

## **April 13, 2002. Frontline (India). Dionne Bunsha.**

### **The crisis of the camps**

CHIEF MINISTER Narendra Modi wants the people in the relief camps to go back home. That would prove his claim that things are back to normal in Gujarat. Almost 1.5 lakh people, who have been hounded out of their homes and live in miserable conditions in 104 relief camps in the State, too would like nothing better than to return home. But there is a hitch - they have no homes to go. And, their lives would be in danger if they leave the camps. More than a month after the Sangh Parivar began a targeted attack against Muslims in the State on February 27, Modi has done nothing to rein in his fellow Sangh members.

In fact, the refugees are at risk even inside a few relief camps in Ahmedabad. The Rajpur relief camp in Gontipur, Ahmedabad, was attacked as recently as March 31. Three persons were injured when a mob threw stones and acid bulbs into the camp, which is housed in a school. "A mob came while we were eating lunch. They broke the tent where medical check-ups are done," said Rashidaben Ghulam Nabi, a refugee. "This is the second time they have attacked us in the relief camp. The first was around March 15, when the Ram temple construction was to start," she said. She alleged that certain BJP leaders paid Dalits to do that.

Rashidaben's few desperate attempts to sneak back to the charred ruins of her home in Parmanand Chawl, near the relief camp, proved dangerous. "They flashed knives and told us to leave," she said. However, government officials were ordered to convince the refugees to return to their homes. They were asked to reduce the numbers in the camps before Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee visited the State. "Officials from the Collector's office had assured us that they would provide us security to go back home. But a day after we sent the applications for police escort, we were attacked again in the relief camp. There is no home to go back to either," said another refugee in the Rajpur camp.

But the government persists with its public relations drive. Violence rages on the streets and no alternative housing is offered to the refugees, and still a drive is on to get rid of the refugees and whitewash the truth. There have been reports of government officials telling victims that they would not get compensation until they returned home. The Ahmedabad Collector, however, denied that people were being told to go back home.

Even as the government wants the refugees to leave the camps, more and more people are seeking refuge and new relief camps are being set up every day as violence continues. Even empty houses are being burned.

In Ahmedabad alone, the number of camps rose, from 44 to 53 in the first week of April. "As violence continues, more people keep pouring in every day. With more than 10,000 people here, we have no room. But we cannot turn anyone away. Even the rations supplied by the government are not enough," says Munirbhai Sheikh, a volunteer at Ahmedabad's Shah Alam relief camp, the largest such camp in the State.

Conditions in the Shah Alam camp were pathetic until recently. There were no adequate medical facilities. With no transport and with a curfew on, two women delivered their babies in a graveyard and another inside a rickshaw. There were less than 20 toilets for 10,500 people. People put up with the scorching heat as they had not even a tent over their heads. But when the Prime Minister decided to visit the camp, the place was transformed. A day before the visit, government officials swarmed to the camp and worked overtime to clean it up, install more toilets and water tanks, put up tents, stock up supplies and distribute Rs.1,250 as immediate compensation for loss of belongings. That was the first time that such compensation was distributed. At the Dariya Khan Ghummat camp in Shahibaug, Ahmedabad, which Vajpayee was to visit, distribution of compensation began but was stalled midway when he decided to cancel his visit there.

At the Shah Alam camp, Vajpayee was the symbol of remorse. "It is a matter of great shame that people have become refugees in their own land, homeless in their own home. The way you have been made to live in relief camps is also a matter of great shame to us," he said. The Prime Minister's April 4 visit also marked the first time that the Chief Minister, or any other Minister in the State, had visited the camp. While an outraged Vajpayee expressed shame at the atrocities, refugees booed Modi, shouting: "He is the killer." Survivors of the worst massacres after Godhra, such as the one in Naroda Patia where 91 people were burnt alive, have sought shelter here. Ministers have been actively trying to empty refugees from relief camps rather than looking to their welfare. Instead of ensuring that rations reached the camps, Food and Civil Supplies Minister Bharat Barot had been shooting off letters to Home Minister Gordhan Zadaphia asking him to close down three relief camps in his Daryapur-Kazipur constituency because his Hindu voters felt insecure with relief camps remaining close to their homes.

The Prime Minister made fiery speeches, but the State government has done almost nothing by way of relief and rehabilitation. Whatever little has been done is either because of voluntary workers or because Vajpayee pulled up Modi for his inaction. Collectors started supplying rations to relief camps only a week after the violence began. The government has not set up a single relief camp. They are all run by local Muslim communities and trusts. The BJP has set up "Hindu relief camps" for a handful of Hindus living in Muslim-dominated areas, who also fled when Muslims were attacked.

While the government is supplying minimal rations, groups such as the Citizens Initiative are providing other essentials such as clothes, blankets and soaps. Some citizens filed a petition in the Gujarat High Court to prevent the State government from evading its responsibility to provide basic facilities. Ironically, there have been times when the Collector's office called up voluntary organisations asking them to help supply grain to a particular camp that was not yet registered.

## ***Modi: Architect of Gujarat Genocide. Denial of Relief to Victims***

IN the villages, the camps are much worse off. Government help had not reached the 800-odd refugees in Hadgol village in Anand district for over a month. The camp organisers' application for registration was still being processed. "People of the local Muslim basti have been so generous, contributing food and putting us up in their homes for the past one month. The government has done nothing," said Munna Divan, one of the refugees who tried to organise relief.

On March 27 Modi was summoned to Delhi by a displeased Vajpayee, who told him to pull up his socks and put together a relief and rehabilitation plan. Soon after his return to Gujarat, Modi set up an all-party committee for relief, which would be headed by the Governor. The word 'rehabilitation' was conveniently left out of the government resolution (GR) announcing the committee's formation. It was only after some Opposition members refused to join unless the term 'rehabilitation' was included, that the Chief Minister agreed that it would be part of the package. The GR was yet to be amended.

