

# RECALIBRATING INDIA-CANADA RELATIONS

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A Strategic Assessment for 2025 and Beyond



*Recommended citation:*

CSDR (2025). Recalibrating India-Canada Relations:

A Strategic Assessment for 2025 and Beyond. New Delhi: Council for Strategic and Defense Research.

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## ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report provides a detailed analysis of India-Canada bilateral relations, examining both historical context and contemporary dynamics. It evaluates the relationship through multiple dimensions: traditional areas of cooperation including trade, education, and people-to-people ties, as well as emerging spheres such as defense, energy, and Indo-Pacific collaboration. The analysis comes at a critical juncture, as both nations navigate significant diplomatic challenges while maintaining resilient economic and cultural connections. Drawing on current data and diplomatic developments through early 2025, the report assesses key opportunities and challenges in the bilateral relationship. It concludes with actionable recommendations for strengthening ties across various sectors. The analysis is particularly relevant for policymakers, business leaders, and stakeholders interested in Indo-Canadian relations, offering insights into how both nations can move forward despite current tensions while capitalizing on their complementary strengths in the Indo-Pacific region.

## ABOUT THE INDIA CANADA RESEARCH INITIATIVE AT CSDR

The India-Canada Research Initiative (ICRI) at CSDR is a project designed to strengthen bilateral relations between India and Canada. This initiative aims to unlock the true potential of the partnership by creating a platform for scholarly exchange, policy research, and strategic engagement. The ICRI was established in Sept 2024 with a grant from the [Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada](#).

## ABOUT COUNCIL FOR STRATEGIC AND DEFENSE RESEARCH

Founded in January 2020 by Lt. Gen. D.S. Hooda (Retd.) and Dr. Happymon Jacob, CSDR is an innovative think tank and consultancy specializing in foreign policy, geopolitical risk, connectivity, and critical areas of defense and aerospace. With a focus on the Indian subcontinent, Eurasia, and the Indo-Pacific, CSDR is committed to generating strategic insights that drive meaningful change. Read more at [www.csdronline.com](http://www.csdronline.com)

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# Executive Summary

- Despite recent diplomatic tensions, the India-Canada relationship has a rich history of cooperation and significant potential for mutual benefit. It was elevated to a strategic partnership in 2015, leading to agreements in various sectors, including civil aviation, education, and space cooperation.
- Economic ties have shown resilience in the face of political challenges. Bilateral trade reached USD 9.38 billion in 2023, demonstrating the strength of commercial relations. Critical sectors for growth include pharmaceuticals, technology, agriculture, energy, and services.
- Educational cooperation remains a cornerstone of the relationship, with approximately 230,000 Indian students studying in Canada (as of 2023). This fosters cultural exchange and contributes significantly to the Canadian economy, with Indian students estimated to contribute USD 20 billion annually.
- The substantial Indian diaspora in Canada, comprising about 3% of the Canadian population, plays a crucial role in maintaining people-to-people ties and facilitating business and cultural exchanges. However, recent visa restrictions and consular service suspensions have created challenges in this area.
- Defense and strategic relations have evolved over the years, with both countries recognizing the need for collective security efforts, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region. Joint working groups on counterterrorism and frameworks for cooperation have been established, though there is potential for deeper collaboration.
- Energy cooperation and climate technology are promising areas for partnership. Canada's abundant mineral resources align well with India's growing energy demands. Both countries have shown commitment to developing clean energy solutions and addressing climate change.
- Investments and innovation collaborations have shown remarkable resilience and growth. Canadian pension funds and major institutions have made significant investments in various Indian sectors, including infrastructure, renewable energy, and technology startups.
- Both countries share complementary visions for the Indo-Pacific region, offering substantial potential for cooperation in trade, supply chain resilience, and promoting democratic values. However, realizing these opportunities depends on overcoming current diplomatic hurdles.
- To fully harness this relationship's potential, both nations need to prioritize trust-building, diplomatic reconciliation, and the resumption of high-level dialogues. Recommendations include fast-tracking trade agreements, enhancing defense cooperation, strengthening educational and cultural exchanges, and aligning Indo-Pacific strategies.
- Although challenging, the path forward offers substantial rewards. A reinvigorated India-Canada partnership could serve as a model for effective bilateral cooperation in the Indo-Pacific era, contributing significantly to regional stability, economic growth, and the promotion of shared democratic values.

## Introduction

The India-Canada relationship has experienced significant developments and challenges over the past decade. Since being elevated to a strategic partnership in 2015, bilateral ties have seen both growth and tension. This report examines the current state of India-Canada relations, exploring key areas of cooperation, ongoing challenges, and potential for future collaboration.

Since 2015, the two sides have signed multiple agreements in civil aviation, education, skills development, and space cooperation. The partnership was further strengthened during Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's state visit to India in 2018, leading to new initiatives in sustainable development, trade and investment, and women's empowerment.

