

August 12, 2002. Indian Express (India).

Long list of missing minority voters worrying EC officials

NEW DELHI, AUGUST 11 The Election Commission is expected to take a final decision on conducting polls in Gujarat by Wednesday. Though the EC has not revealed its mind, the BJP seems quite rattled by the way Chief Election Commissioner J M Lyngdoh made news in Gujarat. Senior party leaders were today fielded to virtually tell the EC that its job was to conduct elections, and only that. While Lyngdoh, who returned with his team to New Delhi today after a three-day tour of Ahmedabad and Vadodara, said a decision would come in a few days, it is learnt that the conclusions of the nine-member EC team that visited the state earlier may be reinforced in the second tour.

One of the facts the team found, and which may influence the final decision, is the long list of voters from the minority community who are missing, especially in the two cities worst hit by the riots.

Election Commissioners T.S. Krishnamurthy and B.B Tandon, along with advisor K.J. Rao, had meticulously gone through the voters' lists for assembly and parliamentary constituencies of the cities and tallied them with the names of people supposed to be in the relief camps.

"The team was given electoral rolls by the local administration and also had its own list. When they went to relief camps and communally sensitive areas, they could not find the voters," a source in the Commission said. "These voters were not in the relief camps, they were not back in their houses. They were not on the list of those killed in the riots. The administration had no clue where they could be. 'Voters cannot be disenfranchised so easily.'" The second important issue the Commission would discuss would be the law and order situation in the state.

The BJP today gave enough signs that it was disturbed by Lyngdoh's approach. Party President M Venkaiah Naidu said at a Press conference in Bangalore that "there is no way other than holding the election." Criticising the Opposition parties for making attempts to get elections postponed on the ground that thousands of people were still in relief camps, he asked why these parties were not talking about the lakhs of people who were in the camps in Jammu and Kashmir. "When elections can be held in Jammu and Kashmir, what prevented these from being held in Gujarat?," he asked, accusing the Opposition parties of maintaining "double standards".

But the more telling comment came from party spokesman and general secretary in charge of the state Arun Jaitley. Objecting to Lyngdoh's focus on relief and rehabilitation measures in Gujarat, he said there were several relief commissioners to do that job and that the EC should concentrate on elections.

Claiming that 98% of the state was normal, Jaitley said, "The relief commissioners must do their job and the Election Commission its own. The EC should bear in mind the constitutional requirement of Article 174 which mandates that the next sitting of the state assembly has to be called in early October."

"The job of the EC is to conduct elections," he added. "I hope they are able to announce the dates at the earliest."

August 18, 2002. Times of India (India). Sanjay Pandey & Anoop Kayarat.

Hindu Rashtra? It's all over Gujarat

AHMEDABAD/VADODARA: If you're looking for signs that Gujarat's the most saffronised of all states, take the highway. Better still, just roam around the congested streets of Ahmedabad.

This is no hidden agenda of the Sangh Parivar. It's all out in the open in Gujarat. Signboards proclaiming India as a 'Hindu Rashtra' can be found all over the state and they don't merit a second look from the authorities.

"Karnavati city of this Hindu Rashtra welcomes you", proclaims a board painted in saffron in the heart of Ahmedabad. For those wondering what Karnavati is, it's what the VHP chooses to call Ahmedabad.

In Chhota Udepur, 200 km south of Ahmedabad, the signboard on the highway is more direct. It simply says: "Welcome to Hindu Rashtra's Chota Udepur town".

These signboards are one legacy of almost five years of BJP rule. While the party let's it be known that it doesn't have anything to do with the 'hidden agenda' of the Sangh Parivar, it has had no qualms in allowing scores of such boards to be put up all over Gujarat.

Even the Congress, which came back to power in the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC) two years ago, is dragging its feet on pulling these boards down, despite a directive to this effect issued by new state Congress president Shankersinh Vaghela recently.

A freshly painted board on a crossroad outside Shahpur Gate proclaims the roundabout to be 'Kashi Vishwanath Chowk'. Most billboards in the name of VHP, Bajrang Dal and Durga Vahini begin with their cause being dubbed variously as Dharamraksha, Rashtraraksha or Gauraksha.

A board at Kalupur, while welcoming people to "Karnavati city of Hindu Rashtra", goes a step further: "Garv Se Kaho Hum Hindu Hain".