The State government's compensation offer has also been criticised, since it constitutes considerably less than what was offered to the victims of the Kutch earthquake. Housing compensation for those affected by the riots has been fixed at a maximum of Rs.50,000, as compared to Rs.1.75 lakhs for the earthquake-affected people. Those seriously injured in the communal violence would be given Rs.50,000, while other injured people would be given Rs.25,000. In comparison, those who became paraplegics are given Rs.3 lakhs each in Kutch. However, compensation to the next of kin of those killed was increased from Rs.1 lakh to Rs.1.5 lakhs by Vajpayee; the Centre would contribute two-thirds of the amount.

Rehabilitation still seems a long way off as the violence continues. The government is still fumbling with basic relief. Besides food and clothes, space is another precious commodity. Around 10,000 people are cramped into the Shah Alam relief camp. Many sleep in the graveyard. The silence of the night is punctuated by screams of children, who wake up reliving the terror of the carnage they witnessed.

Hounded out of their homes and now with attempts being made to push them out of relief camps, the nightmare does not seem to end for the refugees of Gujarat's relief camps more than a month after it all began.

### **June 24, 2002. Hindustan Times (India). Modi Govt turns the screws on relief camps**

Ahmedabad, June 24. Despite official assurances that the riot-hit people living in relief camps would not be forced to go back till the process of rehabilitation is complete, the Gujarat Government is resorting to many subtle ways to see that they close down as early as possible. On Monday, many relief camps received either inadequate ration supplies or none at all. Camp organisers said the Behrampura camp housing 250 families and Gangshohda Kabristan housing 1,500 people has been closed down from Monday evening as the ration supplies were stopped in the morning.

At the Shah Alam camp, the biggest in the state, the organisers refused to accept the ration for just 3,000 people saying the number of inmates there still stood at around 4,500 – mostly from Naroda Patiya who are too scared to return home.

Another 52 families staying in the camp mobbed the Shah Alam camp organisers Monday evening as they were told about the stoppage of their rations. The Citizen Relief Service had to assure them that their ration needs would be borne by the organisers for some more days.

While the government's offer of free ration for six months to Below Poverty Line families has worked as carrot for many to leave the camps, the alleged threats of fabricated cases against camp organizers has worked as the stick.

The ruling BJP, it is said, wants to see the camps closed to show that normalcy has indeed returned to the state and to convince the Election Commission and the critics that the situation in the state is conducive for a snap poll.

Besides, the deteriorating hygiene conditions in the camps may lead to an epidemic when the monsoon hits the state.

### **July, 2002. Frontline (India). Vol.19. Iss.14. Dionne Bunsha. Refugees without refuge**

The government wants them out of the camps, while their homes are yet to be rebuilt. And payment of compensation is inadequate and erratic. The victims of Gujarat face an ever-increasing plight.

WHEN government officials in Vadodara ordered the closure of every relief camp except one, into which they crammed all the refugees, Zubeidabibi Mansoori was among those who were persuaded to return home. Two days later she was back at the camp. "They sent us from the camp even though our house had not been repaired. A fight broke out in the neighbourhood and we had to leave home once again," she said. By then the camp had become too crowded and Zubeidabibi's family and others from her neighbourhood were wondering where to go, when a builder offered to let them stay at one of his sites.

First, like most of the victims of the communal violence in Gujarat they were attacked and had to flee their homes with nothing but the clothes on their backs. Then they hid in street corners, fields and forests for days. When they

## ***Modi: Architect of Gujarat Genocide. Denial of Relief to Victims***

made it to the relief camps, they lived in the most miserable conditions for three months, with no hope of returning. Many had no choice but to live in graveyards. Now, with the Gujarat government adamant about shutting down the camps, the refugees are left to fend for themselves. Although the government has stopped supplies to several camps, hundreds of refugees continue to live there. They cannot go back home because either they are still threatened or they do not have the money to rebuild their homes.

At the Shah Alam relief camp in Ahmedabad, where the government is supplying rations enough for 7,300 people, although the camp shelters 12,150 refugees.

The Gujarat government claims that there are only 16 camps, housing 16,495 people, all over the State. However, a survey conducted on June 19 by Citizens Initiative, a prominent group of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) which is providing supplies to the camps, counted 30 camps in Ahmedabad alone, sheltering 38,200 homeless people. The government claims that there are only six camps in rural Gujarat. But it is well-known that many more exist; they have been delisted and supplies to them stopped. It is all said to be part of the Bharatiya Janata Party government's cover-up operation. It is apparently trying to get rid of the refugees in order to prove that the State is ready for Assembly elections. The BJP is hoping to win the elections by riding the Hindutva wave and taking advantage of the terror that the Sangh Parivar has spread during the recent pogrom against Muslims.

"The government has stopped the supply of everything - food, water, electricity - in the camp," said Amanullah Khan, an organiser of the Vadali camp in Sabarkantha district. "We have 1,000 refugees in the Vadali camp. In our district there are five or six camps," he added. While the Gujarat government claimed that camps no longer existed in Sabarkantha, Khan maintained that people who went back to their villages were returning to the camps. "Just yesterday, around 100 people came back," Khan told Frontline on June 25. "They are threatened by local leaders. Some are facing an economic and social boycott. Others are scared of what may happen on July 12, when the Jagannath Rath Yatra procession will be taken out. Riots have broken out during this festival in the past," said Khan.

The monsoon will make life in the camps even more difficult. A survey of 19 camps in Ahmedabad, conducted from June 14 to 18 by the Citizens Initiative, showed that only nine had made arrangements to shelter people during the monsoon. This and the possibility that the camps may be shut down anytime have seen many people moving into their relatives' homes or to rented houses. The camps need Rs.30 worth of rations per person daily, whereas the government provides supplies (both in cash and in kind) worth only Rs.7. Medical care is also inadequate. The survey showed that four camps had not received any medical aid and that jaundice was spreading in five camps. Although legal assistance is urgently needed, only four camps have received offers of legal aid.

