

# Carney to visit Mumbai, New Delhi

On a business-focused trip to India, the PM will not be stopping in the northern state of Punjab

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Mark Carney's first trip to India will include stops in the country's business capital and its seat of government but no visit to the northern state of Punjab, a major source of immigration to Canada.

The Prime Minister's visit, announced Monday, begins Friday when his plane reaches India. His office said in a statement that he is heading to Mumbai, where he will meet with business leaders, and New Delhi, for a meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Mr. Carney will be in the country seeking new investment and export markets for Canada as Ottawa tries to reduce its economic reliance on an increasingly protectionist United States.

It's a notably different itinerary from those of the Prime Minister's two predecessors, Justin Trudeau and Stephen Harper, and suggests that this government would like to avoid antagonizing its Indian hosts, whose opposition to separatists trying to turn Punjab into an independent Sikh homeland has been a past source of tension between the countries.

Both Mr. Trudeau and Mr. Harper visited Punjab and its Golden Temple in Amritsar, the holiest site in the Sikh faith, during their first official trips to India – Mr. Harper in 2009 and Mr. Trudeau in 2018.

Mr. Harper returned to Punjab during his 2012 visit as well, touring the Sikh Heritage Centre among other locations. During



Visiting the Golden Temple in India's northern state of Punjab has been widely viewed as a symbolic gesture toward Canada's large Sikh community. NARINDER NANU/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

that second trip, he also visited a Hindu shrine in India.

Visiting the Golden Temple has been widely viewed as a symbolic gesture toward Canada's large Sikh community, a group that has played a significant role in Canadian politics.

Three of the previous four prime ministers made the trip. Jean Chrétien visited the temple in 2003 when he was prime minister. Paul Martin, who followed Mr. Chrétien as PM, did not.

This religious site has a troubled history. Back in 1984, Indian troops stormed the Golden Temple on then-prime minister Indira Gandhi's order to dislodge Sikhs whom her government described as terrorists. New Delhi accused them of directing a violent campaign for more autonomy in Punjab. The result was a

bloodbath. Ms. Gandhi was assassinated months later by Sikh bodyguards. This triggered a wave of anti-Sikh riots that left thousands of Sikhs dead.

In recent decades, the Khalistani movement among some Sikhs in Canada and other overseas communities, which seeks to carve a separate homeland out of India, has been a major fault line in relations between Ottawa and New Delhi. India has long complained that Canada provides a haven for Khalistan advocates.

In 2023, Hardeep Singh Nijjar, a Sikh Canadian activist for Khalistan was murdered in Surrey, B.C., and Mr. Trudeau, then prime minister, accused the Indian government of a role in the slaying. New Delhi has denied the charge. Four Indian nationals now face charges in the Nijjar

case.

Asked about the absence of a Punjab stop, Prime Minister's Office (PMO) press secretary Laura Scaffidi said in a statement that Mr. Carney will travel to Mumbai and New Delhi to "focus on expanding economic and business relationships, identify investment opportunities in Canada, and create new partnerships between businesses in both nations."

Ms. Scaffidi said cultural outreach will take place at home. "When he is in Canada, the Prime Minister will continue his engagements with cultural communities including attending important celebrations and events on days of significance."

Mr. Carney attended Vaisakhi celebrations with the Sikh community last April in Ottawa, for

instance, she said.

Goldy Hyder, president and chief executive officer of the Business Council of Canada, said he's in favour of the Carney itinerary for India.

"This is a serious time and warrants a serious visit. Prime Minister Carney is right not to get distracted by diaspora political events," said Mr. Hyder, who is an Indo-Canadian.

After Mumbai, where he will talk with business leaders, the Prime Minister will head to New Delhi to meet with his Indian counterpart. The two will discuss "ambitious new partnerships in trade, energy, technology and artificial intelligence (AI), talent and culture, and defence," the PMO said in a separate statement. Mr. Carney will also meet business leaders in New Delhi.

Vina Nadjibulla, vice-president of research and strategy at the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada, said she takes Mr. Carney's itinerary as a sign that his foreign policy is "more focused on national interest and not limited to certain diaspora priorities."

Balpreet Singh, legal counsel for the Ottawa-based World Sikh Organization, said his organization met with Dominic LeBlanc when he was minister of public safety in the Trudeau government.

But Mr. Singh said the WSO has been unable to procure a meeting with Gary Anandasangaree, the current Public Safety Minister.

"The doors have been shut to us," Mr. Singh said.

He said it appears that Mr. Carney "wants to show the Indians 'I'm here to do business, and let's not let the Sikhs complicate things.'"

Mr. Carney is headed to Australia and Japan after the India visit, also seeking new investment and export markets for Canada.