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Bajrang Dal (Gujarat) convenor Ranchodbhai Bharwad said that Vaghela did have not any moral right to ask for the removal of boards. "He himself inaugurated these billboards during his days with the BJP," he pointed out. He went to add that the Bajrang Dal did not require anybody's permission before installing these boards.

In Vadodara, the boards say "Hindu Rashtra welcomes you to Vadodara Nagar". "At present, Vadodara has about five to six boards at entry points to the city. We have now asked our workers to put up similar boards in localities that don't have them," says VHP's Vadodara chief Ajay Pandya.

The BJP-Samata-controlled Vadodara Municipal Corporation (VMC), however, said that it had not given permission to any party to put up such boards. "We have not given any permission to any party to put up such boards. However, if the signboards are on private property, we cannot do anything," VMC commissioner Arvind Agarwal said.

The boards have come up in the rural areas of Vadodara along the highway which leads to Mumbai as well as other state highways. When asked, superintendent of police Piyush Patel said, "The boards may not be strictly legal. It is unlikely they would have obtained permission for putting up the boards."

Apart from the VHP, there are also cases of locals painting walls with slogans. In Kasar Falia in the Kothi area of Vadodara, for instance, locals have painted a wall with a slogan in Marathi that reads: "Shivrayache ami santan, Desh amcha Hindustan, Khabardar yal pudhe tar, Ubharun taku kabarastan" (We are children of Shivaji, Our country is Hindustan, Dare not come forward or we will send you to the graveyard).

September 11, 2002. Indian Express (India).

Modi's hate bytes and barks

NCM wants text, state BJP defends remarks

GANDHINAGAR, NEW DELHI, SEPT 10: Gujarat state BJP chief Rajendrasinh Rana today justified Narendra Modi's remarks ridiculing Muslims claiming that the Chief Minister was only "stating a fact." Yesterday, during his gaurav yatra at Becharji in Mehsana, Modi reportedly distorted the family-planning slogan Hum do hamare do to Hum paanch, hamare pachchis" in an apparent reference to Muslims in refugee camps.

He was also quoted as having wondered if Narmada waters should have been brought to the state during Ramzaan since the Congress had criticised the government's move to bring the water during Shravan.

These remarks prompted the National Commission of Minorities (NCM) today to ask the state government for a text of Modi's speech.

Admitting that the NCM had called him up, Additional Chief Secretary (Home) Ashok Narayan told The Indian Express: "Today being a public holiday, we will consider the commission's directive tomorrow and do our best to satisfy it."

Asked about Modi's remarks, state BJP chief Rana said that the CM had only stated a fact. On the Narmada-Ramzan remark, he said: "There's nothing wrong in it...The government will send a text of the CM's speech to the NCM, let the commission do whatever it thinks fit."

Chief Convenor of the Gaurav Yatra Jayanti Barot also justified Modi's remarks on Narmada and Ramzan but denied reports that the CM had ever said, Hum paanch, hamare pachchis while speaking about Muslims.

A Rajya Sabha member, Barot said he was with the CM all along the yatra and Modi was "only trying to educate the masses on the problems facing the country because of the population boom". Said Barot: "None should blame any particular community for the population boom in this country. Poor people belonging to even Hindu backward communities like Vaghri and Thakore have large families".

In Delhi, BJP's Mukhtar Naqvi said party chief Venkaiah Naidu had called up Modi to say that such remarks were "not necessary." And that Modi had said that he had been misquoted. Naqvi said that Naidu called Modi after some party leaders expressed concern over Modi's remarks at a meeting attended by Naidu and general secretaries Rajnath Singh, Arun Jaitley, Sanjay Joshi and Naqvi.

Reacting to Modi's remarks, CPI leader D Raja said: "His vulgar diatribe and personal attacks show the low level of his culture and his hostile attitude towards the minority community."

September 15, 2002. Times of India (India).

Tapes capture rabid speeches made by Modi

AHMEDABAD: The Gujarat government on Sunday went into a damage-control mode even as Narendra Modi's controversial statements against the Muslims — first reported by The Times of India — came into sharp focus, with a television channel playing the audio tapes, containing these references throughout the day.

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) representatives alleged that the tapes were doctored. "This is a conspiracy by anti-Gujarat forces and the Congress," was the general refrain of the BJP men.

