



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 092

PUBLIC PART ONLY - PARTIE PUBLIQUE SEULEMENT

Monday, February 5, 2024



Chair: Mr. Ali Ehsassi

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

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• (1555)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Ali Ehsassi (Willowdale, Lib.)): I'd like to call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 92 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development. Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the Standing Orders. Therefore, members are attending in person in the room as well as through the Zoom application.

I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of the members and witnesses.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. You may speak in the official language of your choice. Interpretation services are available. Although this room is equipped with a powerful audio system, feedback events can occur. These can be extremely harmful to interpreters and cause serious injuries. The most common cause of sound feedback is an earpiece worn too close to a microphone.

I remind you that all comments should be made through the chair. With regard to a speaking list, the committee clerk and I will do our best to maintain a consolidated order of speaking for all members, whether they are participating virtually or in person.

Today we have our briefing on diplomatic relations between India and Canada.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee will proceed to the briefing on diplomatic relations between these two countries, an issue that is obviously of great concern to very many Canadians.

I'd like to welcome our witnesses for today. From the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development, we are grateful to have two senior officials. We have Mr. Weldon Epp, who is assistant deputy minister for the Indo-Pacific region. We also have Ms. Marie-Louise Hannan, who is the director general for the South Asia bureau.

Welcome very much. We're grateful that you made the time to appear before us.

Please do bear in mind that when you only have 20 or 30 seconds remaining, whether it's in your opening remarks or when you're responding to questions by the members, I will hold this up. That means to please wrap it up as soon as possible.

With all that explained, we will start with Mr. Epp.

Mr. Epp, you have five minutes for your opening remarks. Thank you.

Mr. Weldon Epp (Assistant Deputy Minister, Indo-Pacific, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Good afternoon.

Mr. Chair, members of the committee, I want to thank you for the opportunity this afternoon to discuss Canada-India relations with the committee. We do so today against the backdrop of undeniably significant challenges, but also in the context of our ongoing shared interests in this very important relationship.

As with any diplomatic relationship, it's important to view all of this with some historical context. Over the last 75 years, Canada and India have had both times of agreement and close co-operation, as well as times of distance and disagreement. Throughout, however, our ties have persisted, and our core co-operation continued to the benefit of both of our countries.

In recent years, the importance of this relationship has grown. Put simply, India is one of the world's largest economies, its largest democracy and a key player in the Indo-Pacific and beyond. Our people-to-people ties are unique, have a long history and are very expansive.

India is a crucial stakeholder to some of the most pressing global problems, whether climate change or global health and beyond. It's in this context that Canada is managing its bilateral relationship with India following the credible allegations relating to Mr. Hardeep Singh Nijjar's murder.

Allow me to underscore that the investigation into Mr. Nijjar's murder is ongoing, and it's therefore important to remember that the concerns Canada has raised with India are allegations. The police have not yet released evidence. That said, the nature of the allegations—if proven by evidence in a court of law—are sufficiently concerning, and by definition, such a grievous breach of Canadian sovereignty that they warranted immediate diplomacy. Simply put, business as usual was not an option.

From the outset, Minister Joly provided clear direction that Canada's approach to the allegations should be guided by three principles: seeking the truth and accountability, protecting Canadians and defending Canada's sovereignty. This effort requires coordination among different Canadian government departments as well as respect for independent lines of work by Canadian law enforcement and intelligence services. Within this, Global Affairs Canada has two major roles.

First, we have engaged with the Government of India about the troubling allegations. In September, when the Prime Minister first addressed this issue, his public comments were based on credible information. Since then, an unsealed U.S. indictment has shed further light on Canada's concerns. The Indian government has committed to examining the American claims, based on evidence in this indictment, through an independent high-level committee. This is a positive development. Moreover, it's reasonable to assume that, when the RCMP investigation reaches a comparable inflection point here in Canada, more information will be available for the Indian government and its high-level committee to consider.

GAC's second role has been to manage our broader bilateral cooperation in areas of shared importance. That means supporting the movement of people between our countries, making sure that businesses can do business and working together on critical global issues at tables like the G20, a forum that Prime Minister Trudeau attended in person in September and virtually in November.

Canada and India also continue to co-operate on security and anti-terrorism issues. This is critical to both of our countries.

India has raised particular concerns around Canada-based Khalistani violent extremism. We have made our position clear: Canada supports the unity and territorial integrity of India. While Canadians are free to peacefully express their views, if crimes are committed in Canada, we expect law enforcement to act regardless of who the perpetrator is.

Finally, in parallel to all of this, there have been intense and ongoing efforts to deal with the unprecedented expulsion of 41 Canadian diplomats and their 41 family members from India, while still working to ensure services are provided to Canadians and Indians throughout our mission network in India.

In sum, since August, our diplomatic engagement with India in managing this issue has been active. As Minister Joly has said, we're at a moment in time in a relationship that spans decades. We've seen challenging times before. Ultimately, it is in all of our interests to get to the bottom of the allegations. By maintaining open dialogue and coordination with India, GAC will continue working towards an early resolution.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1600)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Epp.

We now go to Ms. Hannan.

You have five minutes for your opening remarks as well.

Ms. Marie-Louise Hannan (Director General, South Asia Bureau, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Thank you, Mr. Chair, but my—

The Chair: Oh, was that for both of you? You have my apologies. Thank you for that.

We first go to MP Epp.

You have five minutes, sir.

Mr. Dave Epp (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for appearing.

Mr. Epp, it feels a bit weird for me to address you that way, but it is accurate and true.

I appreciated your opening comments regarding the importance of the relationship with India. I don't want my questions to be construed as undervaluing that relationship with India.

I'm going to actually start with some foreign interference.

The CSIS briefing to the Minister of Democratic Institutions in a note on February 2023, which Global News published this February 2 basically said that Canada "must do more to protect" its democratic institutions regarding foreign interference.

Specifically, when did the Prime Minister become aware of this issue with India? Secondly, what safeguards have been put in place to deal with these allegations?

Mr. Weldon Epp: Thank you for the question. I'll answer the question in a couple of parts.