However, the relationship has been complicated by historical mistrust stemming from India's 1974 nuclear tests and India's ongoing concerns related to Sikh separatist activism within Canada. These issues have led to diplomatic tensions, most recently exemplified by the controversy surrounding the killing of the Khalistani activist Hardeep Singh Nijjar in 2023.[1]

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In 2024, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau asserted that Indian agents were involved in Nijjar's killing, resulting in a significant diplomatic rift. Both nations expelled several diplomats in response, with Canada withdrawing 41 diplomats from India. India dismissed the allegations as "absurd and baseless," accusing Canada of harboring extremists.[2] This dispute marked the two countries' most serious political and diplomatic crisis in years, straining their bilateral relations.



Yet, negotiations for trade agreements, though currently suspended, demonstrate the potential for enhanced economic ties. Both countries have expressed interest in improving relations, with diplomatic representatives emphasizing the alignment of long-term strategic interests and the importance of maintaining business relationships.

This report delves into the various facets of the India-Canada bilateral relationship, analyzing the progress made in different sectors, the impact of recent diplomatic tensions, and the prospects for future cooperation. By examining these aspects, the report provides a comprehensive overview of the current affairs and potential pathways for strengthening this vital partnership.

## Brief History of the Bilateral Relationship

The relationship began with India's first Prime Minister, Nehru, visiting Canada in 1949. In these early years, i.e., the 1950s, Canada offered much-needed development assistance to a newly independent India, particularly through its Colombo Plan. The relationship was strengthened by Canada's supply of the CIRUS (Canadian-India Reactor, US), a research reactor at the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre near Mumbai in 1954.[3] This cooperation in nuclear technologies continued until 1974, when India conducted its first nuclear tests, leading to a freeze in India-Canada cooperation in the nuclear sector.

By the 1980s, the Khalistan movement gathered momentum in India, ending in a devastating confrontation between Sikh separatists and Indian armed forces at the Golden Temple in Amritsar. Reports indicate that 400 people, including 87 soldiers, were killed in the confrontation known as Operation Bluestar, which was ordered by then-Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.[4] Within a year, in October 1984, Indira Gandhi was assassinated by two of her Sikh bodyguards. In June 1985, an Air India flight, "Kanishka", travelling from Montreal to New Delhi via London, was destroyed by a bomb explosion, killing all 329 passengers on board.

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The first indications of normalization in the relationship emerged on the sidelines of India's economic liberalization. Canada's PM, Jean Chrétien, visited India and signed 75 commercial agreements totaling USD 3.4 billion. However, this new optimism was soon reversed by India's second nuclear test in 1998 with strong reactions from Canada.

Two independent Canadian commissions of inquiry later determined that Canada-based Khalistani separatists were responsible for the attack.[5] From India's perspective, Canada's investigation into the incident was slow, resulting in only one conviction and taking over two decades to acknowledge its failure to prevent the attack. Notwithstanding the political perceptions of either side, the Khalistan movement and its associated triggered a new wave of Sikh migration from India to Canada.

Nevertheless, the first indications of normalization in the relationship emerged on the sidelines of India's economic liberalization. Canada's newly elected PM, Jean Chrétien, visited India and departed after signing 75 commercial agreements totaling USD 3.4 billion.[6] However, this new optimism did not last long and was soon reversed by India's second nuclear test in 1998 with strong reactions from the US and Canada. While the US' reaction was relatively measured due to a prosperous and rapidly growing Indo-American

demographic, the Canadian government, under then-Prime Minister Axworthy, attempted to isolate India with repeated sanctions.[7]

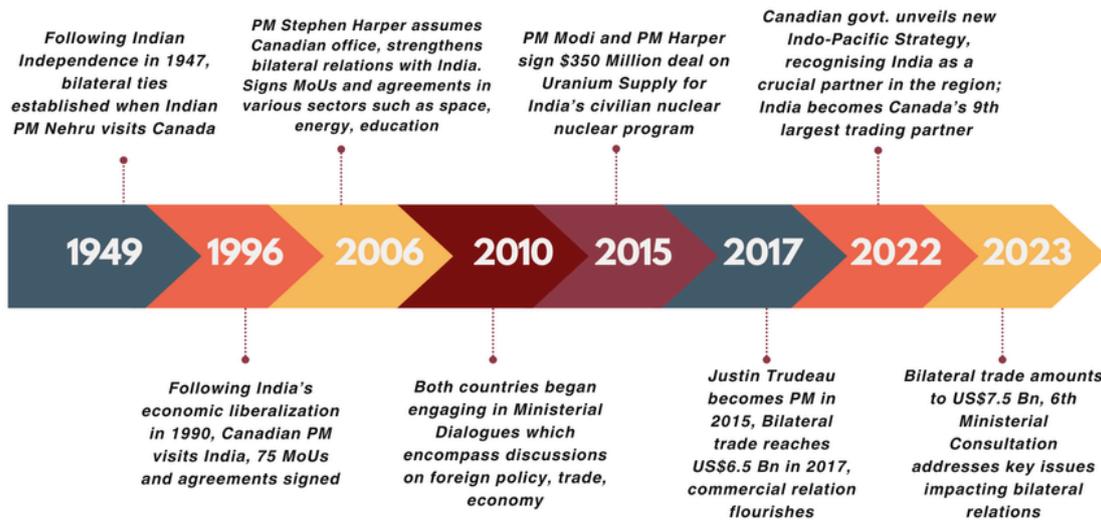
As India slowly repaired its relationship with the West following its 1998 nuclear test, a new government in Canada, under then-Prime Minister Stephen Harper, upgraded ties with India to a strategic partnership in 2006. This elevation resulted in high-level diplomatic exchanges and the exploration of new areas of cooperation in energy, science and technology, and education. This momentum in ties continued at a respectable pace, undergirded by people-to-people ties. When Prime Minister Modi visited Canada in 2015, the relationship had a new sense of purpose. During this visit, the two sides signed a USD 350-million uranium deal to support India’s civilian nuclear program for five years.[8] This marked a reset in an essential historical aspect of the relationship that had grown strained over the years. By 2017, bilateral trade had reached USD 6.5 Billion, indicating a new direction in the relationship.[9] However, since then, at least the political relationship has been marred by controversy over pro-Khalistan activities by Canada-based individuals, resulting in deep mistrust and seemingly irreconcilable differences on national security concerns and the alignment of liberal values.[10]

