That statement prompted outrage from Sikh activist groups, who pointed to how a prominent leader in B.C. received a police warning of death threats to himself and his family — which they believe is linked to India because of his Khalistani activism — just days before Carney’s trip.

Some Liberal MPs have also spoken out, including Ruby Sahota, a Brampton MP who is secretary of state for combating crime in Carney’s cabinet.

“Any suggestion these threats have been resolved does not reflect the current security reality facing Canadians,” Sahota wrote on social media Saturday.

“Attempting to minimize these threats risks eroding public confidence and overlooks the ongoing efforts to protect communities targeted by intimidation and violence.”

Jody Thomas, who was Trudeau’s national security adviser from 2022 to 2024, told the CBC on Friday that she believes the Canadian official “misspoke.” To say the behaviour has ceased is a “gross” understatement, she said.

The focus of Carney’s trip has been clearly trained on trade. On Saturday, he said he wants to ink a comprehensive trade deal with India by the end of the year, before the G20 summit in December.

“We’re here this week because Canada and India are natural partners,” Carney said, referring to the family ties of Canadians, existing business partnerships, and a new education strategy announced Saturday with Canadian universities seeking to create new research agreements and student exchanges with Indian institutions.

“But the reality is, on the economic side, that level of activity is nowhere near our potential,” Carney said. “We should aim much higher, and we are aiming much higher — and to be more strategic in our partnership.”

Speaking to reporters earlier Saturday in Mumbai, Foreign Affairs Minister Anita Anand refused to say whether she agrees India is no longer behind transnational repression and foreign interference.

But she stressed repeatedly that she has “concerns” after speaking with Sikh MPs, and said the government’s top priority with India is to ensure the dialogue on law enforcement and security co-operation that started last year will continue.

“No country has a pass on Canada’s public safety and security,” Anand said.

“We are a country of the rule of law. That means there are independent processes in place to address concerns of public safety, including the killing of a Canadian on Canadian soil. That is a priority for our country, and at the foreign affairs level, I raise these concerns in every meeting.”

Carney is slated to travel to New Delhi on Sunday, where he will meet Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

WITH FILES FROM RAISA PATEL

Prime Minister Mark Carney and his wife Diana Fox Carney tour the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya museum in Mumbai on Saturday. Carney later delivered an address focused on his push to more than double two-way trade with India to \$70 billion by 2030.

ADRIAN WYLD/
THE CANADIAN
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BRAMPTON MP
RUBY SAHOTA
ON INDIA’S
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