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Rep. Pitts praises revoking of visa to Narendra Modi

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Washington— Congressman Joe Pitts (R, PA-16) today commended the State Department for revoking a visa to Narendra Modi, Chief Minister of the Gujarat, India. Congressman Pitts issued the following statement:

“When I joined 21 of my colleagues earlier this month in requesting that President Bush bar Mr. Modi from the country, I hoped that our government would send the clear message that we care about justice and rule of law,” said Congressman Pitts. “Today the Administration did just that.

“This decision tells people still suffering in Gujarat that we believe they all deserve the right to equal treatment under the law and we’re willing to stand up to people who deny it to them. And it tells foreign leaders that we will not stand for religious persecution.

“India’s own government has condemned Mr. Modi’s policies and his efforts to obstruct investigations into the 2002 riots. The Supreme Court called him a ‘modern day Nero’ and multiple sources have said he condoned the riots. India is too strong an ally for us to support officials who defy its policies and undermine its commitment to human rights. So, morally and legally, we had the responsibility to take action. And I commend the State Department for doing so,” said Congressman Pitts, who visited Gujarat in January 2004 and saw firsthand the devastation of the 2002 riots. More about Congressman Pitts’ trip can be read at:

http://www.house.gov/pitts/press/Newsletters/0403-human_rights.pdf.

Mr. Modi’s visa was denied under the International Religious Freedom Act. Passed in 1998 and strengthened in 2004 by the Intelligence Reform Act, it gives the President authority to delay, deny, or cancel visits by a foreign citizen who ‘while serving as a foreign government official, was responsible for or directly carried out, at any time, particularly severe violations of religious freedom.’

The following was released by the State Department today:

“On March 18, 2005 the Government of the United States revoked a visa held by the Chief Minister of Gujarat pursuant to section 212(a)(2)(G) of the U.S. Immigration and Nationality Act which prohibits the admission to the United States of any foreign government official believed to have responsibility for serious violations of religious freedom. Although the U.S. Government has no information regarding any specific activity that may be directed toward the U.S. Government or American citizens as a result of this decision, there is the possibility of an increase in anti-American sentiment, potentially resulting in demonstrations or other actions expressing hostility to U.S. Government policy or to American citizens. Such demonstrations could occur spontaneously and pose risks to travelers’ personal safety as well as disrupt transportation systems and city services. In response to such events, Indian authorities occasionally impose curfews and/or restrict travel. As a precaution, the U.S. Foreign Commercial Service office in Ahmedabad, Gujarat has temporarily closed. U.S. citizens traveling in or residing in India are urged to keep abreast of news reports regarding reaction to the U.S. Government’s decision and to avoid any area in which demonstrations may arise.”

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