

Canada-India Relations

—By Wing Commander Dinesh Mathur, VSM (Retd.)

As we know, a number of organisations and reputed institutions utilise group discussion (GD) as an effective technique to select candidates for managerial jobs or screen candidates for admission to many sought-after courses. While taking part in a competitive group discussion, a candidate is required to possess the necessary skills for a focused interaction. A candidate may probably already have some information about the subject. However, he/she must gather as much up-to-date information on the topic as possible before participating in a competitive GD. A list of sources of information about a topic would include the Internet, television programmes, books, newspapers, journals or magazines. A candidate should read as many contrasting interpretations and viewpoints as possible on controversial topics. Taking notes of the most important ideas and facts is highly recommended as a part of essential preparation for a good performance.

When a group of 10 candidates was called to participate in a GD as a part of the selection process to screen candidates for admission to an MBA course, the candidates opted for this topic. On arrival, they were allotted Identification Numbers and asked to address each other by these numbers, not names. This was done to prevent any bias which may crop up due to a candidate's domicile, religion, caste, community, etc. Three assessors were to observe this GD, and they gave a detailed briefing and asked candidates to maintain discipline; only one person should speak at a time. The candidates were given two minutes to prepare and arrange their thoughts and then asked to finish this GD in 25-30 minutes.

After that, the group discussion proceeded in the following manner:

Candidate No. 8 : Good morning, friends. I am sure you all are eager to express your ideas on this currently hot international topic, which is now being discussed due to some sudden unpleasant developments. As we know, India and Canada have longstanding bilateral relations built upon shared opinions and beliefs. Most significantly, Canada is home to a large number of people of Indian origin—about 1.3 million. Both countries have deep political and cultural relations, which have been cemented over the years



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by agreements, official dialogues and memoranda of understanding. However, recently, on June 18, 2023, a Sikh separatist, Hardeep Singh Nijjar, was shot dead by unidentified gunmen outside a Sikh gurudwara in a Vancouver suburb. This person was designated as a "terrorist" by India. Later, Canadian Prime Minister Mr. Justin Trudeau, while speaking in his Parliament, alleged that Indian agents were involved in Hardeep Singh Nijjar's murder. This was vehemently denied by Indian authorities. This sudden development has spiked tensions between India and Canada. We need to discuss the present state of Canada-India relations and the future of this relationship. Please go ahead and express your ideas now.

Candidate No. 9 : I think No. 8 has adequately introduced the topic.

Candidate No. 7 : Friends, I feel that to understand various developments in Canada-India relations over the last so many years, we should discuss this topic chronologically. This approach will give us an idea of the ups and downs in this relationship. Is it fine with all of you?

Candidate No. 5 : Yes, I think this is the right approach to deal with this topic.

Candidate No. 6 : I think if we start talking in detail about Canada-India relations from the time India became independent, that would suffice. But, just to briefly mention the pre-Independence period, well before India became

independent, Queen Victoria proclaimed that throughout the Empire, the people of India would enjoy equal privileges with white people without any discrimination. Since both Canada and India were under British Crown rule, quite a few ex-army men from the British Indian Army migrated to Canada to settle there. However, after independence, Canada-India relations became closer due to personal ties which developed between Indian Prime Minister Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru and Canadian Prime Ministers. At that time, India and Canada expressed similar views on the Korean War and the Suez Crisis, etc., in the forums of the UN and the Commonwealth, strengthening their relations further.

Candidate No. 3 : Quite right. Canada's aid programme to India commenced in 1951 and increased substantially in the subsequent period. During this programme, Canada provided food aid, project financing and technical assistance to India. In fact, in the past fifty years or so, India has been one of the largest recipients of Canadian bilateral aid, amounting to about 3.8 billion Canadian dollars. In the 1960s also, Canada rendered help to India through the Colombo Plan, etc.

Candidate No. 1 : So, it appears India had quite good bilateral relations with Canada to start with after India became independent.

Candidate No. 8 : But, unfortunately, there was a deterioration in their relationship when India conducted the nuclear test in May 1974. After this test, the Canadian government severed bilateral nuclear cooperation with both India and Pakistan. This was done on the plea that the fissionable material used to construct India's first nuclear weapon had been synthesised with the Canadian-supplied research reactor. Subsequently, Canada also resolved to restrict their nuclear cooperation with only those nations which had signed the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons Treaty (NPT) and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT). We all know India had refused to sign the NPT earlier. At this point in time, the Canada-India nuclear collaboration ended, and this did adversely impact Canada-India relations.