But the government remains unconcerned. "Short of throwing people out on the streets, officials are using every tactic to pressure people into leaving," said an organiser of Citizens Initiative. "They have stopped ration and water supplies. Monsoon shelters haven't been built. They tell people that they will not get three months' free ration, to which they are entitled, unless they leave the camp." Even registered camps are not supplied the full ration quotas. At the Shah Alam camp in Ahmedabad, the biggest in Gujarat, the government is supplying rations enough for 7,300 people, although the camp shelters 12,150 refugees. "Officials take a head count in the camp in the afternoon, when most people are out. They are unwilling to accept the numbers listed in the camp register," said the Citizens Initiative organiser.

"How long can the government feed them?" asked S.M.F. Bukhari, the State government's chief coordinator of relief. "We have given them cheques to repair their homes and also sufficient time to construct their homes," he said. When it was pointed out that 70 per cent of the people had not received any compensation and that in the case of those who were given cheques the amounts were often as low as Rs.71 and averaged between Rs.2,000 and 3,000, Bukhari said: "What we are giving is assistance, not compensation. Aid is given as per the government engineers' estimates." So far the government has spent Rs.62.08 crores on rehabilitation. With Chief Minister Narendra Modi claiming that 95 per cent of the rehabilitation work is complete, how the rest of the Rs.150-crore Central aid will be used remains to be seen.

Rehabilitation is not merely distributing cheques. In Halol, a camp that has vanished from government records, several refugees want to return home before the monsoon but have not been able to. "We have a lot of land. We want to go back before the monsoon and put up the roof of our house. But the sarpanch would not let us return. The police arranged several meetings with them, but they say they don't want Muslims in their village. It is our village as well," said Madinabibi Pathan from Pavagad village in Panchmahals district.

Chief Minister Narendra Modi has claimed that 95 per cent of the rehabilitation work is complete. The government has so far spent Rs 62.08 crores on rehabilitation and it remains to be seen how the rest of the Rs.150-crore Central aid will be used.

People from Randhikpur village, in Panchmahals district, have also not been able to return home. Many have camped in nearby Baria village after the Godhra relief camp was shut down. They are still waiting for tempers to cool down and to be accepted back into the village. Several Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) leaders in the area have been named as accused in the cases of mass murder, rape and looting of Muslims in the village and these people are now trying to intimidate the victims into getting the police cases withdrawn. In the few places where voluntary organisations are helping people rebuild their houses, they are finding it hard to recruit local workers. "They are still scared to have any kind of interaction with the Muslim community," said Sejal Dand, from Anandi, an NGO that is rebuilding homes at Boru village in Panchmahals district. In some places, Hindu residents are being forced by local leaders and goons to boycott Muslims socially and economically.

Although the government insists that Gujarat is back to normal, stray incidents of violence continue. In Vadodara, at least four minor clashes occurred in June. With many of their assailants still unpunished, Muslims do not think it is safe to return home. The appointment of K.P.S. Gill, former Director-General of Punjab Police, as security adviser to the Gujarat government has not been as effective as the media projected it would be. The police are still to take action against many of the accused, and several cases have not yet been filed. For example, in Ahmedabad, only 936 cases have been registered and 3,900 people arrested, a small number considering that 440 people died and around 60,000 were made homeless in the city.

Gujarat's refugees may have disappeared from government lists, but they still remain in the relief camps or in their relatives' houses, waiting to go back home. Only genuine help, rather than coercion, will actually reduce their numbers in the camps.

### **August 12, 2002. Times of India (India). Sanjay Pandey and Radha Sharma.**

#### **Don't ignore us, plead Shah Alam riot victims**

AHMEDABAD: The hunger is reflected in their faces. But, nobody is even glancing at the pile of food in the Shah-e-Alam relief camp here. For, as President A P J Abdul Kalam embarks on his tour of Gujarat, the 2,000-strong inmates of this camp are protesting against the arrest of one of the organisers and Kalam giving their camp a go by.

"We decided to go on hunger strike to drive home a point to the President. We want him to know that we are still not safe in this state and the fact that our apprehensions were right was proved by the late night arrest of Sharif Khan Pathan," says an angry Zeenat Bibi, who has not eaten since morning. Even the children of the camp were prevented from having any food.

While rage over Pathan's arrest is sweeping this camp, people are also "hurt" by the President's decision not to visit them. "The President chose to visit Naroda Patiya, while all the victims of that area are staying in this camp," says U H Mallik, the camp in-charge.

People have also put up placards that say -- "Humse milna hai to yahan aiye" and "Hum Khandahar mein nahin,rahat shibir mein rahte hain."

Kalam sahab Naroda Patiya kyon ja rahen hain. Woh to kabrasthan ban gaya hai (Why is the President visiting Naroda Patiya. The place is now a graveyard)," wonders Zeenat Bibi. "We have heard that cash doles have been given on Sunday to the inmates of the Haj House camp, which the President visited. However, no such doles were given to us. This proves that the government wants to put up a show before the President," laments Mohammad Hanif.

And, beneath the raging anger is a sense of despair. "He should have come here," is a refrain across the camp. "The President is a pious Muslim and hence, he can never go back on his word. We wish he came here as he would have delivered what he promised. He would never have gone back on promises like Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, who said something here and then did a volte-face in their party meeting at Goa," says Hanif.

### **August 15, 2002. Times of India (India). Malini Ghose.**

#### **Surviving on the Edge in Gujarat**

Four months ago, as a member of a women's fact-finding team, I visited several camps in rural and urban Gujarat. I spoke to scores of women survivors and recorded their testimonies. The violence, the destruction, the despair, the horror slapped you in the face. You could not escape it.

Last week, I returned to Panchmahals district to visit Halol, Kalol and Godhra talukas. This time too I could not escape the horror of situation but for different reasons.

