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Starmer to Confront Modi Over Jagtar Singh Johal Detention

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Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer is expected to raise the ongoing detention of British national Jagtar Singh Johal during talks with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The case, involving allegations of arbitrary detention and torture, has drawn increasing concern from human rights groups and UK officials, particularly as UK-India diplomatic and trade ties strengthen.

During a high-level diplomatic visit, Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer is set to address the case of Jagtar Singh Johal, a British citizen from Dumbarton, who has been held in Indian custody since 2017. Johal was arrested shortly after his wedding in Punjab, and his family alleges that he was taken in an unmarked vehicle, tortured, and coerced into a confession. Despite being acquitted of all charges by the Moga District Court earlier this year due to insufficient evidence and unreliable witnesses, Johal remains incarcerated under eight additional cases based on the same disputed confession.

The issue has become a point of contention in the broader context of the United Kingdom's (UK) evolving relationship with India, particularly as both nations move forward on a new trade agreement. West Dunbartonshire Member of Parliament (MP) Douglas McAllister recently met with Foreign Secretary David Lammy to press the matter ahead of Prime Minister Modi's arrival in the UK. According to McAllister, Starmer has given personal assurances that he will raise the case with Modi directly. "This is a vital opportunity to resolve a long-standing issue that continues to cloud UK-India relations," McAllister said.

Johal's brother, Gurpreet Singh Johal, expressed cautious optimism, stating, "I'm putting my faith in the Prime Minister to get this done and bring Jagtar home." Human rights advocacy group Reprieve, which defends victims of extreme abuses worldwide, has also taken up Johal's cause. Dan Dolan, Deputy Executive Director of Reprieve, emphasized that retrying Johal on the same charges breaches both India's constitution and international legal standards against double jeopardy.

Critics of the Indian legal process in this case argue that prolonged detention without credible evidence undermines judicial fairness and basic civil liberties. Supporters of Johal insist that justice must not be delayed indefinitely, especially after a court has already cleared him of the original allegations.

The meeting between Starmer and Modi comes at a crucial time for UK-India relations, with trade, security, and strategic cooperation at the forefront. However, the handling of this individual case may prove to be a litmus test for the values both governments claim to uphold.