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A state minister remarked, "There has been a trend in Gujarat of delivering such speeches for the past 40 years."

Modi, who was in Amreli on Sunday for the second leg of his yatra, neither acknowledged nor denied making anti-minority statements at Bechraji.

State BJP president Rajendrasinh Rana explained that Modi was talking in the larger context of the economic development of the state and the effect that a large population has on it.

The Times of India had reported that Modi, during the gaurav yatra at Bechraji on September 9, had attacked the Muslims for the population boom and asked whether the relief camps needed to be maintained only to "produce babies". Modi was also quoted as saying "their family planning slogan is — we five and ours twenty-five".

He criticised the Congress for opposing the flowing in of the Narmada waters during the month of Shravan and asked whether the party would have liked to bring the waters in the month of Ramzan.

The yatra convener Jayantibhai Barot, however, denied that Modi had ever made these remarks. National BJP general secretary Arun Jaitley had claimed that there were "inaccuracies" in the media's reporting of the chief minister's speech.

After the National Commission for Minorities asked the state government for a transcript of the tapes of the speech and some Opposition parties demanded criminal proceedings against Modi, both the BJP president Venkaiah Naidu and the minister of state in PMO Vijay Goel had advised Modi to exercise restraint.

But neither the state government nor the police claimed to have possession of audio or video tapes from which a transcript could be provided to the NCM.

On September 12, the additional chief secretary (home) Ashok Narayan said the government did not have the tapes and that "we will send the transcript when we receive it".

September 15, 2002. NDTV (India).

Tape confirms Narendra Modi's anti-minority tirade

The controversy over the alleged anti-minority remarks made by Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi during the Gaurav Yatra could take a new twist. NDTV has obtained a copy of the audiotape of the speech made by the chief minister at Besraji village, which confirms that Modi did indeed make the remarks attributed to him.

The National Commission for Minorities has also asked for a copy of the tape.

Until now, the Gujarat government has denied the existence of any tapes and the text of chief minister's speech made during the Gaurav Yatra on September 9 where he allegedly targetted a particular minority community.

Excerpt from Modi's speech

"I told them that I got water from the Narmada in the month of Shravan, if they had it their way, they would have got it in Ramzan. What should we do? Run relief camps for them? Do we want to open baby producing centres? We are five and we will have 25 offsprings. Gujarat has not been able to control its growing population and poor people have not been able to get money.

There's a long queue of children who fix tyre punctures. In order to progress, every child in Gujarat needs education, good manners and employment. That is the economy we need. For this, we have to teach a lesson to those who are increasing the population at an alarming rate."

NDTV has learnt that the State Intelligence Department has sent a report in its letter J/2/BJP/YATRA/525/02 dated September 12 to the Additional Chief Secretary, Home on the allegedly inflammatory content of the Chief Minister's speech.

In paragraphs 10 and 11 of the report, the text of the objectionable utterances have been quoted, while paragraph 13 makes the observation that religious feelings of minorities may be hurt due to this and may lead to increase in communal tension in the state.

Govt alleges conspiracy

However, the state government still maintains that the chief minister made no such utterances.

"There is nothing like this. These days there is a conspiracy by the opposition to malign the chief minister and his government. And we are surprised that Musharraf is speaking the same language as the Congress. The chief minister has not said anything derogatory against anyone," maintained Purshottam Rupala, Spokesperson, Gujarat government.

Modi has now toned down his speeches, but with the National Commission for Minorities taking up the issue of his single speech, he may have to do some more explaining.

September 16, 2002. Indian Express (India). Bashir Pathan.

Tape nails Modi lie

TV replays audio tape of CM's remarks, officials run for cover

GANDHINAGAR, SEPTEMBER 15 Finally, the tape was unspooled. After repeatedly denying that Chief Minister Narendra Modi had made any anti-Muslim remarks during his Gaurav Yatra, the Gujarat government was caught on the backfoot on Sunday when a TV news channel played what it said was an audio tape of the CM's speech. BJP leaders and the state administration were thrown into a tizzy even as the Congress threatened to drag Modi to court, accusing him of provoking Muslims by making "derogatory remarks against them." And the state intelligence department had reportedly quoted Modi's "objectionable utterances" in the report it sent to the home department.