Yet, the relationship has shown resilience. Despite challenges, economic cooperation between the two nations has endured, with total two-way trade between Canada and India actually increased slightly—from USD 651.99 million to USD 684.92 million—between March 2023 and March 2024.[11] Despite tensions, both sides have been engaging in ministerial dialogues on foreign policy, economy, trade, and investment since 2010. May 2023 marked the 6th India-Canada Ministerial Dialogue on Trade & Investment.[12] Maintaining a positive outlook on bilateral trade, the ministerial dialogue demonstrated that plummeting diplomatic ties only partially impact commercial endeavors.

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That said, talks of an Early Partnership Trade Agreement (EPTA), an interim arrangement to realizing a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), and other Free Trade Agreements have not seen much progress since 2010. While 2023 indicated an upward trend toward finalizing a deal, all avenues for negotiation were closed when Canada paused trade agreement talks in September 2023, shortly before the G20 Summit in India.[13]

# LANDMARK MOMENTS IN THE INDIA-CANADA RELATIONSHIP



## Economic Ties

### Bilateral trade in 2022

- Goods: USD 10.83 Bn
- Services: USD 4.96 Bn

### 2024 (Jan-Oct) trade in goods: USD 7.65 Bn

- Decline due to suspended FTA talks and political issues[14]

### Canadian investments continue in key sectors

- Example: CPPIB's USD 115 million in Delhivery Pvt Ltd (2019)[15]

### Economic ties remain robust despite challenges

- Both nations recognize significant business potential

## Political Ties

### Shared values, but continuing tensions over the Khalistan issue

- June 2023: Khalistani activist Hardeep Singh Nijjar murdered in Canada[16]
- PM Trudeau alleges Indian involvement in September
- Diplomatic expulsions: India expels 41 of 62 Canadian diplomats[17]
- India suspends visa services for Canadians (partially resumed)[18]

### G20 Summit 2023: PMs hold informal talks

### Provincial engagement continues:

- Yukon Premier visits India (Sept 2023)[19]
- Saskatchewan Premier meets Indian External Affairs Minister (Feb 2024)[20]

### Broader political relationships remain strained with further expulsions of Indian diplomats in Canada[21]

## Cultural Ties

### Indian population in Canada

- 1.8 million diaspora
- Additional 1 million Non-Resident Indians
- ~3% of Canadian population
- Large remittances from Canada to India
- Film Co-Production agreement
- Repatriation of ancient Annapurna statue (2021)[22]

### • Education

- 230,000 Indian students in Canada
- Indian Council for Cultural Relations chairs in 5 Canadian universities[23]

### Strong cultural and educational exchanges despite political tensions

- Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute was created as a binational initiative to promote scholarly exchange and institutional collaborations in 1968.

