

India and Canada expel envoys in row over Sikh separatist's death

Canada

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Justin Trudeau accused India of supporting "criminal" acts in Canada just hours after both countries expelled each other's diplomats as a row over the murder of a Sikh dissident escalated.

The Canadian prime minister's comments came after India's top envoy in Ottawa was claimed to be considered a "person of interest" along with other diplomats by police investigating the

killing of Hardeep Singh Nijjar, a Sikh separatist and Canadian citizen. Delhi rejected the claim as "ludicrous".

Trudeau said he had evidence linking Indian agents to the assassination of Nijjar, who was shot dead by masked gunmen outside a temple near Vancouver in June last year.

"The government of India made a fundamental error in thinking that they could engage in supporting criminal activity against Canadians here on Canadian soil, whether it be murders or

extortion or other violent acts," Trudeau said in Ottawa.

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) said in an earlier news conference that Indian diplomats and consular officials based in Canada were leveraging their official positions to engage in clandestine activities.

Canada's foreign ministry said: "The decision to expel these individuals was made with great consideration and only after the RCMP gathered ample, clear and concrete evidence which

identified six individuals as persons of interest in the Nijjar case."

India responded by expelling six Canadian diplomats, including the chargé d'affaires in Delhi. Earlier in the day, the country's foreign ministry said it rejected the "preposterous imputations" of a diplomatic communication it received from Canada on Sunday, which it said implicated its high commissioner in Ottawa and other diplomats as "persons of interest in the investigation". It said the accusations

against Sanjay Kumar Verma were "ludicrous and deserve to be treated with contempt".

The government in Delhi also summoned Stewart Wheeler, Canada's chargé d'affaires in India, to the ministry to complain about the allegations.

Nijjar, who became a Canadian citizen in 2015, had been wanted by India for alleged terrorism and conspiracy to commit murder. Four Indian citizens were arrested and charged over Nijjar's murder in May.