Some excerpts from the tape:

- "I told them (the Congress) I got the Narmada water in the month of Shravan, if they had it their way...they would have got it in Ramzan."
- "What should we do? Run relief camps for them? Do we want to open baby producing centres?"
- Rewriting the family planning slogan as 'Hum paanch aur hamaare pachchis', he said: "Gujarat has not been able to control its growing population and poor people have not been able to get money, food...reason being the long queue of children who fix punctures in tyres."
- "In order to progress, every child born in Gujarat needs education, manners and employment...that is the economy we need...and for this we will have to teach a lesson to those who are increasing the population at an alarming rate."

Gujarat government officials continued to offer inane excuses on Sunday. "I don't know about the Star News channel playing the tape of the CM's speech he is reported to have delivered at Becharaji on September 9. I have just returned from Delhi," Additional Chief Secretary (Home) Ashok Narayan said.

"The Government doesn't have any tapes or text of the Chief Minister's speech. I don't know the TV news channel has a tape. I will check tomorrow," he stated.

Modi's Principal Secretary, P K Mishra's excuse was that he hadn't been watching television. "Today being a weekly off, I had gone out for some personal work. I didn't watch TV. I can assure you the government doesn't have any such tapes in its possession."

"I am accompanying the Chief Minister on his Yatra, I had no time for TV," was Gujarat Gaurav Yatra convenor Jayanti Barot's response. Replying to a query, he said, "If the channel really has the audiotape containing the CM's speech, let it send it to the NCM." He continued to deny that Modi had made any such statements.

However, the Congress claimed the BJP leaders had been exposed thoroughly. Former GPCC chief Amarsingh Chaudhary said the tape had rendered false the BJP's claim that Modi "never said it".

"The Congress may use the audiotape as clinching evidence against Modi and approach a court of law since his utterances amount to provoking a particular community in this communally-surcharged atmosphere," he said.

March 3, 2003. Newsweek International. Carla Power.

Modi's Moment

On the anniversary of the ethnic violence in Gujarat, the state's militant chief minister is both unrepentant and possibly a harbinger of India's political future

March 3 issue — Drums beat, as supporters of the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) push forward to toss marigolds and rose petals at Narendra Modi. When Gujarat's chief minister emerges from the airport in the BJP stronghold of Rajkot, there's a cry and a crush of men in saffron scarves emblazoned with the BJP lotus symbol.

THAT EVENING, SPEAKING at a local IT college, the reception is just as rapturous. "The media say this man is like Hitler," says a local BJP man, introducing Modi to the packed auditorium. "They portrayed him like a devil." And yet, the emcee says, he won the vote. When Modi stands up and starts talking—without notes—in his grave, low voice, the neatly pressed crowd stops fiddling with its mobile phones and starts listening.

Modi is good at entrances. At a Mumbai rally this winter, he emerged from a giant pink hydraulic lotus created for him by a Bollywood set designer. His entry into the national political spotlight has been no less dramatic. In 2001, as a mid-ranking party functionary, he was dispatched from party headquarters in Delhi to steer Gujarat's BJP. Then, a year ago this week, he became the poster boy for India's vicious communal tensions. On Feb. 27, 2002, Muslims set fire to a train in the town of Godhra, killing 58 Hindu pilgrims. In the days that followed, well-organized Hindu crowds retaliated by burning, looting, raping and killing hundreds—some say thousands—of Muslims. Modi's early response (which he later denied) was that Hindu rage was an "equal and opposite reaction" to the train attack.

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Newspapers, opposition politicians and human-rights groups charged the Modi government with being complicit in the violence. Even after the riots subsided, Modi's rhetoric did not cool. In his fall campaign for re-election as Gujarat's chief minister, he blatantly played to anti-Muslim and anti-Pakistani sentiments, telling voters that a vote for the opposition Congress Party was a vote for "Mian Musharraf," a phrase that linked the Pakistani leader with defamatory Gujarati slang for Muslim. "He was basically trying to say that all of India's Muslims are hidden Pakistanis—traitors to the nation," says Teesta Setalvad, editor of *Communalism Combat*.