The camps don't exist, so you do not see the hundreds of dispossessed people huddled under makeshift shambles or the open sky. There are no serpentine queues outside the community kitchens. No groups of traumatised women narrating how they watched their family members being killed. No one tells you in a voice choked by betrayal that the mobs were full of familiar faces, people with whom 'hum saath uthte baithte the' or 'bachpan se hum jaante the'.

Things have certainly changed in Panchmahals. Forced to leave the camps, people are now scattered in rented houses around the taluka headquarters where the camps once were, or living in camp-like situations. They visit their homes in the daytime, and, too scared to stay there at night, go to stay with relatives or acquaintances. Some have been forbidden to return, some are too terrified to try, others are simply without the means. A few have returned to their villages but live ostracised and constantly fearful. They don't talk of justice, because they know it is not to be had. They just want to survive. They want to be allowed to make a living.

So what slaps you in the face now is not the brutality of the riot, but the normalisation of daily life under threat of violence. It is cynical and sinister and — if your standards of humanity are low enough — entirely normal.

We were sitting in what continues to be the Halol camp office, although the camp has long been closed. A slight woman with an intense face walked in and introduced herself as Kulsum Abdul Ismail. Her sister-in-law, nephew

## ***Modi: Architect of Gujarat Genocide. Denial of Relief to Victims***

and parents-in-law were killed in the massacre. She lived in Delol, and what remains of her family now stays in a rented room in Halol.

She told us, "I did not think that things could get worse. But they have. Since the camp closed down on June 30 we have had no income, no house, no food. The rations we got after the camp closed lasted about 15 days. I do not cook more than one meal a day". Kulsum cannot think of going back because "they will not let us".

I meet Rashida, a young widow with three children in what used to be the Kalol camp. Like Kulsum, she is homeless. She cannot go back to her home in Talav, on the edge of Kalol town.

With her two-year-old on her hip and the five-year-old hanging on to her kurta, she told me about her situation and that of 17 other Muslim families who lived in homes built on a reclaimed pond. After they fled from their attackers on March 1 their neighbours moved in, fenced the area and now deny them entry. They have no papers for the land. Rashida worked as a rag picker.

Believe it or not, she has lost her source of livelihood. Why? The other rag pickers are Hindu; they do not want her back. The garbage dumps are in Hindu localities and she is scared to go there. With the camp shut she does not know how to feed her family. She does not have a relief ration card and often does not eat herself.

Her situation is not unique. Of the 88 Muslim families of Talav, 50 don't have relief ration cards. So yes, you could say Rashida's situation too is 'normal'. To see what life is like for people who have returned, I visited the pilgrim town of Pavagarh. Nearly half of Pavagarh's 40 Muslim families have returned — with heavy police security and after long drawn-out negotiations between the administration and members of both communities.

The 'recent settlers' i.e. non-landowning Muslims who settled in Pavagarh in the last 10-15 years would not be allowed back. The lucky few will now have to find new vocations. Their stalls have been seized, they are not allowed to take out hand-carts or to drive the jeep taxis that ferry pilgrims to the religious shrines on the hill. I talked to Imtiaz who remembers the days before 'normalcy' — six months ago Imtiaz ran a cold drinks stall. "We had a fridge, colour TV, sofa. Now we don't have soap to bathe. Rs 5 ka sabun nahin kharid sakte".

We met Mahendra, the prosperous deputy sarpanch of Pavagarh in the godown of his large provision shop. Several Muslims told us that he is a relatively reasonable man. He is certainly candid: "We told them not to return but the police and the government have forced them back on us. Now it is up to them to normalise things. If the Muslims are not being allowed to run their businesses they should tell the authorities — it's not our concern". Back in Delhi, I hear Arun Jaitley call the situation in Gujarat 'normal'. And I'm afraid I know just what he means.

### **August 28, 2002. Indian Express (India).**

#### **The biggest camp's shut but 5,000 are still living as refugees**

Ahmedabad, August 28: IT is exactly six months since the Sabarmati Express fire devoured the delicate fabric of brotherhood that existed in the city. The riots made many homeless, forcing them into relief camps. Last week, the largest of these, the Shah Alam Relief Camp was officially closed, imparting a semblance of normality.

But, there are still 11 camps in the city. Some official, some unofficial. About 4,996 refugees live in these camps — 4,610 in official relief camps and about 386 in unofficial ones that were closed months ago! Lack of compensation or inadequate compensation has forced the inmates to stay put. But, S M F Bhukhari, officer on special duty, is aware of only three such camps. Explaining why the camps are still running, he says: "We asked the inmates to shift to Haj House but they refused."

Sankalit Nagar Relief Camp, Juhapura

Number of Refugees: 1,398

Status: recognised

THIS camp was set up during the first week of March and most of the inmates are from Vatva, Sarkhej and the surrounding areas. A few of them have been shifted to the Sonal Cinema Camp for convenience. Both the camps share the ration provided by the Collectorate. These inmates claim to have no place to go, as their houses were completely destroyed during the riots.

Haj House Relief Camp

Number of inmates: 1,000

Status: recognised

OPENED only a month ago, Haj House is probably the only systematically run relief camp. Riot victims from Jamalpur, Behrampura, Gomtipur, Rakhial, Chamanpura and Odhav, who became homeless after the Collectorate began closing down relief camps, found shelter here. These refugees no longer have any houses to return or are too afraid to go back.

Quresh Hall, Mirzapur and Rangila Police Station, Shahpur

Number of inmates: 1,000 and 508 respectively

Status: both recognised

## ***Modi: Architect of Gujarat Genocide. Denial of Relief to Victims***

BOTH the camps opened on February 28 and are provided ration by the Collectorate. Most of the riot-hit from Meghaninagar and Chamanpura shifted to Qureshi Hall after the Dariyakhan Ghummat Camp was closed down last month. While, inmates of Shahpur camp belong to Prem Darwaja, Saijpur, Rakhial and Shahpur.