Briefly, Global Affairs Canada's role in this is the part that I'll speak to. Obviously, the matter of foreign interference cuts across a number of departments and agencies. It's mainly in the public safety portfolio, but we also have a role to play.

To the question of when the Prime Minister became aware, the information that's the basis for the credible allegations came to light in late summer. It therefore informed, as the Prime Minister himself has noted, discussions that he had in Delhi at the G20. There was always a risk—or a possibility, let's just say—that, for a variety of reasons, that information might become public. Until it was public, it was the priority of the Government of Canada to engage the Indian government, raise these concerns directly with them and, once it became public, respond to them jointly.

With respect to the question around democratic institutions, you'll be aware that Global Affairs Canada plays a partnership role with other departments in addressing dynamic concerns of increased foreign interference. That includes through the lead that we play, including within the G7, on the rapid response mechanism, or RRM.

Of course, Global Affairs Canada also plays a role, participating through deputy ministers, in the SITE task force, with respect to the monitoring of interference during elections themselves.

Thank you.

Mr. Dave Epp: Thank you.

I'm moving on to the shooting that you referenced.

India's high commissioner to Canada stated in a *Globe and Mail* article today that the office had not received a formal request to co-operate with the RCMP probe.

You mentioned the RCMP investigation in your opening comments. Why have they not received an invitation to co-operate?

Mr. Weldon Epp: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm aware of the article and also of the position that the high commissioner articulated, because it's not actually a new position. It's been repeated in a number of interviews.

It is the case that there's an active RCMP investigation under way. I will refer more specific questions to the RCMP directly, but the Indian position has been that, until they receive evidence from a police investigation, they will reserve their right as to how they will respond. Therefore, it's not inaccurate to say that, while that investigation is still under way, the RCMP is not directly engaging the high commissioner.

• (1605)

Mr. Dave Epp: India has been critical of Canada's handling of the extradition treaty that we've had in place since 1987. What evidence did India present, specifically, in the extradition case of Mr. Nijjar?

Would that evidence not have met the proper level for criminal investigation in Canada? Is that why we did not respond to an extradition request prior to the shooting?

Mr. Weldon Epp: Mr. Chair, I will respond to that in general terms.

The general line of questioning is not inaccurate. There has been ongoing co-operation between Canada and India over many years on extradition-related requests. It is also the case that, historically, Canada has extradited individuals to India, so it's also possible that could happen again in the future.

The reality is that in many cases in the extradition requests that come forward—I'm briefed by my colleagues from Justice Canada regularly, and there's a body of ongoing requests right now that are being responded to—the evidentiary threshold in Canadian law is not met.

It's important to understand that the threshold is the same whether the extradition request comes from the United States or India or any other government.

Mr. Dave Epp: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Epp.

We'll now go to MP Chatel, for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sophie Chatel (Pontiac, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll continue along the same lines. I want to expand on my colleague's questions.

In addition to Mr. Nijjar's murder, there have been conspiracy allegations in the United States. There has been suspicious activity in the United Kingdom, including concerns about Mr. Kanda's death.

I would like to know how you compare Canada's response to this Indian interference with the responses of our major economic partners, such as the United States and the United Kingdom.

[*English*]

Mr. Weldon Epp: That's an important question. There has been a lot of commentary to that effect, including by our Indian colleagues.

It's important to note that there are some commonalities between the case that is under way in the United States and that of Mr. Nijjar. There are also some big differences. In the case in the United States, what is under investigation is a conspiracy to murder. In the case of Canada, there has been a murder.

Secondly, it is the case that the U.S. legal system differs in a couple of key ways from our own. The possibility for an early narrative and the disclosure of evidence through an indictment in the U.S. differs quite significantly from the legal process in Canada.

The point at which there would be an inflection point in a Canadian investigation, such that detailed information supporting the investigation can be released to the public or a foreign government, comes at a later stage. There is a kind of sequencing disjuncture. However, what we do know from the U.S. case, due to the indictment, is that there is a clear link being described by the evidence provided to date.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: What about the situation in the United Kingdom?

[*English*]

Mr. Weldon Epp: I don't feel prepared to discuss the details of the allegations in the case of the U.K. Unlike the case in the United States, we don't have an active investigation under way that is in the public domain.

However, it is true that there have been discussions, both between our partners and India but also between our partners—between us, the U.K. and the U.S.—because we are all dealing with some similar impacts of differences between our legal systems, let's just say, and that of India's, when it comes to how to deal with allegations of terrorism and extremism.

There is a common objective to make sure those kinds of activities don't take place in our countries, but it is not the case that our legal systems treat or define those activities the same as is the case in Delhi.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: Thank you.

Briefly, in your opinion, what role does India play in Canada's Indo-Pacific strategy? How is Canada approaching diplomacy?

I would also like you to explain to Canadians the benefits of this strategy for Canadian companies.

• (1610)

[*English*]

Mr. Weldon Epp: Indeed, the Indo-Pacific strategy that the government launched a year ago is a 10-year strategy. To the question, while there are challenges at the moment, as I mentioned in my opening statement, in our bilateral relationship with India, I don't think anyone would disagree with the strategic importance of India, its economic growth and its global impact.

Over the course of a 10-year strategy, we fully anticipate leveraging the tools of that strategy, including our incredible history, our diaspora and our people-to-people ties, and developing further the partnership that both our countries see as being of interest. We hope to get to that curve, strategically, sooner rather than later, but of course our priority for now is to pursue the allegations and get to the bottom, as the Prime Minister has said, of Mr. Nijjar's murder.

Within the broader context, what does the IPS bring to Canadian stakeholders, businesses and universities?

The government has launched a very ambitious whole-of-government, whole-of-society agenda for a region that is driving global growth and driving global innovation. Canadians are reasonably well positioned, but, frankly, need to work together to have an impact in that region. In the first year, you will have seen some significant successes, including launching a strategic partnership with ASEAN and strengthening bilateral relations in northeast Asia. We hope to develop that further in the next year.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We now go to Mr. Bergeron. You have five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Montarville, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the witnesses for joining us today and shedding light on the situation between India and Canada.

