

People's Union for Civil Liberties

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May 3, 2006

To,

1. Collector, Vadodara
2. Municipal Commissioner, Vadodara
3. Commissioner of Police, Vadodara
4. Mayor, Vadodara

Subject: Demand for immediate action by your Department to restore normalcy in Vadodara City

Dear Sir,

We feel that your handling of the demolition of the Fatehpura dargah on May 1, 2006 and the aftermath of those events warrants deep concern. Given the known potential for communal conflict in Vadodara city, the authorities should have taken extra precaution to address the situation in a sensitive manner.

Instead, the authorities deviated from established norms to be followed during these types of events. The Mayor arrogantly and aggressively threatened to use the army of VHP and BJP workers to demolish the Dargah in the absence of cooperation from local police. The tense situation was created by the statements of the Mayor that and the rashly organized demolition drive –both meant to instigate. Rather than effectively restoring peace and calm, the police in fact incited further violence by aiming fire directly at the public.

Many innocent citizens who were accidentally present at the time in Fatehpura were at the receiving end of the inflammatory actions of the politicians and the immature reaction of the police. The inept action of various authorities suggest a lack of seriousness. Indeed it appears that the casual approach to demolition of a sensitive dargah, the over-eager attempts to carpet the road thereafter -- speak of an underlying plan to keep the minority community under constant leash and a sense of siege.

We strongly feel that the demolition of such crucial and sensitive structures should be done after taking the sentiments of people into account and such moves need to be negotiated over an extended period of time. And the moment the rioting mob began to terrorize the public it was the duty of all authorities to act immediately to control the situation and protect the people. Instead of fulfilling its responsibilities to the community, almost all authorities acted in a way to escalate fear and intimidation in the riot-prone areas. The behaviour of authorities demands a complete reorientation of the methods of

the police and other governmental offices.

In such tense times, it is important that the people be heard and their grievances addressed. As long as the complaints of the people fall on deaf ears, the people's faith in the system will be shattered and distrust will grow. This will only feed fear, and incite more violence. It has been our experience over the past two days that the Police Commissioner and his office are not reachable via phone, and that the department is not taking even the complaints of the PUCL seriously. This leaves little hope for common people to be heard. Effective and non-partisan action is incumbent on the police; dereliction of duty in such life and death circumstances is absolutely unacceptable.

It is discouraging that we are forced to make these complaints again and again, especially as they relate to the negligence in fulfilling the most basic responsibility of the state authorities. The Supreme Court has also repeatedly chastised the state powers on these same grounds. It appears that the experience of the 2002 carnage did not teach any lessons. Various authorities and politicians communalised the ambience unnecessarily. For instance, the Mayor should have been prevented from continuously making provocative statements publicly given the socio-political context. The communalised atmosphere is now detracting attention from more important issues at hand such as the issue of rehabilitation for demolition-affected families. It tarnishes the good name of our state when the authorities continuously antagonize its citizenry by neglecting its duty.

In the present context, we demand:

- 1) The resignations/transfer of the Mayor, the Commissioner of Police and the Municipal Commissioner.
- 2) Setting up a redressal cell for an effective and immediate response to distress call by communities under attack and siege.
- 3) Systematic and planned rehabilitation of all whose homes/hutments have been burnt and/or demolished in the last few months (not only the last few days).
- 4) Compensation to families who have lost their lives in police firing and had their shops, *lari gallas* and factories burnt (for example in Sardar Estate).
- 5) Criteria of what is legal, illegal, authorised, unauthorised constructions and/or encroachments to be put in public domain and simultaneously a plan for preservation of religious and historical monuments in the spirit of Gaekwads of yore.
- 6) Demolition, if at all required, only after openly and publicly negotiating with communities and civil society representatives.
- 7) A master plan for promoting communal harmony in the city so that such incidents never repeat.
- 8) Opening up for public discourse the long-term master plan for development of the city of Vadodara and the way urban renewal mission funds are going to be used – transparently.

Sincerely,

Kirit Bhatt

Rohit Prajapati
Chinu Srinivasan
Trupti Shah
Shobha Shah
Issaqbhai Chinwala
Rita Choksi
Nagin Patel
Magan Desai
Jagdishbhai Surti
Rameshbhai Rathod
Jahnvi Andharia
Kantibhai Mistry
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