Saiyadwada, Khanpur and Vatva Darga  
Number of Refugees: 475 and 229 respectively  
Status: both recognised

OPENED on February 28, the inmates of these two camps have been living here for exactly six months. The inmates of Khanpur camp belong to Shahpur, Khanpur and Naroda areas, while Vatva Darga shelters refugees from Vatva itself. These inmates have nowhere to go as their houses have not been reconstructed yet.

Jahagir Nagar Camp, Vatva  
Number of inmates: 150  
Status: officially closed

FOR the past six months, about 150 residents of Vanarvat Talav have been living in this camp, which was declared closed three months ago. Their houses completely destroyed, the refugees refuse to return. About 60 inmates claim to have received no compensation money including the cash dole of Rs 1,250 for household goods. Since most of them are unemployed, they are provided ration by the local NGOs.

Jia Camp, Vatva  
Number of inmates: 120  
Status: officially closed

RESIDENTS of Navapura and Vanarvat Talav, which were badly affected during the riots, shelter here. This camp was declared closed three months ago. While a few have shifted to other camps or to their relative's place, the inmates claim they have no other place to go. They, too, are provided ration by the local NGOs.

Rajpur Tol Naka Relief Camp  
Number of inmates: 51  
Status: officially closed

TEN families of Bhogilal-Ni-Chali in Gomtipur reside in this camp. They do not depend on any organisation for food as the male members are daily wagers. But, the inmates refuse to return as their houses were badly damaged during the riots.

Ram-Rahim Nagar Relief Camp  
Number of inmates: 45  
Status: officially closed

RIOT-HIT from Ghyasiram Ni Chali shelter at this camp which was officially closed two months ago. As their houses were damaged beyond repair during riots, some refugees have shifted to rented houses while others continue to live here. Most of them earn and cook their own meals. They promise to return as soon as the houses are reconstructed.

Jamalpur Relief Camp  
Number of inmates: 20  
Status: officially closed

TWO families of Dhobi-Ni-Chali at Jamalpur Crossroads reside here. Due to inadequate compensation, the members cannot repair their damaged houses and return. The male members works as pedal-rickshaw driers. For the past three months, they are the only ones living here. Neither the organisers nor the authorities help them any longer.

### **September, 2002. Frontline (India). Vol.19, Iss.19. Harsh Mander.**

#### **Before it is too late: The wanton subversion of relief and rehabilitation in Gujarat.**

THE survivors of the brutal mass violence in Gujarat today long, above all, just to get on with life. Many have been bereaved, an even greater number have been pauperised, and an entire community is alienated and traumatised. A large majority of those battered by the carnage are working class people, and with their characteristic mix of resilience, industry, fatalism and optimism, barely six months after the inferno devastated their homes, lives and trust, more than anything else they wish to pick up the frayed and tenuous strings of their lives, and begin all over again.

The relief camps in Ahmedabad and the rest of the state are now almost empty. To an external observer, this may lend credence to the State government's claims that normalcy has been restored, that rehabilitation has been accomplished, and that allegations that the survivors remain destitute and insecure are part of the mischievous propaganda of activists and politicians who have a vested interest to keep the communal cauldron simmering. This would have been true if the State had established relief camps, ensured justice and security, and mobilised the State machinery to muster the resources that the affected women, men and children would need to rebuild their homes and livelihoods. Such official efforts are elementary to good governance and a civilised polity, and since Independence this has indeed been the stated policy of governments in India in all instance of such major

## ***Modi: Architect of Gujarat Genocide. Denial of Relief to Victims***

tragedies. There may have been failures of relief and rehabilitation, but not its open, wanton and deliberate perversion.

Public authorities in Gujarat not only refused to extend relief, or rehabilitate those destroyed by the waves of mass violence that followed the horrific torching of a railway compartment in Godhra, but systematically created roadblocks for other agencies which attempted to substitute for the State and forced the closure of relief camps after giving people a pittance to compensate for their losses. This impunity of the State is, in some ways, more grave than its complicity in the massacre that occurred in the wake of the tragedy in Godhra. This is because such impunity is unprecedented in the experience of independent India and also because the State authorities remain brazen and determined in their denial, unmoved by the enormity of the suffering of a section of its people, by the outrage of constitutional agencies such as the National Human Rights Commission and the Election Commission, by judicial pronouncements, by media exposure, and by petitions at all levels including the highest in the land, by activists, concerned citizens and affected people.

The denial of relief and rehabilitation by the government of Gujarat is a harrowing and disgraceful tale of a premeditated, unrepentant, merciless and perverse exercise of public authority. It began in the immediate aftermath of the mass violence. Terrified survivors, women, men, girls and boys, fled to enclaves of safety that they located, with only the clothes on their backs. These shelters were mostly open spaces in Muslim ghettos in cities, towns and villages; places of worship; schools; parks; and sometimes graveyards. Initially, people slept under the open sky. As the numbers continued to swell, to well over a hundred thousand people in Ahmedabad alone and more than half that number in other parts of the State, voluntary teams were formed, mostly in a spontaneous manner, to manage the camps. These teams mustered stockpiles of food supplies, medicines and drinking water, organised facilities for sanitation, and arranged cooks and health and sanitary workers.

As the weeks and months elapsed, the State was barely visible amidst these admirable but austere self-help efforts of the affected communities. After almost 10 days, the district administration began to supply the camps with uncooked food rations and arrange occasional visits of medical teams. In the two decades that I spent in the civil services, I have never observed a single instance earlier when the State did not lead relief operations after a major disaster, human-made or natural. The organisation of relief and rehabilitation is central to the training and traditions of the civil services. Governments in the past may have faltered in the outcomes of their programmes. But the Gujarat carnage of 2002 marks a sordid first in which civil service functionaries consented to merciless political dictates and cooperated to abdicate responsibility for relief and, over time, even to thwart community efforts to provide shelter and succour to the hapless survivors.