For the BJP, Modi is the perfect 21st-century political specimen: disciplined, media-savvy, silver-tongued and a hard-line Hindu nationalist. "By telling audiences, 'It is only I who can save you from the Muslims,' he speaks in the way that Hindus want to hear," says Jay Dubashi, a former BJP adviser. "He has become an icon for the party." That's particularly true since his fiery Hindu nationalism landed him two thirds of Gujarat's vote, ending a string of BJP election defeats around the country. Party leaders are trying to figure out how to replicate Modi's Gujarat victory in four state elections this month, with three more to come later this year.

There's even talk that Modi could be India's next prime minister. For those keen to preserve India's secularism, painstakingly constructed by leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi, that's a terrifying thought. Pundits and opposition politicians worry that Modi-style intimidation of Muslims, Christians and other minorities is making India feel increasingly like 1930s Germany. Human Rights Watch has accused Modi's police force of being complicit in the 2002 violence. "Who is this Human Rights Watch?" he says, in an interview with *NEWSWEEK* as his eight-seater ministerial plane flies to Rajkot. "Who is behind them? Who funds them?" Besides, he adds, the riot issue is being looked at by a government commission. In the meantime, "the people of Gujarat have already replied, so it's not necessary for me to reply." To his accusers, he quotes Jesus: "Oh, forgive them Lord, they know not what they do."

Love it or loathe it, Modi's Gujarat success has triggered political soul-searching in India. The judiciary's failure to investigate his government for its involvement in the riots, says Justice A. V. Ravani, a former chief justice in Rajasthan, "is Balkanizing the country, and threatening the very basic fabric of this society." The Congress Party—which held secularism as an article of faith for decades and has long tried to convince itself that the BJP's popularity was based—mostly on a protest vote—is being forced to confront the depth of Hindu nationalist sentiment in India. In the wake of Modi's December victory, Nehru's old party—which always made a grand show of praising India's religious heterogeneity—has begun to adopt its own version of Hindu-influenced nationalism. Says Jairam Ramesh, the Congress Party's secretary of the economy: "We have to rescue Hinduism from being hijacked by the BJP."

The form of the religion promoted by the nationalists is more political than doctrinal, and relatively modern in origin. Modi, born 53 years ago to a lower-caste family in the Gujarati town of Vadnagar, left home at 17 to join their petri dish, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). Influenced by 1930s fascists of Germany and Italy, the RSS founders built a disciplined social organization that insisted India be defined as a Hindu country. Like prime minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and his deputy, L. K. Advani, Modi became an RSS apparatchik. In the mid-1980s he joined the RSS's political wing, the BJP, and later worked to broaden the party's appeal to the lower castes and non-Hindu ethnic groups.

RSS and BJP colleagues describe Modi as a classic organization man: driven, hardworking and ambitious. Separated from his wife, he told *India Today* he's committed to ascetic bachelorhood: "When you are on a mission, you don't need a companion." It is this disciplined demeanor, says Ramesh, that distinguishes the younger generation in the BJP—a group of up-and-comers he calls "the Albert Speer generation," after Hitler's brilliant architect—from older politicians. "Vajpayee and Advani still operate in a Nehruvian ethos," he notes. "But [politicians in the younger generation] are technocrats," he says. "Economically, they're liberalizers. And socially, they're bigots."

Across the border in Pakistan, Modi's brand of nakedly muscular Hinduism alarms moderates and stokes Islamist anger. At home in India, it appeals to professionals like his audience at the Rajkot computer college: urban, striving middle-class Hindus. Buoyed economically by India's economic liberalization and software success, they're nonetheless keen to keep traditional values alive. (The same is perhaps even more true for the vast and successful Gujarati diaspora in the West, from which much of the nationalists' financial support comes.) By casting Muslim communities as uncivilized and backward, Modi's rhetoric simultaneously equates Hinduism with progress and strength.

Modi, whose 18-hour workdays start online, and whose Handspring pocket organizer boasts his own picture as a screen image, shares his followers' faith in technology. He also appeals to their resentments. Hindus are angered by what they see as the Congress Party's pandering to Muslims, allowing them privileges like their own family law, based on Sharia. "Modi is bidden by the call of the motherland," says H. V. Pradhan, a tourism officer in Ahmedabad. "He says, 'In the world of science and technology, why are you going back to the age of the bullock cart?' He asks, 'How long should we be told by uneducated imams what to do?'"