Candidate No. 6 : I would like to add that, fortunately, this situation did not last long. In 2010, consequent to the

signing of the Nuclear Cooperation Agreement (NCA) between the two countries, a new era of engagement commenced. Later, in 2015, a follow-on agreement was signed to supply 3000 metric tons of Uranium concentrate to India under a five-year contract. This did somewhat improve Canada-India relations.

Candidate No. 3 : I have read that during those early years of the bilateral relationship, while Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru was the first Indian Prime Minister to address a joint session of the Canadian Parliament in 1949, Indira Gandhi was the second Prime Minister of India to do the same in 1973. Then, after the bombing by Sikh terrorists of an Air India Flight in 1985, both countries continued to maintain a bilateral dialogue on anti-terrorism. Annual regular meetings of the Canada-India Working Group on Counter-Terrorism were also held.

Candidate No. 2 : So, we assume during this period, both nations maintained normal bilateral relations.

Candidate No. 8 : You are right. But, in the 1990s, when India initiated economic reforms, the chances of improving the Canada-India relationship grew significantly. India's enormous economic liberalisation attracted Canadian businessmen. As a result, in 1996, the then Canadian Prime Minister, Mr. Joseph Chrétien, with a delegation of about 300 business leaders, visited India. Later, in the immediate subsequent period, External Affairs Ministers of both countries exchanged visits. During the Canadian Foreign Minister's visit to India, the office of the Canadian High Commission in Chandigarh was also opened, which was an indication of improving relations between the two countries.

Candidate No. 6 : I would like to add that during this period, the Canada-India Working Group on Counter-Terrorism was also established, bringing several government departments and agencies of both countries together. During this period, while the Canadian Prime Minister visited India, the Indian Prime Minister also visited Canada for the G-20 Summit in Toronto. With all these developments, the relations between the two countries improved considerably in the subsequent period.

Candidate No. 3 : Yes, you are absolutely right. In fact, 2012 was observed as the "Year of India in Canada", which was a joint initiative of both governments. During that year, the Indo-Canada Chamber of Commerce co-hosted with the Government of India the regional Pravasi Bhartiya Divas, a diaspora conference. This hugely successful conference hosted over 1000

delegates from India and Canada's governmental, business, scientific and medical sectors. This event was further followed by the International Indian Film Academy Awards held in Toronto.

Candidate No. 10 : So, things looked pretty good during this point in time.

Candidate No. 4 : Quite right. In the same sequence of events, Canadian Prime Minister Mr. Justin Trudeau came on a State Visit to India in 2018 and spent a week in India. However, during this visit, some commentators raised questions with regard to Canadian tolerance for Sikh separatists who were operating in Canada. It was also observed that some Khalistani sympathisers were invited to attend some events during this visit. However, the Canadian Prime Minister regretted it the next day by saying that such people should have never been invited. Therefore, things looked somewhat settled, at least at that time.

Candidate No. 1 : I would like to add that during long farmer protests in 2020 in Delhi, the Canadian Prime Minister expressed concerns about handling the protest by the Indian Government and declared that Canada supported peaceful protests and the dialogue process. But, at that time, the Indian Government called this an unacceptable interference in India's internal affairs. It may be recalled that a large number of Sikh farmers were also involved in these farm protests.

Candidate No. 7 : Yes, I recall that at the beginning of September 2023, Canada paused talks on a proposed trade treaty with India. This unexpected move occurred three months after both countries said they planned to seal an initial agreement in 2023. The Indian Government was perhaps not expecting such a negative move from the Canadian Government.

Candidate No. 8 : Due to all such developments, relations between Canada and India appeared not as cordial as in the past. When India hosted the G20 Summit in New Delhi in September 2023, the Canadian Prime Minister did come to attend. Still, there was no one-on-one meeting between the two nations' Prime Ministers, and they met only on the sidelines. During this interaction, while the Indian Prime Minister raised concerns about Khalistani protests in Canada, the Canadian Prime Minister talked about the accusations of the Indian Government's involvement in the murder of Hardeep Singh Nijjar in the recent past. As a result, the discussions between the two Prime Ministers were not all that cordial, and not much progress has been reported in the ongoing trade talks.

