



Coalition Against Genocide

For Immediate Release
March 19, 2005

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AN OPEN LETTER TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF INDIA

Shri Manmohan Singh
Prime Minister
Government of India
South Block, Raisina Hill
New Delhi - 110 011

Dear Prime Minister,

We at the Coalition Against Genocide, representing a wide spectrum of over 35 organizations representing thousands of NRIs, urge you to not contest the U.S. State's denial of a diplomatic visa to Mr. Narendra Modi and the cancellation of his existing tourist/business visa. CAG considers the denial of visa to Mr. Modi as a clear victory for all Indians and for supporters of human rights and justice in the U.S. and in India. Claims made by Mr. Modi and the Sangh Parivar that this represents an "insult to India and the [Indian] Constitution" are laughable, coming as it does from people who have stained the Indian constitution with the blood of thousands of its citizens.

Given that your government had recommended to the American embassy that Mr. Modi be given a multi-entry visa, we can understand your discomfiture at the new turn of events. However, we urge you to look at this not through a nationalistic lens or as a violation of protocol, but to consider the larger issues involved. The complicity of Mr. Modi's government in the February-March 2002 Gujarat pogrom is now public knowledge. Not only was Mr. Modi delinquent in his duties as Chief Minister of Gujarat, but he also effectively demobilized the state apparatus and gave a free hand to his ideological brethren (from the Sangh Parivar) to carry out the killings. This has been affirmed by numerous national and international civil rights organizations and women's groups.

It is also known that Mr. Modi unleashed a virulent campaign against Muslims even after the pogroms and particularly during the campaigning for the December 2002 assembly elections. That the Sangh Parivar's campaign of hate contributed to a stark polarization of the Gujarati civil society along communal lines and eventually resulted in Mr. Modi's electoral victory is also well accepted. (We will be glad to share with you video footage of the divisive ideology of the Sangh at work before the December 2002 assembly elections.) One newspaper aptly called Mr. Modi's victory a "harvest of hatred."

In short, we assert that while accepting that Mr. Modi was elected to power, we also need to remind ourselves of the willful flouting of constitutional and election commission norms in the run up to the assembly elections, the circumstances under which the elections were held, and the human costs of Mr. Modi's electoral victory.



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The issue is not simply of Mr. Modi's devious rise to power. After storming back to power in December 2002, his government has played an active role in shielding the culprits and harassing the survivors, witnesses and social justice groups. In a scathing indictment of Mr. Modi, the Indian Supreme Court pronounced: "The modern day Neros (a reference to the Gujarat Government) were looking elsewhere when Best Bakery and innocent children and women were burning, and were probably deliberating how the perpetrators of the crime can be saved or protected." The Supreme Court also castigated the Gujarat government for shielding the guilty and ordered the re-opening of 2,000-odd riot cases that had been closed in a hurry. Perceiving danger to the victims and witnesses, the Court -- in an unprecedented move -- also shifted some cases outside Gujarat. The Supreme Court's not-so-implicit message was that Mr. Modi cannot be relied upon to discharge his duties.

Mr. Modi has time and again revealed his utter incapability for discharging his constitutional duties, but that hasn't stopped him from loudly proclaiming his constitutional rights as head of state. We aren't the least bit surprised at Mr. Modi's reaction to his visa snub, but we're appalled that the Indian government has lodged a strong protest to the American embassy and asked for an "urgent reconsideration." At this moment, we urge you to think of the valiant struggle for justice waged by the pogrom survivors and human rights activists in Gujarat, and the constant harassment they have faced from Mr. Modi's government and his swayamsevak friends.

Mr. Modi's criminal conduct in India ought to have been the real basis for censure and legal redress. It is unfortunate that the issue had to come down to the U.S. revoking his visa, when the UPA government itself should have acted against Mr. Modi's criminal misrule after it came to power on behalf of the Indian people almost a full year ago. In keeping with your common minimum program, we urge you to take immediate action to ensure speedy justice for the victims of the Gujarat pogrom, and bring the perpetrators to book. We also urge you to curtail the fund-raising activities in the US of hate groups such as the one Mr. Modi belongs to.

On our part, we hope to build on the long tradition of human rights activism in India and the U.S. particularly the awe-inspiring legacies of Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and seek to continue working towards a truly secular and harmonious India - a country without hatred, where people are not persecuted because of their faith or political beliefs, but where (in the immortal words of the great Rabindranath Tagore) the mind is without fear and the head held high.

Yours Sincerely,

Mr. George Abraham, Non Resident Indians for a Secular and Harmonious India
Dr. Angana Chatterji, Professor of Anthropology, California Institute of Integral Studies, San Francisco
Ms. Sapna Gupta, South Asian Progressive Action Collective
Dr. Ashwini Rao, Campaign to Stop Funding Hate
Dr. Shaik Ubaid, Indian Muslim Council
Dr. Usha Zacharias, Professor of Communications, Westfield State College, Massachusetts