The facilities that the organisers of the camps could muster for sanitation, bathing and drinking water were painfully inadequate, bereft as they were of state support. The Sahmat (Safdar Hashmi Memorial Trust) fact-finding team in March found only one mobile toilet with four chambers for nearly 9,000 people in the Shah-e-Alam camp. A month later the numbers in the camp had swelled to a high of 12,000 but there were only 18 toilets. Even these became badly clogged as they were rarely cleaned, and emanated a nauseating stench and attracted swarms of flies. Often they were completely dysfunctional.

The summer temperatures were pitiless, and the mercury pushed to 45°C, sometimes higher. Life in the relief shelters became even harder - old people, children and women listlessly sought shade under the tattered shamianas or the few trees that dotted the graveyards and open grounds. The residents of the camps were even more threatened with the arrival of the monsoons. State authorities refused, despite repeated representations, court injunctions and even a delegation led by former Prime Minister I.K. Gujral to the Prime Minister, to build rain-proof shelters to protect the survivors from the ravages of the rains. Across the city of Ahmedabad, there are a number of massive disused buildings of long-closed cotton mills and the permission of courts could have been sought to provide them shelter in these buildings. The stubborn refusal of the State authorities to build or requisition adequate shelters suggests that they hoped that the onset of the monsoon would result in the forced closure of all camps and establish a mirage of normalcy in the run-up to the announcement of Assembly elections.

However, local organisations such as the Citizen's Initiative in Ahmedabad mustered donations of cash, materials and voluntary labour to erect rain-proof shelters in several camps. Blue plastic sheets stretched out on bamboo scaffolding afforded the most minimal protection to the residents of the camps. But as sheets of rain fell continuously in the early days of the monsoon (which subsequently failed), women miserably clutched their children around them and rainwater gathered in puddles and dirty, unruly streams in the low-lying graveyards and open grounds where the camps were located.

The camps gradually emptied as all except the most terrified or destitute residents left for their old damaged homes, or to live with relatives within or outside the State. Or, dozens of people crowded together, in small hired rooms in Muslim ghettos. After the onset of the monsoon in late June, some 20,000 people remained in around 27 camps in Ahmedabad. Unmoved by their plight, the district administration pasted notices at several of these camps, demanding that they be disbanded and the residents dispersed or relocated. The State government even stopped the supply of food and occasional medical supplies. The notice from the District Collector added ominously that if people persisted with staying in the camps, the government would not be responsible if any 'aafat', or calamity, overcame them.

The Collector, when contacted, insisted that he only wanted to relocate the residents to the big camps, Shah-e-Alam and Dariyakan Ghummat, where facilities would continue to be extended. However, people refused to move there because they wanted to remain close to their old homes, which they were now trying to rebuild, or to find some kind of casual work. The Collector could not explain how he was going to provide shelter and facilities to

## ***Modi: Architect of Gujarat Genocide. Denial of Relief to Victims***

more residents in the big camps when the government had provided absolutely no protection from rain and had offered only minimal facilities for sanitation and drinking water even to their original population.

### **DIONNE BUNSHA**

Rebuilding homes in Naroda Patiya, Ahmedabad, where around 112 people were killed in a communal attack. Even now many people visit their homes only during the day.

The camp organisers increasingly found themselves under intense official pressure to close the camps. Starved of food supplies, some camps persisted for two months or more with donations raised by voluntary organisations. A small number of camps continue to operate, but are without food supplies. They are just primitive covered spaces that extend a bare semblance of shelter to internal refugees with nowhere to go. One by one, even the big camps, such as Dariyakan Ghummat and Shah-e-Alam, were closed. The camp organisers today face the continuing wrath of the hapless residents who were turned away from the camps at short notice. But they defend themselves with stories of diverse arm-twisting techniques resorted to by a doggedly hostile administration.

Matters have become worse with the State government's 'compensation' for the loss of lives, injuries and for homes, business establishments and livelihoods destroyed. 'Compensation' is a heartless, callous word. What in the world can compensate the violent, barbarous death or rape of loved ones; the destruction of one's home with all its dreams and memories; or the loss of work that gives one dignity and succour? Instead, one should perhaps talk more humbly of 'government assistance' to help the survivors to rebuild what they have lost.

In human-made and natural disasters of the past, the government has never been able to substitute for all the economic losses suffered by a family. But the grants and soft loans were designed to be sufficient, at least in theory, to enable the survivors to craft a new beginning and eventually restore themselves to their old situation. In Gujarat, there is even no such claim. Take shelters, for instance. The Prime Minister, in his sole encounter with the survivors of the carnage, in the Shah-e-Alam camp in Ahmedabad, announced an assistance of Rs.50,000 for every destroyed or damaged home. The government interpreted this assurance to define the ceiling for compensation for damaged housing (which, incidentally, is far lower than the Rs.90,000 ceiling for earthquake victims in Gujarat a year earlier), and set a limit of Rs.5,000. For all movable property in the house - clothes, gadgets, jewellery, money, utensils, everything that a poor or middle-class family has accumulated through years of industry and saving - the families were compensated at a flat rate of Rs.2,500.

In my own survey in the Vatwa Jehangir Nagar camp in Ahmedabad, I found that the compensation paid was drastically lower than the officially estimated damage to houses and no explanation was provided for this. Firozeshai Peerozi received Rs.3,000 against a damage assessment of Rs.90,000. Abdul Bhai was given the same amount for losses recorded at Rs.45,000. Asghar Bhai Abbasi received Rs.4,900 for a loss recorded at Rs.75,000. Mehboobshai Ansari got Rs.21,750 to compensate losses recorded at Rs.2,41,600.

It would be impossible for any family to rebuild their homes with such paltry sums. Their crisis is aggravated because, in a decisive and cruel departure from the past, soft loans for housing or livelihoods are not being extended to the survivors. Apart from some niggardly grants, they have had no support from public institutions to reconstruct their homes.