I'll refer to the statement made by the Prime Minister last September. In the hours that followed that statement, the Minister of Public Safety, Democratic Institutions and Intergovernmental Affairs told us that the Prime Minister saw fit to make the statement because the news was about to be released in a national media outlet.

I have two questions about this.

Does the minister's statement mean that, had the government not been concerned about a leak to the media, it would have kept this information secret?

Given the importance of India to Canada, why take the risk of souring relations with India, when the news was about to hit the papers the next day anyway?

[*English*]

Mr. Weldon Epp: Mr. Chair, I'm happy to answer the question.

I think the first part of that two-part question is speculative in a way, because we knew the media was aware of this information. It had sought commentary, so we knew that a story was going to be coming into the public domain.

I think the first thing to do is just underscore the unprecedented nature of the story. This was sensational. It was the first time ever on Canadian soil... The moment the government understood that the story was going to go public, as Minister Leblanc has previously described, there were concerns about ensuring that Canadians felt safe, felt secure and felt confident that the government was on top of and aware of the issue and doing what it could to manage the issue.

To answer your question, you can imagine it's rather implausible, knowing the media was about to release the sensational story, that the government would simply choose not to comment. The Prime Minister's decision, as it has been previously described by the Prime Minister and Minister Leblanc, was meant to address a concerned Canadian public and reassure them about what the government's approach would be in addressing this issue and how the government had already been actively involved, including the Prime Minister's raising it personally with Prime Minister Modi at the G20.

I think the Prime Minister has said on the record that the intention was never to provoke India. Certainly, if you look at Canada's engagement with India, including just in the last year in the lead-up to this, you'll see there was an intensification across the board in trying to build a strong relationship.

Thanks.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: One question remains unanswered. Would the government have chosen not to reveal this situation to Canadians if there hadn't been a threat of a leak? I don't suppose that you can answer that question.

You were right to point out that relations between Canada and India have had their ups and downs.

In your experience, have these relations ever hit a low point as serious as the current situation?

This reminds us of a bygone era, the Cold War, when Canadian diplomats were expelled en masse.

Can we compare the low points of relations between Canada and India with the current situation?

• (1615)

[English]

Mr. Weldon Epp: I think I understand that the premise is not.... There's no perfect comparison, but I get the spirit of the question.

It's important to remember that, as I said in my opening, we've had some very challenging periods in our relationship—Air India not the least. That was a tragedy for both Canada and Canadians, and India and Indians. There have been different views, as this committee will be aware, of the handling of investigations after that. That was a challenging period.

I think it's also the case that Canada-India relations recovered from the challenges of India's decision to, effectively, become a nuclear state. These are different situations from the one we're encountering now, both with respect to the allegations being unprecedented but also with respect, as the member of Parliament mentioned, to how the Indian response of kicking 41 diplomats out of Delhi was quite unprecedented.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: You have 10 seconds, Mr. Bergeron.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Briefly, what measures have been taken to compensate for the loss of 41 Canadian diplomats in the field?

[English]

Mr. Weldon Epp: Very quickly, we are managing essential services with a reduced team of 21 in Delhi. We are working across departments, including principally IRCC, which has a huge volume of public services. To date, they're managing to keep up with core services, although service standards and volumes can be expected to bring pressure on that small team in Delhi.

The Chair: Thank you.

We now go to MP McPherson. You have five minutes.

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you all for being here today and answering our questions. It's very important for us to have this information. I really appreciate it.

I'm going to ask some questions about human rights and India's current administration's pretty questionable history on those rights.

More specifically, I'm interested in some more information about the arms that we are currently sending to India. We know that Canada's military export sales to India went from \$6.2 million in 2021 to \$54.8 million in 2022. That's over a 700% increase in sales. Knowing that the current Modi regime is being criticized for cracking down on political opponents, minority groups and women, do you have any concerns about the increase in the sales of military goods?

Mr. Weldon Epp: Canada does have an ongoing dialogue with India, as we do in our diplomacy with most countries on human rights-related issues.

Canada has raised concerns about human rights-related issues with India, principally in the public domain, through our response to India's universal periodic review at the United Nations human rights committee. The last was in 2022. In that, you will see that Canada raised concerns specifically about minority rights. We also raised human rights issues in private. I think in most cases we're most effective when we keep those sorts of conversations frank and through private diplomacy.

To your specific question in terms of the relationship or correlation to arms sales, to be honest, I have not recently reviewed those figures. What I can tell you from experience working on similar files is that out of context it can be, at times, misleading or confusing to look at the annual figures. In that sector, in military procurement, often one sale once in 10 years can, year on year, show a major increase, and the next year it may come down. I haven't looked longitudinally to see whether that two-year comparison means a trend.

• (1620)

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you. That makes sense.

I'm going to take a moment now of my time to read a motion into the record. It's certainly not something we will debate today. It says:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(1)(a) and given the value of military goods and technology exported to India from Canada in 2022 exceeds \$54.8 million, the committee order Global Affairs Canada to produce all documents, briefing notes, memorandums and emails between the department and the Minister of Foreign Affairs' office, the Privy Council Office and the Prime Minister's Office related to the granting of any arms export permits to India between 2021 and 2024, within 30 days of the adoption of this motion; and that these documents be provided to the committee without redactions, except to protect Cabinet confidences.

I'll send that around in both languages so everyone has that.

My next question follows, again, some of the concerns that we have with regard to human rights and India's National Investigation Agency. Knowing that the NIA has released hit lists of Sikhs living in other countries, including Canada, is there any concern about sharing information between the RCMP and the NIA?

Mr. Weldon Epp: I think that the conditions under which Canada will share information relating to Canadian citizens or nationals living in Canada will always be compliant with Canadian legal standards. That's the premise under which we share information for investigations in foreign countries, not least for extradition requests.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Knowing that this particular relationship with the NIA is very fraught, because of the current context and because we have seen that they have identified Canadians on hit lists, that would obviously make that a very sensitive area, and you would want to be very cautious on what we release with regard to information.