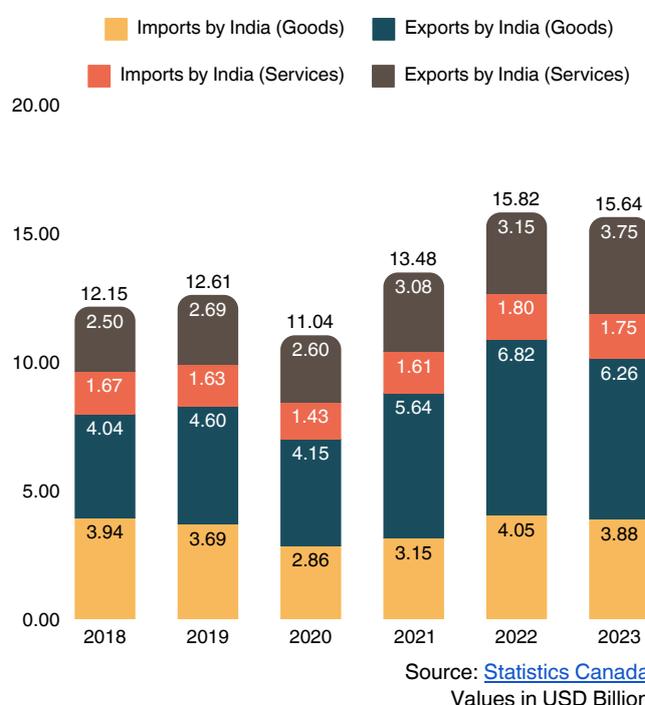
## Areas of Cooperation

The India-Canada relationship faces significant challenges that require urgent attention. The presence of the Khalistan movement in Canada remains a considerable irritant, with India accusing Canada of harboring separatist elements. The unresolved prosecution in the Hardeep Singh Nijjar murder case continues to strain relations, with Canada alleging Indian involvement and India dismissing the claims. Allegations against Indian diplomats regarding espionage and interference further complicate diplomatic engagement. Additionally, mistrust is fueled by broader concerns about foreign interference, including India's reported role in Canadian politics. Addressing these issues through transparent legal proceedings, diplomatic dialogue, and counterterrorism cooperation is essential to restore stability in bilateral ties.

As new areas for bilateral cooperation emerge, there is a growing reliance on existing traditional areas of cooperation. These areas have been the cornerstones of India and Canada's bilateral relationship, evolving over decades, encompassing and impacting the diaspora, leadership, and economic growth of the two countries over the last century.

## Bilateral Trade

The trade and investment relationship between India and Canada has shown resilience and potential despite recent political tensions. In 2023, India's major exports to Canada were dominated by pharmaceuticals, valued at USD 274.05 million, followed closely by nuclear reactors, boilers, and parts at USD 195.46 million. Electrical machinery and iron and steel articles also featured prominently, with exports of USD 160.68 million and USD 156.03 million, respectively.[24] Conversely, Canada's exports to India primarily consisted of minerals, pulses, potash, newsprint, scrap metals, industrial chemicals, and gemstones.



Recent trade figures for goods and services after Q2 2024 reveal Canadian exports to India at USD 4.2 billion and imports at USD 2.4 billion. While the data shows slight depreciation from 2023 and no significant growth, it is notable that trade has persisted despite ongoing political tensions.[25]

Canada is India's 35th largest trading partner, while India is Canada's 9th largest. This disparity hints at the untapped potential in their trade relationship. Canada's position as the 14th largest global importer, yet only the 32nd most prominent market for Indian exports, further underscores this potential.[26] Experts estimate that a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) could boost bilateral trade by CAD 8 billion within a decade.[27]

However, challenges persist. The suspension of CEPA talks has hindered potential growth, and both countries face rising competition in international trade. Yet, opportunities are emerging, particularly with the post-COVID surge in Canadian companies looking to source from India especially in view of supply chain vulnerabilities and the rising economic and geopolitical tensions between the West and China.

Looking ahead, trade between India and Canada is expected to grow, albeit slower than its full potential. Resolving political issues will be crucial to unlocking this relationship's full economic potential. Both countries can become more favorable trade partners, leveraging their complementary strengths.

Key sectors poised for growth in this bilateral trade relationship include pharmaceuticals, technology, agriculture, energy, and services. As India's importance in the Indo-Pacific region continues to grow, and as both countries navigate the evolving global trade landscape, their economic ties can strengthen significantly, provided they can overcome current diplomatic hurdles and capitalize on their mutual economic interests.

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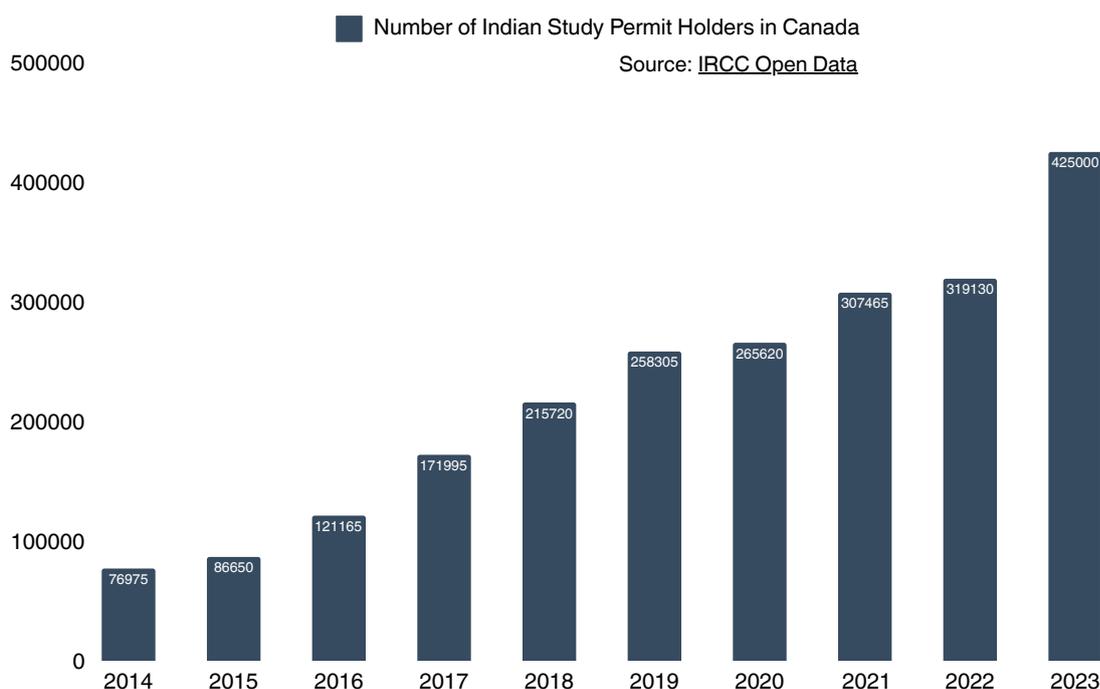
## Education