The abdication is even greater in the matter of livelihoods. There are no government circulars to compensate for damage to business establishments, factory buildings, shops, machines or merchandise. Likewise, no compensation is available for losses to agricultural implements.

There is one government circular which says that small shopkeepers and those with self-owned earning assets such as hand-carts, sheds, cabins and vehicles which have suffered damage will be granted ex-gratia relief up to Rs.10,000. Another brutal departure from past policy is the decision to converge grants and soft loans under various government schemes and public institutions to assist people whose livelihoods are crippled by riots. The government order explicitly debars persons who have received assistance under this scheme from being eligible for any other government grant or loan.

In the Jehangir Nagar camp, 22-year-old Noor Bano clutches her infant son who was born in the camp. The camp is officially closed; the government stopped supplying rations two months ago and the once thriving common kitchen has wound up. But almost 800 people continue to live in the camp because they have nowhere to go. Just five days before the monsoon broke over Ahmedabad, volunteers from an autorickshaw union in Andhra Pradesh toiled round the clock with young men from the camp to build rain-proof shelters which provide them some protection. But food is scarce, and Noor Bano's husband Sirajuddin looks around for casual work when he does not do the volunteer's work of accompanying patients from the camp to the hospital. They owned a hand-cart, sold plastic toys and utensils, and lived as tenants in Nawapara Darbanagar. With Noor Bano, in an advanced stage of pregnancy, and with their two small sons, they fled to the safety of this camp when the violence broke out. Their hand-cart was destroyed and their home was burnt and looted; not a shred remains. They received a cheque for Rs.1,800 for the damage to their home but gave this to their landlord when he demanded it from them. An aid agency gave them a hand-cart, but without working capital they are trapped and continue to live in a camp that the government refuses to recognise.

Halima, who stays in the same camp, was abandoned by her husband 18 years ago. She used to work as a part-time domestic help, and also plied a hand-cart, selling vegetables. The cart was burnt, her employment was terminated and her house burnt. Against an official damage assessment of Rs.90,000, she was offered a cheque for Rs.3,000. She initially refused to accept it, but was advised that she should take what she was given. She has



## ***Modi: Architect of Gujarat Genocide. Denial of Relief to Victims***

returned to her home. A voluntary organisation plastered her damaged walls with cement, but they are fragile and could fall any time. She scrubs the burnt tiles and there is no electricity and water supply. She languishes there during the day but at night returns to the security and comradeship of the camps.

HUMANE standards of relief and rehabilitation seemed light years away when I made one of the most painful journeys of my life, exactly six months after the massacre. It was a trek of less than a kilometre, in the bylanes of Naroda, witness to the most brutal bloodshed in the history of Ahmedabad.

With me were 'aman pathiks', or peace workers, young people who had volunteered to serve and heal in response to our call after the carnage. Following the forced closure of Shah-e-Alam camp a few days earlier, refugees had been coerced to return with their families to what remained of their homes in this settlement of dread. Some slept in a cramped madrassa, others with relatives. As we walked, they pointed to the remains of their homes. Tenement after tenement of charred houses, collapsed masonry, cracked walls, open skies, burnt heaps, all crowded with aching memories. They recreated for us the ghoulish events, the murders, burning, rape, the terror, the escape, and the ones who could not get away.

As we walked, our eyes repeatedly clouded and our shoulders stooped. This is not the country that we have loved and been nurtured by. We must reclaim it. Or one day it may be too late.

### **September 15, 2002. The Hindu (India). NRIs deplore Govt. apathy to Gujarat riot victims**

NEW DELHI SEPT. 14. A group of NRIs from the U.S. today deplored the Government machinery for "failing to provide much relief to the victims of communal riots and disbursing a paltry amount of money in the name of rehabilitation."

Speaking to the press here at the end of their nine-day "Sadbhavana Mission" to Gujarat and New Delhi, 12 delegates from New York, North Carolina, Chicago, Delaware, Washington, Maryland, New Jersey, Michigan and California expressed deep anguish over what has been happening over the past six months in Gujarat under the "State Government's patronage." The delegation included Nishrin Hussain, daughter of the former Congress MP, Ahsan Jafri, who was killed in the riots.

"During our visit to different parts of the riot-hit State, we found the situation far more grim than what is being reported in the media. With the Government removing relief camps, the victims are on the verge of starvation as they have no means of livelihood. Though there are some relief camps being run by different organisations, no official help is reaching them," said the delegation leader, Shrikumar Poddar.

Expressing dismay over the lack of response and help from the people in carrying out relief operations, Mr. Poddar said unlike the relief operations taken up after the devastating earthquake in the State where members of all communities, businessmen and corporate houses from all over the country helped, this time around not many people, particularly from other regions have come forward to help the victims of the communal riots.

Another member, Raju Rajogopal, said the delegation met organisers of over 20 relief camps and everyone complained that the minority community was left helpless during the "State-sponsored terrorism" when innocent citizens were being massacred. "We have come here to seek answers as to why all this has happened. We condemn the Godhra killings, but what followed was equally deplorable. People outside are not fully aware of the plight of the victims. We need to do something urgently," he said.

The delegates criticised the Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, and the Gujarat Chief Minister, Narendra Modi, for declining to meet them. "These leaders do not have time to meet us and are busy with their hate yatras. Ironically, they were the same leaders now in power whom we have supported in their struggle during the Emergency. Now, same atrocities were being committed during their rule," they added.

The delegation met the President, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, and leaders of different parties, including the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, and the former Prime Minister, I.K. Gujral, telling them how the victims were suffering in the State where communal tension had failed to subside. "Gujarat's elected Government seems to have completely abdicated its constitutional role, and has cynically sought to worsen the situation for the victims at every level, and is continuing to exacerbate communal feelings, with electoral gains in mind.

And we have seen no signs of the Central Government or the party in power intervening to reverse this politics of hate," said the delegation in their memorandum to the President, urging him to "not only exercise your full constitutional authority, but to speak out publicly against the continuing horror of the people of Gujarat."