Candidate No. 6 : Immediately after this development, in the middle of September 2023, Canada postponed a

trade mission to India, which was planned for October. It was also clarified that Canada's decision to halt trade treaty talks and postpone the mission was owing to the Canadian concerns surrounding Hardeep Singh Nijjar's killing and India's alleged involvement in it.

Candidate No. 4 : I think we can take this development as the turning point in the good relations between the two countries.

Candidate No. 3 : Yes, the ties worsened when the Canadian Prime Minister spoke in the House of Commons in Canada on what he stated were "credible allegations of potential link" of the Indian Government's involvement in the killing of Nijjar. You would recall that Hardeep Singh Nijjar was shot dead by two masked gunmen in British Columbia in Canada a few months back on June 18, 2023. India immediately reacted and rejected this charge as "absurd and motivated".

Candidate No. 8 : This was followed by a deterioration in diplomatic relations between the two countries when each side expelled each other's top diplomats. Thereupon, India warned its citizens in Canada that they should exercise utmost caution due to growing anti-India activities. India also suspended visa applications from Canadians until further notice. India accused Canada of being a safe haven for terrorists, extremists and organised crimes. In retaliation, Canada also put India into the high-risk country category due to anti-Canada protests in India, anti-Canadian sentiments, and the high risk of terrorism in India.

Candidate No. 6 : Friends, things looked quite worrisome when some leaders of the Khalistani movement threatened Indo-Canadian Hindus and advised them to leave Canada. However, such threats were later condemned by Canadian officials. Canada also asserted that some of the intelligence with regard to Nijjar's killing came from the US intelligence agencies. Meanwhile, the Indian Government asked its intelligence agencies to identify all Khalistanis in Canada, the US, England and Australia, and cancel their Overseas Citizenship of India to prevent them from entering India, in addition to confiscating their assets in India.

Candidate No. 3 : Let me add that India also raised concerns over reported incidents of threats to Indian diplomats and attacks on Indian consulates. India also highlighted that the Indian government has provided information to the Canadian Government about organised crime leadership, which operates in Canada, in addition to a number of extradition requests. With regard to Canadian allegations, India

conveyed that it would initiate requisite action if Canada provided particular information in connection with Nijjar's killing.

Candidate No. 7 : This was quite a reasonable response from the Indian side. Am I right?

Candidate No. 8 : Friends, we know Canada's Khalistan connection is not new, and Canada's recent allegations have not yet been supported by evidence. The reality is extremist Sikhs in Canada have come to assert disproportionate influence over the Canadian political system because they are well-organised, control important Gurudwara finances, and can mobilise support for their favoured candidates. This seems to be the reason why Khalistanis in Canada have been given a long rope for quite some time now.

Candidate No. 4 : During this period, India also asked Canada to downsize its diplomatic presence in India and conveyed that there should be parity in the number of diplomats in both countries. Later, India expelled 41 Canadian diplomats, and both Canada and America expressed their displeasure on this Indian move and called it a violation of the Vienna Convention. Meanwhile, the Canadian Prime Minister continued to escalate the Khalistan issue by discussing this matter with other countries to pressure India to facilitate its investigation into Nijjar's killing.

Candidate No. 1 : Keeping in view some not-so-pleasant incidents in Canada in the recent past, India has pointed out that it is necessary to call out things like violence, threats and intimidation against Indian diplomats and missions in Canada. India has also conveyed to Canada that relations between the two countries cannot become normal under these circumstances.

Candidate No. 7 : In view of the close relations between Canada and America, and India and America, it would be pertinent to talk about how the US has reacted to the present tense relations between India and Canada.

Candidate No. 6 : Yes, initially, America did ask India to cooperate with Canada in the investigation regarding Nijjar's killing. It was earlier reported that America had provided intelligence to Canada on this matter, which indicated India's alleged involvement. However, subsequently, both the US and Canada expressed a desire to avoid escalating the tensions with India. The matter rests here for the present.

Candidate No. 3 : Interestingly, I feel these developments have put America and its Western allies in a spot. I am saying so because the US cannot brush aside Canadian charges since Canada is a close strategic ally. Still, India is also a strategic partner of the US, which is critical in the Indo-Pacific region, where China's assertiveness is

growing. So, America is trying to balance its stand in the current scenario.