The educational ties between India and Canada have been a cornerstone of their bilateral relationship, underpinned by a Memorandum of Understanding on Higher Education signed in 2010 and renewed in 2018. [28] This partnership has flourished, with approximately 230,000 Indian students currently pursuing their education in Canada, making a significant economic impact. These students contribute significantly to the Canadian economy, underscoring the financial importance of this educational exchange.

The Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute is at the heart of this academic collaboration, a network comprising 156 Indian and 36 Canadian member institutions. This organization is crucial in fostering education, cultural cooperation, and research between the two countries, serving as a bridge for academic and cultural exchange.[29]

The economic aspects of this educational relationship are substantial. Foreign students, including those from India, often pay about double the tuition fees of their Canadian counterparts, contributing significantly to the funding of Canadian educational institutions. Notably, students from the Indian state of Punjab alone account for USD 8 billion in annual economic contribution to Canada, highlighting the concentrated impact of this demographic.[30]

However, recent tensions and changing immigration policies have led to challenges in this sector, impacting institutional and research partnerships. Some visa and consular services have been suspended, and Canada has announced plans to reduce student visa issuance by 35% in 2024, with a further 10% reduction planned for 2025. New student applications for this year are also significantly down from previous years because of changes to Canada's immigration policies.[31] Additionally, a new 24-hour weekly work limit for international students has been implemented, potentially affecting their ability to support themselves financially during their studies.[32]



Several potential solutions have been proposed to address these challenges and maintain the strength of educational ties. These include strengthening organizations that facilitate dialogue between Indian students, researchers, and Canadian faculty, encouraging provincial-level collaborations with Indian institutions, and promoting Canadian student enrollment in Indian institutions to balance the exchange.

Looking to the future, there is a potential risk of Indian students shifting to alternative destinations such as the UK or Australia if current restrictions continue. This underscores the need for adaptive strategies to maintain educational ties despite political tensions.

The importance of this educational relationship cannot be overstated. It is crucial not only for bilateral relations and cultural exchange but also as a significant contributor to the Canadian economy and societal diversity. As both countries navigate current challenges, the resilience and mutual benefits of their educational ties will likely drive efforts to preserve and strengthen this vital aspect of India-Canada relations.

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## People-to-People and Culture Connect

The people-to-people and cultural ties between India and Canada form a cornerstone of their bilateral relationship, with Canada hosting one of the largest Indian diasporas globally. This deep-rooted connection has long served as a bridge, fostering understanding and cooperation between the two nations. However, recent diplomatic tensions have presented significant challenges to maintaining these vital links.

The suspension of Canadian consular services in India, except in New Delhi, has created substantial obstacles to visa processing and travel. The drastic downsizing of the Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) office in India, from 27 to just five employees, has severely impacted visa application processing.[33] These changes have resulted in apparent travel restrictions, affecting tourist activities, family visits, and cultural exchange programs, thereby threatening the rich tapestry of cross-cultural experiences that have long characterized India-Canada relations.

In Jan 2025, Canadian authorities have alleged India of carrying out influence operations and meddling with the electoral process.[34] The 16-month inquiry, led by Justice Marie-Josée Hogue, identified widespread political interference and disinformation campaigns to destabilize the country. Despite these efforts, the investigation found no evidence of "traitors" within Parliament and determined that the 2019 and 2021 federal election outcomes were unaffected. The Indian Ministry of External Affairs rejected the report's allegations and has accused Canada of "consistently interfering in India's internal affairs." [35] Importantly, India's response has suggested greater scrutiny of people's movement to curb the "environment for illegal migration and organized criminal activities". This further poses challenges to visa processing and travel.

Despite these challenges, opportunities for strengthening ties remain, particularly through the Indian diaspora in Canada. This community is crucial in facilitating idea exchange, research collaboration, and technical and scientific knowledge sharing. Their unique position, straddling both cultures, makes them invaluable assets in maintaining and deepening bilateral connections. Potential areas for collaboration, even in the face of current difficulties, include business development, investments, and educational cooperation.

Going forward, there is a clear need to establish a more resilient foundation for bilateral cooperation. Strengthening traditional areas of collaboration could pave the way for expansion into emerging sectors, ensuring the relationship's longevity and depth.