At Ahmedabad's Shah Alam Mosque, mention Modi's name and people talk of violence, not vision. They recall how Modi's police force refused to protect them during last year's riots, telling them they were Hindus first and policemen second. At dusk, the Mughal monument is a tribute to the centuries-old braid of Islamic and Hindu cultures. For proof of how Indianized Islam has become during its 12 centuries in South Asia, one need only look at how incense thickens the air, candles flicker in front of the saint's tomb and a huddle of musicians belt out qawwali, the songs of South Asian Muslim mystics. Yet the faithful at Shah Alam believe Modi is trying to rip them out of the fabric of Gujarati society. "He wants to finish the minority community here," says Nasrin Sheikh, an English-

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literature student at Gujarat University. Post-riot politics have changed the 20-year-old's life. "Before, I'd go to see movies or roam in the gardens with my Hindu friends," she says. "Now they say, 'You are not my friend, you're my enemy'." She now hopes to emigrate, worried that she'll have no future as a Muslim in India.

As with many populist politicians, part of Modi's appeal to his constituency lies in his extravagant scorn for India's elites. Though he believes his election was a historical turning point for India, "the winning party isn't acceptable to so-called writers and intellectuals, so they're not writing books about it." Or perhaps they're waiting to see whether Modi's Gujarat success is an aberration or a trend. Anxious for their new golden boy to repeat his winning formula in state elections this month, the BJP is sending him on the stump. His anti—terrorism and anti-Pakistan message looks set to be the central plank for parliamentary elections in 2004.

Yet there's a real question as to whether the Gujarat strategy will have traction in other Indian states. Modi's polarizing strategy worked well in the religiously conservative region with its 512-kilometer border with Pakistan and a history of riots and communal tension. Known as the party's "Hindutva laboratory"—the state where it tests out its radical Hindu program—Gujarat is about 10 percent Muslim, but its Islamic population is evenly spread across the state, which means that parties haven't bothered to court a Muslim voting bloc. On the other hand, Himachal Pradesh, which Modi visited last week on the stump, doesn't have Gujarat's huge Muslim population or its religious tensions. At a press conference in the state capital of Simla, Modi started by sounding his familiar themes of "nationalism and security." A few minutes later, sensing the absence of radicals among the audience, he changed tack. The BJP's main goal, he finally said, was efficient administration.

Even if the BJP has to temper the Gujarat message for other Indian states, there's no denying a rising Hindu sensibility may dominate the country's political future. Italian-born Congress leader Sonia Gandhi recently started a campaign at a Hindu temple, and not long ago, a Congress chief minister made a noisy defense of supporting a ban on cow slaughter—long a BJP issue. But it may be tricky for a party that historically was heavily invested in secularism to beat the BJP at its own game. In the end, the best chance of defeating a demagogue lies in ideas and policies that speak to people's needs. If Congress can't come up with them, they may lose the battle for India's political soul. And then this may truly turn out to be Modi's moment.

July 12, 2003. Los Angeles Daily News (AP). Prajnan Bhattacharya. Training camps worrying India's minorities

KANPUR, India -- At her summer camp, 10-year-old Stuti Gupta is learning to use guns, leap through rings of fire and fight with knives and wooden truncheons -- skills India's most powerful Hindu nationalist group tells her she needs to protect her faith. The women's wing of the World Hindu Council is holding training camps in several parts of India, where girls learn martial arts and are "ordained" with metal tridents, the symbol of Shiva, the Hindu god of destruction.

But in a modern nation built on principles of tolerance and equality, such camps don't just deepen Hindus' faith. They create cauldrons of hostility and inject hatred against Muslims and Christian minorities, critics say.

"Such trends are inconsistent with prosperity, development and modernization. They are completely antithetical to the modern project of nation building," said Mushirul Hasan, a Muslim who is a professor of modern Indian history.

"If the government wants to create a modern state, it must call the bluff of the Hindu fundamentalists and show the danger they pose to the country."

Stuti, a fourth-grader, traveled 170 miles from her native Banda to attend the camp in the northern industrial city of Kanpur. Both cities are in Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state.

"This training will prepare me to fight the odds in the society confidently. They are killing Hindus everywhere to reduce us to a minority and this would help me to face that challenge," the girl said.