Mr. Weldon Epp: Indeed, and I have full confidence that the RCMP is alive to that and following Canadian legal standards in terms of how to respond to those concerns.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you. I think I'm done.

The Chair: Yes, that's correct.

We'll go to the second round, and we start off with MP Hoback.

You have four minutes.

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Four minutes doesn't seem like enough time.

I'll have to be very quick, Mr. Epp.

Is this the normal process we follow in a situation like this? Is it normal protocol in terms of how we handled the information from what we'd gathered through the investigation to relaying that information then to India in this case? If we had another country involved in something similar, would we do it the same way?

Mr. Weldon Epp: Can I just clarify? You're referring to the police investigation and the way—

Mr. Randy Hoback: That's correct. How it's handled.

Mr. Weldon Epp: Understanding that I'm a diplomat and not a policeman or investigator—

Mr. Randy Hoback: What's your process for notifying the other country?

Mr. Weldon Epp: The notification for any information required would come at the point in an investigation where the police and prosecution were ready, presumably, to lay charges. For the police, their approach to engaging foreign governments would be, in this case, no different from any other.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Is it normal—again, in a situation like this—that the Prime Minister make the announcement, or should the police make the announcement in regard to the accusations because there haven't been charges laid from what I understand?

Mr. Weldon Epp: I think it's important to be precise about wording. I don't believe the Prime Minister levelled accusations. My recollection is that the Prime Minister spoke in the House of Commons—

Mr. Randy Hoback: In the House of Commons, he made it very....

Mr. Weldon Epp:—about allegations. He referred to allegations of a serious nature based on information available, but he also referred to the importance of allowing a police inquiry to continue and have the space to do what it does.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Again—I'm sorry—I'm just short for time so I have to be fast here.

Why would the Prime Minister do that in the House of Commons in this scenario? Why wouldn't the RCMP do it? Who made the decision that we were going to talk about it in the House of Commons, because we talked about the political sensitivity regarding this?

We still didn't have the information out of the U.S. at this point in time, so why was the decision made to do it through the House of Commons and not through a press release or a media conference with the RCMP?

Mr. Weldon Epp: My understanding is that when the RCMP's investigation has reached the stage at which it would proceed through a potential prosecution, there would be a charge sheet released and there would be an announcement—

• (1625)

Mr. Randy Hoback: Okay, but that hasn't been done yet.

Mr. Weldon Epp: That hasn't been done yet because that investigation's still alive.

In the middle of that investigation, or at least at an earlier point in September, it was the case that the government became aware that the media was about to release information regarding this case, so the government prepared to respond and discuss those matters in public.

Mr. Randy Hoback: That happens in all sorts of investigations, where there are rumours that media is going to break a story, but if the RCMP in this case isn't ready to lay charges, why would the Prime Minister feel the need or the pressure to go in the House of Commons and do that? Why wouldn't he just let the RCMP say, "No comment. We have nothing to add at this point in time." Why would he allow the story to pick up pace?

When we look at the political damage of his politicizing it in the House of Commons, why would we do that? Why wouldn't we just let it stay at a low level until we had the charges actually being laid? That's a different story. You're laying charges now. That's pretty serious.

However, the Prime Minister making comments in the House of Commons, that's very serious. Would that maybe justify why India reacted the way it did?

Mr. Weldon Epp: I'm not going to be here to justify how India reacted. I think I spoke earlier and I'll repeat again that the allegations were sensational and unprecedented, and since Mr. Nijjar's murder earlier in summer, it is the case that this community of Canadians had already been very concerned about their security. There were a lot of rumours going on, so at the point at which this information was going to become public, the government chose to speak to it.

Mr. Randy Hoback: I assure you that I don't disagree with you, but the Prime Minister didn't provide—

The Chair: Mr. Hoback, I'm afraid your time is over.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Thank you, sir.

The Chair: We now go to MP Zuberi.

You have four minutes.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

As you mentioned, the people-to-people ties between India and Canada are very important. We have a lot of Canadians of Indian heritage who still have important ties to India, and our relationship is critically important.

It was mentioned in November 2023 by India's high commissioner to Canada, High Commissioner Sanjay Kumar Verma, that there have been a lot of conversations between India and Canada and that there's been a lot of dialogue. He says, "I feel that most of it is very constructive."

How would you characterize the tone of things today, given what has transpired in the last months?

Mr. Weldon Epp: There's no question that these events, the allegations and how governments have responded to them, have brought on a very challenging period in Canada-India relations, but it's also the case, as my colleague Mr. Verma, the high commissioner for India, has described it, that there continues to be constructive engagement on both sides.

I can speak further to that with respect to government engagement, which remains intensive, but I would also point out that across society, engagement also remains robust. We ask. We seek perspectives. We understand from the business community that trade and investment relations continue to be strong. We have not seen any impediment to that. There continue to be many other channels of people-to-people co-operation.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: With respect to visas, which are important for people to visit their families and also to come to Canada, has there been an impact with respect to the issuance of visas from Canada to India or India to Canada for people who want to see each other or study in Canada?

Mr. Weldon Epp: You'll recall that in the fall there was a temporary pause on the side of the Indian government in terms of issuance of some categories of visas to Canadians. That has largely, although not entirely, been restored, but the visa services for the vast majority of visa categories used by Canadians have been restored.

With respect to Canadian visa services to Indian nationals, there's no question that the expulsion of two-thirds of our diplomats from our high commission in India has had an operational impact. That said, both GAC and IRCC have worked very hard together to ensure that the remaining core team of IRCC colleagues, together with their local staff, are able to address as best as possible the volume of visas.

I agree that it's in our interest and, I believe, in the interest of our Indian colleagues to continue to support robust family, student, immigration, business and people-to-people flows.

Thank you.

● (1630)

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: The conversation around foreign interference has been quite robust. We saw the concerns around Mr. Nijjar's death. That will be going to court. There have also been reports around interference in other areas, including in the Conservative leadership race of 2022 and a nomination in the Conservative Party of March 2023.

Have those allegations created any strain at all in the relationship? Have they been raised?

