

Aftermath of an Assassination: Inside the India-Canada Crisis

How the killing of a Sikh activist exploded into a stunning confrontation—and turned into a test for a rising superpower.

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An image of Hardeep Singh Nijjar during a June protest over his killing.

Photographer: Ethan Cairns/The Canadian Press/AP

Charanjit Singh Sujjon was playing soccer when he heard the gunshots. At first Sujjon, 50, thought someone was setting off firecrackers next to

Kabaddi Park, a green space in Surrey, British Columbia, just outside Vancouver. It was June 18—Father’s Day—and the park was busy into the evening, mostly with members of Surrey’s huge South Asian community. Then Sujjon saw two men running away from the Guru Nanak Sikh Gurdwara, a nearby Sikh temple. Sujjon saw they wore black hooded sweaters despite the late-spring heat and had their hands in their front pockets, as though they were concealing something. Both had covered their faces with masks or bandannas and kept looking back as they ran.

Sujjon, who works as a caretaker for the gurdwara, started running toward the back of its parking lot with another man, Bhupinderjit Sidhu. They saw a dark gray Dodge pickup truck stopped near the exit. The driver’s side window had been blown out, and shell casings littered the pavement. Inside was the temple’s president, a prominent Sikh political activist named Hardeep Singh Nijjar. Slumped toward the passenger seat, Nijjar, 45, had visible wounds on his face, neck, arm and chest. His flowing black hair—observant Sikhs don’t cut it—had unwound from under his turban. Sidhu opened the door and began shaking Nijjar by the shoulders. “Are you OK, brother?” Sujjon cried. But by then, it was clear that Nijjar was dead.

The Guru Nanak Sikh Gurdwara in Surrey. Photographer: Darryl Dyck/The Canadian Press/AP

Officers from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) arrived along with an ambulance shortly afterward. They cleared away the crowd that had gathered outside the gurdwara, cordoning off the area with yellow tape. And they began an investigation that would, by late September, explode into global headlines. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has [accused Indian agents of involvement](#) in killing Nijjar—a Canadian citizen who advocated for the creation of “Khalistan,” an independent