Several strategies emerge to address current challenges and capitalize on existing strengths. Leveraging diaspora networks to maintain cultural bridges, exploring digital platforms for cultural exchanges, encouraging subnational and institutional partnerships, and supporting diaspora-led initiatives in business, education, and culture are all crucial. These approaches can help preserve and strengthen the cultural relationship between India and Canada, maintaining the warmth and depth of bilateral relations even as both countries navigate periods of diplomatic challenges.

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## Emerging Areas of Cooperation

Building on the foundation of traditional areas of cooperation that anchor bilateral ties, India and Canada have recently started exploring new, emerging areas of collaboration. As global challenges evolve, it becomes increasingly important to tap into crucial sectors like defense, strategic relations, energy, climate tech, investments, and the Indo-Pacific.

### Defense and Strategic Ties

Canada and India's defense and strategic ties have evolved significantly, adapting to the changing geopolitical landscape and shared security interests. The foundation for this cooperation was laid in 1997 with the establishment of the Joint Working Group on Counter-Terrorism. This partnership was further solidified in 2016 through an MoU between India's Defence Research and Development Organisation and the Canadian Commercial Corporation, focusing on military technology, infrastructure, and training. The renewal of this agreement in 2021 underscored its ongoing relevance. The relationship reached a new milestone in 2018 when it signed a Framework for Cooperation on Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism.[36] Canada's participation in the 2021 QUAD joint naval exercise 'Sea Dragon' further demonstrated the practical aspects of this collaboration.[37] In April 2023, a high-level dialogue between the defense ministers of both countries opened new avenues for cooperation, including potential Canadian investments in India's defense sector and integrating Indian companies into Canadian supply chains.[38]

Notably, the defense partnership has shown resilience in diplomatic challenges, and even amidst strained political relations, Canada's participation in the Indo-Pacific Armies Chiefs Conference in New Delhi in September 2023 highlighted both nations' commitment to maintaining strategic ties.[39]

The Indo-Pacific region's growing strategic importance, particularly in light of China's increasing influence, underscores the potential for a stronger India-Canada defense partnership. Both countries recognize the need for collective security efforts and the benefits of a robust military alliance.

The relationship has significant untapped potential. The India-Australia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership could serve as a model, featuring regular consultations, 2+2 dialogues, and collaborative defense technology and strategy alignment efforts.[40] By fostering such deep cooperation, India and Canada could significantly enhance their strategic positions in the Indo-Pacific, contributing to regional stability and security while navigating the complex geopolitical landscape of the 21st century.

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## Energy, Natural Resources (Critical Minerals) and Climate Tech

Energy cooperation between India and Canada has a rich history dating back to the 1950s, when Canada provided India with a research reactor for its nascent nuclear program. This longstanding relationship has evolved into a promising partnership, driven by Canada's abundant mineral resources and India's growing energy demands.

The foundation for modern energy dialogues was laid in 2016 through Ministerial-level discussions. A landmark moment came in 2015 when the Modi and Harper governments brokered a significant uranium supply deal. This agreement, valued at CAD 350 million, promised to deliver 7.1 million pounds of uranium concentrate to India's Department of Atomic Energy, marking a pivotal step in bilateral energy cooperation. [41]

Beyond nuclear energy, the partnership extends to renewable sectors. India is Canada's fourth-largest partner in a two-way FDI for electric vehicles and renewable energy and the third-largest recipient of Canadian investments in renewables, attracting USD 2.445 billion.[42] As India's energy needs continue to grow, Canada is well-positioned to meet these demands with its diverse energy portfolio, including coal, natural gas, uranium, and oil.

Critical minerals form another crucial aspect of this relationship. Canada's Yukon province—rich in lead, zinc, silver, gold, asbestos, iron, and copper—has shown keen interest in supplying these resources to India. The September 2023 visit of Yukon Premier H.E. Ranj Pillai to India underscored this commitment, exploring investment opportunities and mineral acquisition deals.[43]

Climate technology presents another frontier for collaboration. Both nations leverage their memberships in international organizations to develop effective climate solutions. A notable example of this cooperation was

the launch of the Greenhouse Gas Satellite-D in 2016, a Canadian-built microsatellite launched by the Indian Space Research Organisation.[44]

Canada's proactive approach to funding clean technology projects in Asia, such as the Canadian Climate Fund for the Private Sector, aligns well with India's growing clean-tech startup ecosystem. In 2022, a significant USD 68 million loan was extended to IIFL Home Finance Limited to promote affordable green housing for lower-income women in India, exemplifying the potential for collaborative climate initiatives.[45]