Mr. Weldon Epp: I think members of the committee will be aware that the public inquiry into foreign interference has scoped India into its discussions. There's no question that both the work of that inquiry and the resulting public discussion around these issues will do two things. First, it will shed light on the nature of those concerns and how the government has been or could be addressing them. I think it will also inevitably bring a degree of, let's be honest, additional risk to diplomatic relations.

I think that's just part of Canada doing its thing—addressing a very important public issue and taking the time to do it. We speak to our Indian colleagues as well as others to explain to them the parliamentary process that led to that commission of inquiry and to ensure that they understand what it is and what it isn't.

Thank you.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'll now go to Mr. Bergeron for two minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll continue with my last question about the measures taken to try to remain effective despite the expulsion of 41 Canadian diplomats and their family members.

For example, have you hired more local staff?

[English]

Mr. Weldon Epp: Let me answer that in a couple of ways. There are two moving parts, if I might. There's the High Commission of Canada in Delhi. In that case, it was the Government of India's decision to effect a unilateral mass expulsion of 41 diplomats. That has meant our team is smaller with respect to Canadians accredited to India. Our local staff still continue to work and are managing to provide services across business lines to Canadians.

With respect to consulates general, those consulates provide some services remotely at this time, but they are not currently providing in-person services. Those in-person services have been brought to and are delivered by our high commission out of Delhi. There are some challenges with respect to the delivery of services, but with respect to supporting companies in investing and trading, for example, we continue to have both Canadian and local staff who are in the consulates providing those services to Canadian companies. Local staff are still in those cities. Their managers are either in Delhi or working from the region to support those services remotely or, as delegations come through, in person.

Thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Have you hired more local staff?

[English]

Mr. Weldon Epp: I'm sorry. Let me just make sure that I get the nuance. I'm afraid I might have missed...

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Have you hired more local staff?

[English]

Mr. Weldon Epp: No, we have not. I'm sorry to be difficult in getting to the direct answer. It's no.

The Chair: Thank you.

You're out of time.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Okay, thank you.

[English]

The Chair: MP McPherson, you have two minutes.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, again, for your testimony this afternoon.

Mr. Epp, you spoke a little bit about some of the things that Canada has done to express our discomfort and displeasure with the human rights abuses that have been occurring. Can you tell us a little bit more about the steps that Canada is taking to address the anti-minority hate speech from elected members of the BJP and the discriminatory laws targeting religious minorities in India, recognizing that these are the causes of the Indian foreign interference in Canada targeting our Indian diaspora communities?

• (1635)

Mr. Weldon Epp: I'll just frame it again. Canada continues to raise issues of concern with all countries diplomatically, including India. In the case of India, India is also a democracy, just like

Canada. It's an imperfect democracy, but it does have long-standing institutions of democracy, which provide some degree—as Canada's do—of gives and takes. It is the case, for example, that India's democracy continues to produce largely free and fair elections. It is the case that India's supreme court and constitution are independent institutions of the government.

For the Government of Canada, when we see that we have specific concerns with respect to fellow democracies, we do tend to raise those issues in a spirit of exchange in private diplomatic meetings or, in the case of multilateral platforms like the human rights committee, during the UPR process.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Are those things happening? Are they being raised?

One of my concerns, of course, is that we have an Indo-Pacific strategy that is seeking to develop relationships aside from China because, of course, China has some very serious human rights abuses that we know it is committing against the Uyghur people, for example. However, it does seem that—

The Chair: I'm going to ask that you allow him to respond in less than 10 seconds, please. We're considerably over time.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Mr. Chair, I didn't ask a question, so it's hard for him to respond.

It's fine. I'm fine. Thank you.

The Chair: Are you sure?

Ms. Heather McPherson: Yes.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you, MP McPherson.

We now go to MP Chong.

You have four minutes.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for appearing.

The British Columbia Gurdwaras Council and the Ontario Gurdwaras Committee have said that Canada's extradition process—which, as you noted, has been in place since the late 1980s—is being used by the Indian government to “stifle political dissent and silence government critics”.

Do you share these concerns? Why or why not?

Mr. Weldon Epp: I have full confidence in the Canadian extradition process and related law. As members of the committee may know, I have had some experience of that with respect to Canada-China relations recently.

Canada has a very high standard. The test that needs to be met, the threshold for Canada to pursue an extradition, is quite high, as you know. If anything, that has been a challenge—as was raised earlier—in bilateral relations as we work to understand legitimacy or the substance of specific extradition requests.

Hon. Michael Chong: One of the former foreign policy advisers to the current government has said, in *The Globe and Mail*, that the subject of Khalistani extremism came up in every single meeting with Indian officials, “in every talking point, in every pull-aside.”

My question is this: Does the government believe that there are Khalistani terrorist-financing activities going on in Canada? If so, what is being done to address the issue?

Mr. Weldon Epp: Aspects of the question get us into assessments that would come to my purview in Global Affairs Canada through intelligence means and others as a subject of ongoing investigations or police work. I won't speak to the specifics, but what I will say is that the premise is correct that concerns about Khalistani extremism and transnational crime are top of mind for the Indian government.

It's fair to say that we've had long-standing exchanges on this matter, and in some cases we've been able to advance those exchanges through structures. For example, we have an ongoing, GAC-led, Canada-India counterterrorism working group. That group will be meeting again soon.

We use those platforms to address definitional differences but also common objectives. For example, how India defines extremism or even terrorism does not always compute in our legal system, but there is an overlap and that's why we have these discussions, including that working group, to address those issues.

Hon. Michael Chong: Closely related to the issue of terrorist financing and extremist financing is the whole issue of money laundering and beneficial ownership registries. Can you tell us what role GAC has, if at all, in the implementation of new measures to combat money laundering and terrorist financing in Canada?

I'm thinking about the new federal beneficial ownership registry that's coming into place, and I'm thinking about the proposed financial crimes agency of Canada that was announced and other measures that have been talked about and announced by the government.

• (1640)

Mr. Weldon Epp: It's a terrific question.