Candidate No. 4 : Friends, we have talked quite adequately about the political relations between Canada and India. I think there is also a need to briefly talk about the trade relations between the two nations.

Candidate No. 8 : Yes, Canada and India enjoy a good trade relationship. In fact, since 2004, despite the recession in the late 2000s, trade has grown by about 70%. India celebrated the year 2012 as the Year of India in Canada to further give impetus to business, cultural and political relations. However, it is felt that there is much scope to further improve trade relations between the two countries. Total trade between the two countries has steadily grown during the past five years.

Candidate No. 6 : I can specifically point out that while Canadian imports from India include boilers, mechanical appliances, mineral fuel oils, organic chemicals, pearls, pharmaceutical products, etc., Canadian exports to India include edible vegetables, pearls, fertilisers and quite a few other things. But, presently, the balance of trade between the two nations is in favour of Canada. As earlier mentioned, due to recent developments, trade talks have been put on hold by Canada. That is where we are.

Candidate No. 3 : It may also be noted that in 2022, as many as 1,85,955 Indian students were studying in Canada leading to big monetary gains for Ottawa. The visa restriction by New Delhi on such students has not only resulted in heavy financial losses to Canada but also further deteriorated the bilateral ties.

Candidate No. 1 : Friends, we did not realise that the time allotted to us for this discussion is already over, and we must conclude it now.

Candidate No. 6 : If some friend wants to add something more, he should quickly do it now; otherwise, can I ask No. 3 to conclude if you all agree?

Candidate No. 2 : Yes, No.3, please conclude now.

Candidate No. 3 : You all will agree that we had a very interesting discussion on this current international topic. Friends, as we have highlighted, Canada and India have had cordial relations for quite some time now, which include political, trade and commerce ties. A very large number of Indians stay in Canada, while a good number of tourists regularly visit India. However, in the recent past, consequent to the killing of a Khalistani separatist leader Hardeep Singh Nijjar, the Canadian Prime Minister asserted that the Indian Government was involved in the murder. After that, there was a diplomatic standoff between India and Canada, and both countries expelled diplomatic staff posted in each other's

country and suspended all bilateral engagements. Canada claimed their allegation was based on the intelligence report that America and other allies provided. However, despite India asking to share such reports to initiate further action, Canada has not yet provided details of these intelligence reports. Thus, the present impasse continues. Recently, both America and Canada have indicated that they do not wish to escalate matters, and India should cooperate in investigating Nijjar's killing. Meanwhile, India has pointed out the hate campaign in Canada against Indians and the fact that Canada has been sheltering Khalistani separatists for quite some time now. It is hoped that with diplomatic discussions and intervention by the US and other world leaders, things will improve in the near future.

Thanks. Have a good day.

Critical Analysis of Candidates' Performance

Good : 3, 6 and 8

These candidates have made adequate contributions towards the completion of this group discussion. While No. 8 initiated, No. 3 concluded this GD. It is recommended that a candidate having good knowledge of the topic should start the discussion. While these candidates spoke, they also gave opportunities to others to contribute. Others did not dispute the information and data put forward by these candidates. By looking at their performance, it became apparent these candidates had prepared this topic quite well, and, therefore, they could speak confidently and convincingly. In view of all these facts, their performance has been adjudged as 'Good'.

Average : 1, 4 and 7

These candidates also took an interest and helped in taking this discussion forward. They also guided this GD at crucial stages to cover some important aspects of this current topic. However, despite doing so, it became obvious that they did not possess adequate data and information to put forward. This was so since they did not prepare the topic in the desired manner, though they had some idea of this subject matter. Therefore, their contribution remained limited only. It is felt that they had the potential to perform much better but lacked focused preparation. Because of all these facts, their effort is assessed as 'Average'.

Below the Average: 2, 5, 9 and 10

These candidates did not contribute towards this group discussion in the desired manner. It appeared they had decided to come for this significant interaction without making any effort to prepare. It was observed that they were not contributing by bringing new facts or information on this topic. They were either appreciating or prompting others to speak, which is considered highly inadequate in a competitive group discussion like the present one. Due to a lack of information and data, they did not have the desired self-confidence to speak. Owing to all these reasons, their performance has been assessed as 'Below Average'.

CSR