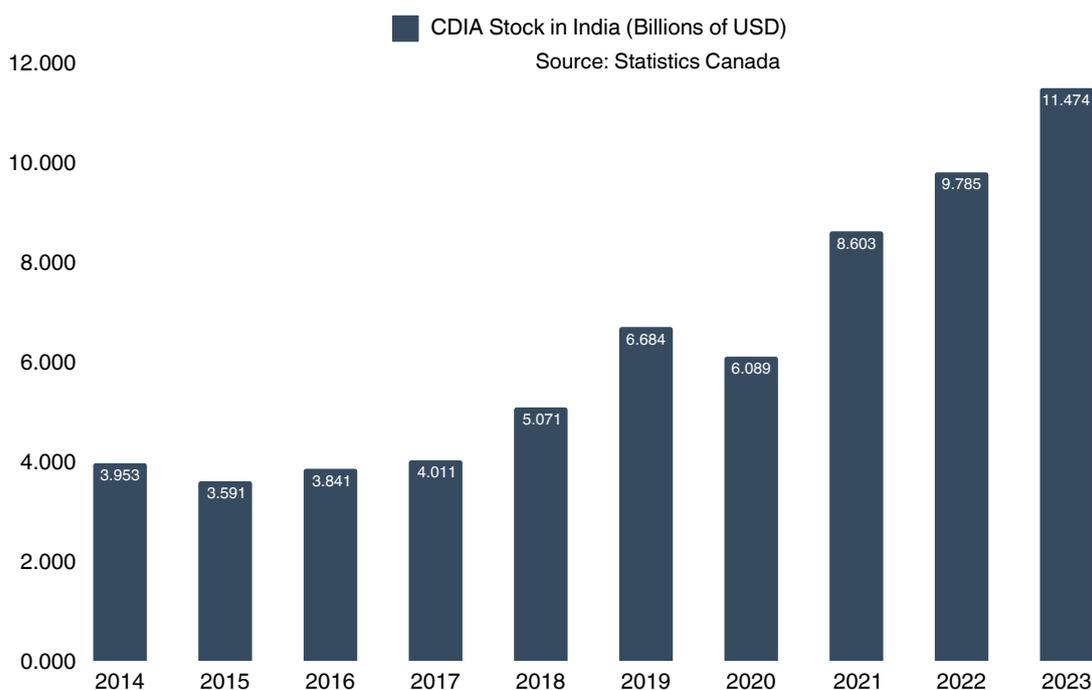
As both countries participate in various international forums, there is ample opportunity to initiate comprehensive dialogues on climate action policies. By harnessing their complementary strengths, India and Canada can forge a robust partnership in climate technology, addressing global environmental challenges while deepening their bilateral ties.

“Canada's proactive approach to funding clean technology projects in Asia, such as the Canadian Climate Fund for the Private Sector, aligns well with India's growing clean-tech startup ecosystem.”

## Investments and Innovation

The evolving landscape of global economic dynamics has positioned India and Canada as potential partners in strategic investments and innovations. Despite diplomatic challenges, the economic ties between the two nations continue to strengthen, particularly in critical sectors that promise mutual benefits.

In the realm of technology and innovation, Canadian investments in India have shown remarkable diversification. Programs like the Canadian International Innovation Program have facilitated cross-border R&D collaborations, exemplified by the partnership between BluWave-ai and Tata Power in India's



renewable energy sector.[46] Canadian institutions like Caisse de dépôt et placement du Québec (CDPQ), Brookfield Asset Management, and Fairfax Financial Holdings have made significant investments across various Indian sectors, including banking, energy, telecom, logistics, and infrastructure.[47]

Canadian pension funds have emerged as substantial investors in the Indian market. The Canada Pension Plan Investment Board (CPPIB) invested over USD 838 million in the first quarter of FY 2024-2025, spanning renewable energy, private equity, and infrastructure.[48] In March 2024, CPPIB and the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan Board invested USD 438.3 million in India's National Highway Infrastructure Trust.[49] These long-term investments have shown resilience against short-term political tensions, underscoring the economic confidence in India's growth story.

The agri-food sector, a priority in Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy, has seen significant investments at sub-national levels in India. Companies like McCain Foods and AG Growth International have invested substantially in Gujarat and Karnataka. However, high tariffs on Canadian agricultural products in India highlight the need for comprehensive trade agreements to fully harness this sector's potential.[50]

Space collaboration represents another promising area of cooperation. Building on MoUs signed in 1996 and 2003, recent developments include ISRO's use of Canadian space infrastructure for nanosatellite launches[51] and a collaboration agreement between Bharat Electronics (India) and Reliasat Inc. (Canada) in September 2024.[52] Canada's contribution to India's first astronomy satellite further exemplifies the depth of this technological partnership.[53]

“Space collaboration is another promising area of cooperation. Building on MoUs signed in 1996 and 2003, recent developments include ISRO's use of Canadian space infrastructure for nanosatellite launches and an agreement between Bharat Electronics (India) and Reliasat Inc. (Canada) in September 2024.”

Despite diplomatic tensions, the continued growth of Canadian investments in India's burgeoning sectors—including startups, energy, space, technology, and infrastructure—underscores the robust economic ties between the two nations. While these investments have shown resilience, the full potential of this partnership still needs to be explored. Developing comprehensive trade deals and exclusive agreements could significantly enhance these collaborations.

## Indo-Pacific

India and Canada share a complementary vision for the Indo-Pacific region that offers significant potential for cooperation. Both nations recognize this region's strategic and economic importance, with their respective Indo-Pacific strategies revealing striking complementarities that could form the basis of a robust partnership.