I'll readily admit it's not my *métier* or my area of specialization. I do know colleagues from our legal branch are very involved, but I'm afraid I can't speak to the details of that.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chong.

We now go to MP Oliphant.

Hon. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Epp and officials, for being here today.

I want to start by very publicly saying that we are in this position...and I want to acknowledge the death of Hardeep Singh Nijjar and offer, again, publicly, condolences to his family and to the community in Surrey that was profoundly affected by that tragic killing. It has brought us to a difficult position.

The second thing I want to do is ask you to express to our officials in the mission who remain in Delhi, as well as those working remotely and our locally engaged staff, our appreciation for working under very difficult circumstances, and whether it's on the immigration side, the trade side, the foreign affairs side or the consular side, our appreciation for continuing to do that work in a very difficult situation.

The third thing I would like to say, and it's somewhat rhetorical—and I don't really expect an answer—is, can you imagine the outrage from the opposition if the Prime Minister had not taken the opportunity to speak to members of Parliament about this situation and had done it somewhere else or allowed it to happen somewhere else?

I don't expect an answer, but I think it showed a great respect for us as members of Parliament that it was the venue at which he chose to raise these allegations.

With respect to the position we're in right now, since that killing last year both the United States and the U.K. have raised allegations about inappropriate activities by the Indian government in those two very close allied countries. There are probably no two closer allies to Canada than the U.K. and the U.S.

Do we have conversations with them about this? How is our approach similar or dissimilar on this? The facts are different in what happened. However, are we engaged with our allies on this particular problem?

Mr. Weldon Epp: I just want to express my appreciation for this sentiment. I will convey to our High Commissioner Cam MacKay and his colleagues the sentiments of support expressed. It's been a very difficult stretch for their team, and they appreciate all the understanding and support.

With respect to our conversations with like-minded allies, these have been intensive. This is, again, a very unprecedented and intensive challenge that we are working through. There are also cross-cutting concerns, as I mentioned earlier. All three countries, the two partners you named and Canada, have large diaspora communities that have been targets of transnational crime. There have been challenges that affect these communities. There's a concern for domestic security as well as for engaging India on addressing those domestic matters that may play out differently in our legal systems than they do in India.

I would just also add that, for Canada, it has been important to work with these partners to ask questions of our Indian colleagues, as these partners have done. If you note, after the Prime Minister's statement in which he asked that the Government of India clarify its stance on arbitrary extrajudicial killings with respect to international law, we have seen that clarification from the Government of India in the public domain by the Union Home Minister, when he clarified that it is not India's policy and it has never been.

It's important to raise these questions, for Canada to raise them, to receive an official position from the Indian government and to hear from the Indian government, including from Prime Minister Modi, that they will, "definitely look into" any evidence and hold people accountable if there's evidence provided.

Working with our partners, we'll have to continue to raise these issues and have those conversations.

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• (1645)

Hon. Robert Oliphant: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We now go to Mr. Aboultaif.

You have four minutes.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thanks to the witness.

Mr. Epp, you mentioned that there was a conversation or perhaps a non-conversation at the G20 between the Prime Minister and Prime Minister Modi. Regarding that, do you believe that the incident or the episode where the Prime Minister brought this to Parliament was a reaction to what happened at the G20?

Mr. Weldon Epp: No. The Prime Minister's decision and the government's decision is.... The Prime Minister, Minister LeBlanc and Minister Joly have explained, related to addressing the very sensational and unprecedented matter that the media was bringing to the Canadian public's knowledge, the importance of speaking directly to Canadians about the government's knowledge of these allegations and what it was doing about it.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Do you believe that India has overreacted in its response by expelling our diplomats?

Mr. Weldon Epp: We were all surprised by the decision of the Indian government to kick out 41 Canadian diplomats. This is unprecedented in diplomatic history globally, so yes.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Was that a sudden overreaction, or was there a collection of incidents that happened after Prime Minister Trudeau took prime ministership?

Mr. Weldon Epp: To be fair, I cannot possibly speculate on the calculus that went into taking that dramatic decision on the part of India.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: I'm asking based on your observations, I guess.

Mr. Weldon Epp: I would just repeat my observation that it's highly unusual. There are tools to address concerns about specific individual diplomats posted abroad, PNG, *persona non grata*. That's not what the Indian government chose to do. They did not, for example, name specific Canadian diplomats and say that they would like to kick this diplomat out of the country. They unilaterally resized our mission in Delhi.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Do you think the current situation has affected our relationships with our allies as well as with other countries?

Mr. Weldon Epp: I wouldn't want to speculate. What I would say is that we continue to have close partnerships with our like-minded allies as well as with partners around the world who understand that this is a unique situation and, I think, are understanding of the manner in which the Canadian government has responded to unexpected developments.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: You represent the department where basically you have this history together. As I said, as an observer you have the knowledge and the ideas. We would value your opinion on this. I think it's very important for the committee to know how this incident has affected our relationships. I mentioned our allies as well as other countries.

Mr. Weldon Epp: I would simply observe that we continue to have very close discussions with our allies about some of the very difficult issues these incidents have brought to foreign ministries. Minister Joly has intensively engaged her colleagues, and not just allied colleagues but diverse colleagues from around the world, to understand their perspectives, to share Canada's views, to share our position and to, at the bottom of it, underscore the government's position, which is that while these are allegations, they're quite serious and it will be important to work together to allow justice to take its course.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Is it normal practice in situations like this for a prime minister to bring this whole situation to the House of Commons all of a sudden, without trying to find other ways to reveal what we have or to, at least, express it in a different way?

Mr. Weldon Epp: There is no way I can answer that. This was entirely unprecedented in nature. I wouldn't compare it to any other previous episode in diplomatic history for Canada.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Epp.

We now go to MP Alghabra for four minutes.

• (1650)

Hon. Omar Alghabra (Mississauga Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here and for your service to Canada.

I do want to make a comment first. I find it quite surprising that the Conservatives keep talking about the point of the utility of the House of Commons, given how much the issue of China comes up in the House of Commons every day—and rightly so. Our constituents expect us to have these vigorous debates in the House of Commons, whether it's China, India, the United States or any other country, for that matter. I just wanted to make that known for the record.