The delegation also mooted to form a network of organisations to provide relief to riot victims so that help could be properly channelised and carried out in a more effective manner. They also called for an urgent need to begin immediately an image building exercise at the global level and restore the pride of India which has taken a serious beating after the communal riots.

Stating that she was not alone in her fight against communalism, Ms. Nishrin Hussain, said Gujarat was in danger. Criticising political parties for carrying out hate campaign all over the country, she said youths were being made target of this campaign. As these parties have nothing to offer to these youths — no education, no jobs, nothing — they were giving them arms, thus leaving the country to ransom.

**January 10, 2003. The Hindu (India). J. Venkatesan.  
NHRC chief deplores tardy relief to Gujarat riot victims**

NEW DELHI JAN. 9. The chairperson of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), Justice J.S. Verma, has deplored the tardy progress in providing relief to the riot victims of Gujarat.

In an interview to The Hindu, Mr. Justice Verma, who is laying down office next week, said: "a lot more needs to be done and ought to have been done by the Gujarat Government".

He was responding to a question whether the State Government had fully implemented the recommendations of the NHRC on providing relief to the riot victims.

Mr. Justice Verma said he was happy that during his tenure from November 1999, he had strived to make the Commission an institution which could be looked up to by everyone. By and large, all its recommendations had been complied with by the various authorities, some immediately and some after a delay.

On Gujarat, he said in his view "mere abatement of violence is not return of normality. An obligation is cast on the Government to restore confidence among the people and that is yet to be generated in the required measure".

He said concerned over the tardy progress in providing relief, the Commission had recently written a letter to the "highest authorities" in the Government and impressed on them the need to completely rehabilitate the people affected by the riots.

"Mere acceptance of incidents is not enough. What is required is identification of the perpetrators of violence, proper investigation and their prosecution by ensuring a fair and speedy trial. That alone is going to generate confidence among the people, particularly the minorities".

**Appeal to Press**

He said the State Government must also assure the victims that violence would not be repeated and "inflammatory speeches" should be avoided. "There is no soothing balm than doing justice to the victims," he said and appealed to the press not to highlight inflammatory speeches.

Mr. Justice Verma regretted that the Union Government was still sitting over the recommendations made by the Commission in March 2000 for bringing amendments to the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993 to confer more teeth to the Commission for effectively enforcing its directions issued to the States and other authorities from time to time.

During his tenure the Commission had registered a total of 2,14,806 cases and of them 2,06,583 had been disposed of.

On the Commission's stand on the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA), he said: "I stand by what I said earlier. The existing laws are sufficient to deal with any eventuality, including terrorism. And, any law for combating terrorism should be consistent with the Constitution, the relevant international instruments and treaties, and respect the principles of necessity and proportionality".

"Now that the matter is pending before the Supreme Court, it is up to it to decide on the validity of POTA".

He reiterated the view that "any affront to dignity was a violation of human rights and it should be dealt with firmly.

On the role of Justice A.J. Sadasiva Commission appointed by the NHRC to probe into the atrocities committed by the special task force on tribals in their efforts to nab forest brigand Veerappan, he said the Commission was expected to complete the task shortly and submit its report.

**August 23, 2003. Indian Express (India).  
Rs 100 as Gujarat riot relief: Shame, says probe judge**

Ahmedabad, August 22: When 50-year-old Mehrunissa Sarifuddin Sheikh today displayed a cheque of Rs 100 she received as compensation for her house torched in the post-Godhra riots, so taken aback was the two-member probe panel that Justice (retd) K G Shah couldn't help remark: "sharam aani chahiye lene wale ko aur dene wale ko (shame on those who receive and award such compensation)."

After Mehrunissa told the Commission that an official had surveyed her house and pegged the loss at Rs 3 lakh, Shah ordered that her case be probed immediately.

She was reluctant to give out her present home address but the women who accompanied her said she now lived in Mehendikuva in Shahpur area. They were among the 107 who, in 16 groups, deposed today before the Commission headed by Shah and Justice (retd) G T Nanavati.

## ***Modi: Architect of Gujarat Genocide. Denial of Relief to Victims***

When 25 Hindu and Muslim women from Shahpur said "a small incident leads to a communal flare-up even now" and that they were "scared" to interact, the panel ordered Madhavpura police to ensure law and order was maintained in the area.

Complaining about police high-handedness, Ghulam Noor Mohammed, a 55-year-old resident of Mirzapur, alleged that constables Bahadur Singh, Kishan and Raghu of Shahpur police station had shot at his son-in-law Usman during the riots. Usman later succumbed to his injuries.

He alleged that the three constables "tried to disrupt the law and order situation" and also shot at one Iqbal, injuring him.

"I managed to meet K P S Gill who directed me to officials of the police station concerned. Instead of investigating the issue, they externed me for no reason," Ghulam Noor said. Government counsel Arvind Pandya said that investigations in this case were on.

Rafiq Ahmed Naseer, owner of a petrol pump in Madhavpura area, said his pump was looted thrice during the communal violence. "On February 28 (last year), fuel was stolen from my pump. On March 18, a mob attacked my attendants and, on April 4, over 20,000 litres of petrol was stolen. I lodged a complaint with the police and requested that the pump's electricity connection be cut."

Nineteen-year-old Satish Nadia said he received a bullet injury when a mob attacked residents of Shahpur area on April 15. "I was shot in the neck and was unconscious when I was taken to Chandramani hospital."

Several Muslims residing in Dudheshwar deposed before the panel and stated that a mob pelted stones, burnt shops and disrupted peace in their area, forcing them to shift to relief camps.

"Vehicles were set ablaze and my house was damaged. Scared, we rushed to a graveyard near our home," Gulab Sheikh said.

The women accompanying him said that they were still awaiting compensation. The Commission will record statements on the Naroda Patiya massacre on August 26 and 27 while that of Meghaninagar area victims, including the Gulbarg Society, would be taken up on August 29.