

Canada

Joe Biden raised Canadian Sikh's death with India's Narendra Modi at G20

White House says targeting dissidents in other countries 'absolutely unacceptable'



US president Joe Biden, left, was among western leaders that discussed the death of a Canadian citizen with India's prime minister Narendra Modi, right, at the G20 summit in New Delhi this month © Kenny Holston/Pool/AFP/Getty Images

Demetri Sevastopulo in Washington, **Henry Foy** in Brussels and **Jaren Kerr** in New York 11 HOURS AGO

Joe Biden and other western leaders expressed concern to Narendra Modi about Canadian claims that New Delhi was involved in the murder of a Sikh separatist in Vancouver when they met the Indian prime minister at the G20 summit this month.

Three people familiar with the discussions at the summit said several members of the Five Eyes — an intelligence-sharing network that includes the US, UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand — raised the killing of Hardeep Singh Nijjar with Modi. One said Biden felt it was important to address the issue directly with his Indian counterpart.

The White House declined to comment on whether Biden had discussed the issue with Modi at the G20.

The leaders intervened at the G20 summit after Canada urged its allies to raise the case directly with Modi, said two people familiar with the situation, who added Ottawa asked them to mention the claims in private.

In a stunning move on Monday, Justin Trudeau, Canada's prime minister, said there were "[credible allegations](#)" that Indian government "agents" were behind the murder of Nijjar, who was killed in Surrey, a suburb of Vancouver, in June.

The explosive claim, which New Delhi has dismissed as “absurd”, immediately cratered Canada-India relations. India on Thursday [stopped issuing visas](#) to Canadian citizens and ordered Ottawa to reduce its diplomatic presence in the country. Earlier on Thursday, the Canadian foreign ministry said it was adjusting its staff levels at missions in India over concerns about the safety of its diplomats.

The crisis has sparked questions about how Canada’s allies have handled the case, particularly given the intense efforts the Biden administration has made to enhance relations with India in an effort to create a counterweight to China. The US president hosted Modi for a high-profile state visit over the summer.

US officials have strenuously denied that Washington was quiet on the issue to avoid antagonising India. The White House said it was “deeply concerned” after Trudeau made the claims. One person familiar with the thinking inside the administration said Washington concluded it would have been inappropriate to weigh in publicly before the announcement because of possible legal implications for the Canadian investigation.

US national security adviser Jake Sullivan on Thursday dismissed suggestions that Washington’s desire to bolster ties with New Delhi would constrain its ability to voice concerns about the allegations. He said the administration took the allegations “seriously” and would defend US principles regardless of the country involved. He said the US was consulting closely with Canada.

“We are in constant contact with our Canadian counterparts,” said Sullivan, adding that the US had also been “in touch” with India’s government.

Adrienne Watson, the White House National Security Council spokesperson, said “targeting dissidents in other countries is absolutely unacceptable and we will keep taking steps to push back on this practice”.

Speaking to reporters in New York on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly on Wednesday, Australia’s foreign minister Penny Wong said Canberra had “raised our concerns” with New Delhi without giving details.

Canada’s public broadcaster on Thursday reported, citing federal government sources, that intelligence obtained by the Canadian government relating to Nijjar’s killing included communications involving Indian officials and Indian diplomats that were based in Canada.

Canada’s public safety ministry declined to comment.

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