Mr. Epp, as you alluded to in your opening remarks, the relationship between India and Canada is extremely important for Canada. I would argue that it's extremely important for India. Almost two million Canadians of Indian background have affection and familial ties. Thousands of businesses are either doing business in India or are interested in doing business in India. The growth potential that the Indo-Pacific strategy lays out is extremely promising.

However, this question is one that I know most of my colleagues' questions and your remarks have been trying to deal with: How do you navigate the desire and the interest in having a strong diplomatic and economic relationship but at the same time ensure that we have the ability to have our domestic debates on what Canadians expect their government to stand up for, internationally and domestically, on human rights and values? How do we navigate that?

I know that sometimes the advice is on whether or not we can do it privately. Yes, it needs to be done privately, but sometimes it also needs to be done publicly. Canadians need to have faith that their government is promoting their values and their interests. How do we navigate that?

Mr. Weldon Epp: I think the Government of Canada, Global Affairs Canada, believes there is a time and a place for both private

diplomacy and public comment. As the members of the committee are aware, private diplomacy was under way before it became known that there would be a media story and before the Prime Minister made his statement in the House. Private diplomacy had its use.

It's also the case, and Minister Joly has been clear on this as well, that most often diplomacy is most successful when it takes place in private conversations as opposed to in a noisy public domain. However, it's important for Canadians to know how the Government of Canada is protecting their security, including, in a situation like this, the security of all Canadians within Canada regardless of their backgrounds, how we're defending our sovereignty and how we're managing an incredibly important relationship that will continue to be important, as the member said, for both Canada and India.

For the Government of Canada and for Global Affairs Canada, both can be true at the same time. We'll continue to look for opportunities to remain in dialogue with the Indian government, even as the investigation and next steps, in terms of co-operation on getting to the bottom of the Nijjar murder, will potentially take some time.

Hon. Omar Alghabra: Am I done?

The Chair: You have 10 seconds.

Hon. Omar Alghabra: Again, speaking in the House of Commons, not only to members of Parliament but to all of Canada, is an important channel for Canadian leaders to share with Canadians what we are doing to protect Canadians and to protect the interests of Canada.

I don't expect an answer. I had 10 seconds, so I wanted to make that statement.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, MP Alghabra.

We now go to Mr. Bergeron. You have two minutes, sir.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: I'll focus on the impact of the expulsion of 41 diplomats. According to the High Commissioner of India to Canada, it was an act of reciprocity.

My question is quite simple. Is it normal, in the diplomatic world, to ensure an equal number of diplomats on both sides? Otherwise, what is the basis for the reciprocity claim made by the High Commissioner of India?

• (1655)

[*English*]

Mr. Weldon Epp: Thank you for the question.

It's important to go back to these principles and the basis for managing diplomatic relations, which is the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations. In short, that convention uses the term "parity" nowhere, and that term was the basis on which the Indian government explained its expulsion of 41 diplomats.

It is the case that the VCDR, as it's known, provides for host states to place limits on the number of diplomats a sending state will have posted, but that requires consultations and has to take into account both the needs of the host state and the conditions of the sending state. Therefore, the idea of some kind of pure, literal parity or pure reciprocity in numbers simply doesn't exist in the Vienna convention. That word doesn't exist, and there's no agreed definition of that in the international law.

We reject the Indian government's position in this regard, and we have been quite clear on that.

The Chair: Thank you.

We next go to MP McPherson. You have two minutes.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I would also like to make a comment, following up on my colleague Mr. Alghabra's comments on the Conservative's participation. I recognize that they didn't think it was appropriate for the Prime Minister to bring it up in the House, but on the other hand, I didn't find it particularly appropriate that, when we had a debate in the House of Commons, they did not participate at all in that take-note debate on the tragic death and murder of Mr. Nijjar. I want to make that point as well.

I want to ask a few questions about the foreign interference inquiry process, if I can. We have seen the Uyghur representation pull out of that process. They are worried about whether or not it will be fair and transparent.

What efforts are being made to ensure transparency in the process, especially regarding the disclosure of evidence to the public?

Mr. Weldon Epp: Mr. Chair, I want to get to this quickly so I don't waste the member's time. I'm not in a position to comment on the specifics of the inquiry and its terms of reference. It's under way, and I will leave items that should come before the inquiry to the inquiry.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Okay. Thank you.

One last question I have for you goes back to the issue of the Indo-Pacific strategy, as we look at the human rights issues we see coming out of India. The question I was going to ask in the last section is how we justify taking our eggs from one basket, where we're quite concerned about human rights, and putting them into another basket, where, of course, human rights should be a deep concern as well.

From my perspective, I have a lot of challenges. The government is doing quiet diplomacy. Perhaps there's some open diplomacy, but this is a country that, conceivably, has allegedly killed a Canadian citizen. Democracy or not, having that relationship seems very fraught to me, and I don't understand how we balance that with just being quiet.

I have a bit of trouble with that, and I would love your insight on that, Mr. Epp.

The Chair: Mr. Epp, again, we're over time, so if you could keep your response to less than 10 seconds, that would be great.

Mr. Weldon Epp: Mr. Chair, I'll be very quick.

The question has a reasonable premise. I believe that the government's decision, for example, to pause free trade negotiations with India reflects the premise that, given the serious nature of the allegations, it's not currently "business as usual". However, we do have an important long-term, strategic relationship with India, and Canadians and Indians do as well.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We now go to MP Chong.

You have four minutes.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll just build on the questions I was asking earlier.

The High Commissioner of India to Canada has said that "some Canadian citizens are using Canadian soil to launch attacks on [Indian] sovereignty and territorial integrity", which is against any international law. What does the Government of Canada say to that?

Mr. Weldon Epp: We take note of those comments, and we've heard those views expressed in diplomatic meetings repeatedly.

For example, in the interview in *The Globe and Mail* today with the high commissioner, he also points out that there is a difference between Canada's and India's definitions of, for example, "terrorism". Therefore, it's important for governments—India's or otherwise—to bring forward concrete, substantiated cases and not just allegations.