The World Hindu Council's main target is Muslims, who make up more than 12 percent of the country's 1.02 billion people. Some 84 percent of India's citizens are Hindus, and the Hindu nationalists often warn of what they say are the growing militant ambitions of Muslims.

While the camps for girls are a relatively new phenomenon, the nationalist group has long held camps for boys, who attend them by the thousands.

"The camps are not only organized to impart arms training and physical education, but also to give them an in-depth knowledge of Indian culture and traditions," said Hari Agarwal of the camp in Lucknow, capital of Uttar Pradesh.

But Muslims are alarmed. In a rare move, a Muslim organization in Uttar Pradesh has announced it would distribute 5,000 tridents to Muslims next week to counter what they see as a growing threat.

In the western state of Gujarat, several summer camps are under way for hundreds of young women. Gujarat was the scene of Hindu-Muslim riots last year that claimed over 1,000 lives, most of them Muslims. The riots began after Muslims burned a train car, killing 60 Hindus.

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"These camps are being run across the state without any ban from the government," said Atallah Khan, a Gujarati industrialist and organizer of a relief camp for Muslims whose homes were burned in the riots.

"If tomorrow, Muslims start organizing such camps in the name of their religion, and the same with Christians and Buddhists, would the state government permit them to do so?" he asked.

The Gujarat state government, widely accused last year of doing little to stop the anti-Muslim violence, has not taken a stand on the camps.

Kalpana Vyas, a senior Hindu Council leader who is supervising the camps in Gujarat, said they were meant to aid girls in "physical, mental and spiritual development."

"Learning how to use firearms is not illegal and it is not meant to kill anyone without provocation," she said. "Muslims also organize such camps in Pakistan to train people how to handle deadly weapons."

The Hindu Council campaign has been bolstered by the 13-year Islamic insurgency in the disputed Himalayan province of Kashmir. India has long accused Pakistan of supporting the militants, a claim Islamabad denies.

The Hindu Council, an ideological affiliate of India's ruling Baharatiya Janata Party, has used the Kashmir insurgency to push its hard-line brand of Hinduism, traditionally a peace-loving religion.

Minorities throughout India and those who defend the country's secular constitution say training young Hindus how to use weapons is neither patriotic nor religious.

"These camps are being organized to scare the minorities," said Sharif Khan Pathan, secretary of the Citizens Relief Service in Gujarat. "We understand that the state government is a sponsor of such activities, but the (federal government) should ban such training camps, as ultimately it is the Muslims who will suffer."

September 30, 2004. Times of India (India).

In Modi's Gujarat, Hitler is a textbook hero

AHMEDABAD: Gandhi is not so great, but Hitler is. Welcome to high school education in Narendra Modi's Gujarat, where authors of social studies textbooks published by the Gujarat State Board of School Textbooks have found faults with the freedom movement and glorified Fascism and Nazism.

While a Class VIII student is taught 'negative aspects' of Gandhi's non-cooperation movement, the Class X social studies textbook has chapters on 'Hitler, the Supremo' and 'Internal Achievements of Nazism'.

The Class X book presents a frighteningly uncritical picture of Fascism and Nazism. The strong national pride that both these phenomena generated, the efficiency in the bureaucracy and the administration and other 'achievements' are detailed, but pogroms against Jews and atrocities against trade unionists, migrant labourers, and any section of people who did not fit into Mussolini or Hitler's definition of rightful citizen don't find any mention." They committed the gruesome and inhuman act of suffocating 60 lakh Jews in gas chambers" is all the book, authored by a panel, mentions of the holocaust.

The section on 'Ideology of Nazism' reads: "Hitler lent dignity and prestige to the German government within a short time by establishing a strong administrative set up. He created the vast state of Greater Germany. He adopted the policy of opposition towards the Jewish people and advocated the supremacy of the German race. He adopted a new economic policy and brought prosperity to Germany.

He began efforts for the eradication of unemployment. He started constructing public buildings, providing irrigation facilities, building railways, roads and production of war materials. He made untiring efforts to make Germany self-reliant within one decade. Hitler discarded the Treaty of Versailles by calling it just 'a piece of paper' and stopped paying the war penalty. He instilled the spirit of adventure in the common people".

A few classes junior, students in Gandhi's home state read that the Bapu really may have been overrated. In the chapter on 'Gandhian Era and National Movement', there's a section sub-headlined 'The Negative Aspect'.