At the heart of both countries' approaches is a commitment to promoting economic growth and prosperity in the region. Canada's 2022 Indo-Pacific Strategy emphasizes expanding trade and investment and strengthening supply chain resilience.[54] This aligns closely with India's ambitions to deepen its economic engagement with Indo-Pacific partners. The synergy is particularly evident in sectors such as agriculture, clean technology, and critical minerals, where Canadian expertise meets India's growing demand and market potential.

The shared emphasis on supply chain resilience presents another avenue for collaboration. Canada's interest in aligning with initiatives like the Australia-Japan-India Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (SCRI) offers a clear pathway for cooperation with India, potentially enhancing economic security for both nations. [55]

Beyond economic considerations, both nations are committed to ensuring peace, security, and stability in the Indo-Pacific. While existing frameworks for defense cooperation exist, there is ample room to deepen practical collaboration through joint military exercises (e.g., both Canada and India were part of the Milan exercises in 2024), intelligence sharing, and co-development of defense technologies.[56]

Furthermore, as democracies, India and Canada emphasize the importance of promoting democratic values and institutions in the region. Their commitment to pluralism and human rights provides a strong foundation for cooperation in governance and civil society initiatives.

By leveraging their complementary strengths and shared objectives, India and Canada have the potential to forge a powerful partnership in the Indo-Pacific. Such collaboration would benefit both nations and contribute significantly to regional stability, economic growth, and the promotion of shared democratic values. As key regional middle powers, their cooperation could be vital in shaping a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific, setting a new benchmark for international collaboration in this crucial global arena.

India and Canada can explore cooperation in maritime security, infrastructure development, and supply chain resilience—particularly in critical minerals and clean energy. Collaborating on climate initiatives like green hydrogen and sustainable maritime practices could further strengthen their regional influence. These targeted efforts would enhance stability, economic security, and long-term collaboration in the Indo-Pacific.



## Conclusion and Recommendations

Despite its challenges, the India-Canada relationship holds immense potential for mutual benefit and regional impact. The relationship is shaped by a complex history, increasing economic interdependence amid geopolitical uncertainties, and shared strategic interests, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region. While recent diplomatic tensions have strained political relations, the resilience of economic and people-to-people connections underscores the relationship's fundamental strength.

A multifaceted approach is necessary to revitalize and deepen this crucial partnership. Prioritizing diplomatic reconciliation through establishing a high-level bilateral task force is essential to addressing and resolving current political tensions, focusing on shared security concerns and mutual interests. This task force could serve as a dedicated mechanism for sustained dialogue at ministerial and senior bureaucratic levels, ensuring that diplomatic engagement continues despite political shifts or crises.

Its mandate could include crisis management, conflict resolution, and fostering cooperation in areas of mutual interest, such as security, trade, and diaspora engagement. Regular meetings, working groups on specific issues, and a structured communication channel could help preempt diplomatic standoffs and build a foundation of trust. Additionally, the task force could facilitate track 1.5 or track 2 dialogues, incorporating experts, business leaders, and civil society voices to create a more comprehensive and resilient engagement framework. Simultaneously, fast-tracking negotiations for the Early Progress Trade Agreement (EPTA) while continuing work on the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) can unlock significant economic potential.

Enhancing defense cooperation through expanded military-to-military engagements in the maritime domain, joint exercises, and collaboration on defense technology development is vital, particularly in the Indo-Pacific. Developing a long-term energy pact focusing on critical minerals, clean technology, and renewable energy investments can strengthen energy and climate partnerships.

“**Prioritizing diplomatic reconciliation through establishing a high-level bilateral task force is essential to addressing and resolving current political tensions, focusing on shared security concerns and mutual interests.**”

Revitalizing educational exchanges is equally essential. Creating a bilateral education task force to address visa challenges, promote two-way student mobility, and foster academic and research collaborations can reinvigorate this crucial aspect of the relationship. Leveraging the substantial Indian diaspora in Canada through a formal engagement mechanism can facilitate business, cultural, and knowledge exchanges, bridging enhanced ties.

Boosting innovation collaboration through joint research funds and innovation hubs in critical sectors like AI, biotechnology, and space technology can drive technological advancement for both nations. Enhancing sub-national cooperation by encouraging direct partnerships between Canadian provinces and Indian states can help bypass national-level tensions and foster grassroots connections.

Strengthening people-to-people ties through investment in cultural exchange programs, youth leadership initiatives, and professional networking platforms can deepen mutual understanding and cooperation.

Finally, aligning Indo-Pacific strategies through a joint working group can help identify and pursue complementary objectives in this critical region.

As middle powers with shared democratic values, India and Canada have a significant role in shaping a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific. Their collaboration could contribute substantially to regional stability, economic growth, and the promotion of democratic norms. The complementary nature of their Indo-Pacific strategies provides a solid foundation for joint initiatives in this critical region.

However, realizing these opportunities requires concerted effort and political will from both sides. Overcoming the trust deficit stemming from recent controversies is crucial. By focusing on areas of mutual interest and leveraging their respective strengths, India and Canada can mend their bilateral relationship and elevate it to new heights of strategic partnership.

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In conclusion, while the path forward may be challenging, the potential rewards of a strong India-Canada partnership are substantial. Both nations stand to gain economically, strategically, and culturally from deeper engagement.

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