Canada has an elaborate and well-staffed set of teams—be it at Justice Canada or with the RCMP, including our liaison officers abroad and so on and so forth—to work with foreign countries to address issues of transnational crime, including terrorism, when there is evidence.

In the case of our relationship with India, it has sometimes been a sticking point. We're aware that they have concerns. We're ready to deal with them. I know that there's currently a very active caseload, as I said, for Justice Canada. Part of that gets to saying what our threshold is and asking whether they can provide evidence that meets that. For example, Justice Canada and the RCMP in the past have done, effectively, workshops with the Indian government to explain what our standards legally would be.

I understand that the high commissioner has a job to do and has his instructions. We speak about these issues regularly. We're diplomats. At the end of the day, what's really important is for his government's justice and policing agencies and institutions to work closely with ours. I know—

• (1700)

Hon. Michael Chong: Some people would argue that GAC is a central agency and, as such, should be within the machinery of government, providing advice and directing other departments in terms of the threats we're facing. If it is the case that Canada is being used as a staging ground to fundraise for terrorism, to fundraise for extremist activities taking place in other countries, surely GAC has a role to play in working within the machinery of government to convey that problem to the other parts of the government that are responsible for dealing with it on Canadian soil.

Mr. Weldon Epp: That's a fair point. There's an ongoing discussion between departments. GAC is part of that conversation. We don't lead on determining whether there are grounds for those accusations and how to deal with them within Canadian borders, but we certainly support, through a number of mechanisms, ongoing dialogue about how to address international crime.

We have, as members may be aware, mechanisms for funding international capacity building on international crime—cross-border crime—as well as terrorism, so there's a role for GAC.

Hon. Michael Chong: I raise this because it seems to me that we're increasingly becoming a haven for transnational repression, in part funded by financing activities that are illicit. I look at TD Bank's cancellation of a proposed takeover of a U.S. regional bank, a \$13-billion U.S. takeover. It was kiboshed by U.S. regulators because of money-laundering concerns.

I see FINTRAC's recent finds levelled against big Canadian banks. The Royal Bank, I think, got a \$7-million fine. TD got fined over \$10 million. Other banks got fined. This is all in the last month or so, and then just this past week there was a \$65-million U.S. fine against a Royal Bank subsidiary for money laundering. It seems like we are a nexus—

The Chair: We are out of time. You're well over your four minutes for questions.

Hon. Michael Chong: Yes. Quite simply, former national security and intelligence adviser Jody Thomas recently visited India to talk about the Nijjar assassination.

Can you tell us about that trip?

Mr. Weldon Epp: Quickly, Mr. Chair, I won't get into the details of this trip or that, but the bottom line is that Canadian senior officials, including the national security and intelligence adviser, Deputy Minister Morrison and others, have intensively used our existing channels of diplomacy to make sure the Indian government understands the nature of our concerns, to describe the allegations that we're concerned with and to look at ways to move forward together to get to the bottom of the matter.

The Chair: Thank you.

For the last four minutes, we go to MP Khalid.

You have four minutes, please.

Ms. Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses for being here today. I'll get right into it.

How has India's extreme reaction to Canada's credible allegations impacted its relationships with its allies and with its regional neighbours as well? Has it impacted them?

• (1705)

Mr. Weldon Epp: I'm not aware of any direct impact of the current challenges between Canada and India on India's relations with its neighbours.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: You mentioned that we are stalling now on trade agreements. Has that benefited any other country in that region?

Mr. Weldon Epp: No, I'm not aware of any benefits to any other countries in this regard. It should be noted that trade negotiations can move quickly, but they can move slowly. They can be quite long processes, both for Canada and, I would add, for other countries pursuing trade agreements, with India in this case.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thank you.

Over the past number of years, from the Prime Minister's trip to India to this issue, have you in Global Affairs been monitoring social media campaigns spreading misinformation and disinformation on this issue, specifically as it has arisen now?

Mr. Weldon Epp: Yes, we monitor all forms of media quite closely. I think it has been very interesting to see the amount of chatter or discussion of these matters, both on social media in Canada and also within India.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Are you able to describe that for us?

Mr. Weldon Epp: I guess what I would say is that some of the more sensational elements of what's happened—for example, allegations of potential links between India and the death of a Canadian—obviously generate a lot of commentary. However, the expulsion of Canadian diplomats also generated a lot of coverage.

Suffice it to say that India is a democracy. It's very diverse. There are many voices. It has an active media, and it's close to a formal election campaign, so in terms of Indian social media, quite reasonably—although one could argue this is not the main event—it comes up frequently in domestic discussions about India's foreign policy.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thank you.

You had mentioned that obviously India is a very diverse country, very much like Canada, dealing with a lot of different cultures, a lot of different religions, etc. How have different diaspora communities reflected on or reacted to this turbulence within the relationship?

Mr. Weldon Epp: I have not spent time—and I'm not aware that my colleagues have—in parsing the responses or reactions of different communities within Canada. I think it's important to emphasize that, for Global Affairs Canada, we look at the impact of foreign policy on Canadian citizens, irrespective of their religious or community interests.

It is the case that the community of Canadians of Indian heritage is quite significant, quite large, historically long-standing and quite diverse. Naturally, as for all Canadians, there will be very different and distinct views about what's happening between Canada and India. I think that's entirely normal, and we're not guided by that sort of analysis. Our interest is in making sure that the services that Global Affairs Canada is responsible for and the diplomacy that is our mandate to manage is managed with the interests of all Canadians at heart.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: It seems a bit strange to me, because when we talk about—

The Chair: MP Khalid, you're out of time.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: May I have one last comment, Chair?

The Chair: No. You're considerably out of time, I'm afraid.

At this juncture, I want to take the opportunity on behalf of the entire committee to thank you, Mr. Epp.

Thank you, Ms. Hannan.

We're very grateful for the time, the perspective and the expertise you have brought to our committee.

We will suspend for four minutes, and we will come back for committee business.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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