Who Are the Guilty?
Causes and Impact of the Delhi Riots

A FACT-FINDING team jointly organised by the People's Union for Democratic Rights (PUDR) and People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) in the course of investigations from November 1 to November 10, has come to the conclusion that the attacks on members of the Sikh Community in Delhi and its suburbs during the period, far from being a spontaneous expression of "madness" and of popular "grief and anger" at Indira Gandhi's assassination as made out to be by the authorities, were the outcome of a well-organised plan marked by acts of both deliberate commission and omission by important politicians of the Congress(I) at the top and by authorities in the administration. Although there was indeed popular shock, grief and anger, the violence that followed was the handiwork of a determined group which was inspired by different sentiments altogether.

Experiences of individual members of the fact-finding team as well as their extensive interviews with the (i) victims of the riots; (ii) police officers who were expected to suppress the riots; (iii) neighbours of the victims who tried to protect them; (iv) army personnel; and (v) political leaders, suggest that the attacks on the Sikhs followed a common pattern, whether they took place in Munirka in the south or Mangolpuri in the west, or Trilokpuri in the east. The uniformity in the sequence of events at every spot in such far-flung places proves beyond doubt that the attacks were masterminded by some powerful organised groups. As a senior army officer deployed in Delhi during the recent riots said: "This arson is the work of an expert." Newspaper reports suggest that this pattern is similar in all Congress(I) ruled states.

There was also a definite pattern discernible in the choice of the victims made by the assailants. According to the 1971 Census figures Sikh males in the age group 20-50 in Delhi number approximately 100,000. The Sikhs who were killed in the recent riots largely belonged to this age group. The official estimate of only 325 killed (including 46 Hindus) till November 7 (Hindustan Times, November 11) sounds ridiculously low compared to the magnitude of arson, lynching and burning alive of people in the resettlement colonies alone. On the basis of information gathered from various sources, including eye-witnesses, survivors and relatives of the dead, the team estimates that the number of those killed is more than a thousand.

From the team's talks with the victims and their neighbours in almost every riot-hit spot, it could reconstruct the sequence of events, which followed a stereotyped pattern everywhere. The first phase was marked by the floating of a set of rumours on the evening of October 31, following the announcement of Indira Gandhi's death. The rumours were three. First, Sikhs were distributing sweets and lighting lamps to celebrate Indira Gandhi's death. (Later during the team's investigations when it asked the residents of the affected localities whether anyone from among them had actually seen such things, almost everyone admitted that they had not personally witnessed them), but had heard from someone else. It did however come across a few people who while expressing revulsion at the incidents of assaults on the Sikhs, added that they had seen in some places some Sikhs expressing their glee at Indira Gandhi's death by demonstrative gestures. It has reports that some isolated groups of non-Sikhs also exhibited similar behaviour. From the information that it has gathered from various sources, the team's impression is that such cases were few and isolated. The second rumour was that train-loads of hundreds of Hindu dead bodies had arrived at Old Delhi Station from Punjab. Third, that water was poisoned by the Sikhs. As for the two latter rumours, the team came across evidence of policemen in vans touring certain localities and announcing through loudspeakers the arrival of the train and the poisoning of water. In certain areas, it heard that police officials had rung up residents advising them not to drink water. These rumours (the last two were officially repudiated later) contributed to the shaping of a public mind that acquiesced in the attacks and murders that took place soon after.

The second phase began with the arrival of groups of armed young people in tempo vans, scooters, motorcycles or trucks from the night of October 31 and morning of November 1 at various places like Munirka, Saket, South Extension, Lajpat Nagar, Bhogal, Jangpura and Ashram in the south and south-east; the Connaught Circus shopping area in the centre and later the trans-Jamuna colonies and resettlement colonies in other areas in the north. With cans of petrol they went around the localities, setting fire to houses after the looting was over. It is either educated or a local person?" In some areas, like Trilokpuri, Mangolpuri and the trans-Jamuna colonies, the arsonists consisted of Gujjar or Jat farmers from neighbouring villages, and were accompanied by local residents, some of whom again were Congress(I) activists. In these areas, the team was told, Congress(I) followers of the Bhangi caste (belonging to the scheduled caste community) took part in the looting. In South Delhi, buses of the Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) were used by the miscreants to move from place to place in their murderous journey. How could the DTC allow its buses to be used by criminals?

The attacks in the resettlement colonies (e.g. Trilokpuri in the trans-Jamuna area and Mangolpuri in the west) where the maximum number of murders took place again displayed the same pattern. The targets were primarily young Sikhs. They were dragged out, beaten up and then burnt alive. While old men, women and children were generally allowed to escape, their houses were set on fire after the looting of valuables. Documents pertaining to their legal possession of the houses were also burnt. In some areas of Mangolpuri the team heard from the survivors that even children were not spared. The team also came across reports of gang-rape of women. The orgy of destruction embraced a variety of property ranging from shops, factories, houses to gurudwaras and schools belonging to the Sikhs. In all the affected spots, a calculated attempt to terrorise the people was evident in the common tendency among the assailants to burn alive the Sikhs on public roads. Even five days after the incidents, on November 6, in the course of one of its regular visit to Mangolpuri the team found that although the ashes had been cleared, the pavement in front of the Congress(I) office was still blackened with burnt patches, which the local police had earlier pointed out as spots where four Sikhs were burnt alive.

Socio-Economic Composition of Assailants

The team members on the basis of extensive interviews in different parts of the city were able to piece together the characteristics of the mobs that were responsible for the looting, arson and killings.

In some cases the mobs were brought from outside the locality (where they were set loose by local political leaders) and Jats and Gujjars from neighbouring villages. They were transported in vehicles. A large number of Scheduled Caste people were also a part of the mob.

More important, in the areas which were most affected, such as Trilokpuri, Mangolpuri and Sultanpuri, the mobs were led by local Congress(I) politicians and hoodlums of that locality. These areas, it will be recalled, were set up in the urban resettlement drive initiated by the Congress(I), and have since been active support bases of the Congress(I). These areas have also in the recent past provided the Con-
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1980 jobs. Among the Scheduled Caste communities the local miscreants who attacked the Sikhs. Many of them working as sweepers while the Bhangis—many of them solid supporters of Congress (I)—were predominantly supporters of Jagjivan Ram, a festival, but for the arson and loot that was going on. As the crowd began to listen to the speeches made by the procession leaders, organised attempts were made by certain groups from among them to shout down the speakers, by raising the slogan: “Indira Gandhi zindabad! Hindu-Hindu bhai bhai!” It is significant that wherever the team went, it did not find any sign of mourning or grief on the faces of those who were participating in the looting and burning. Attempts to pacify them by the peace marchers were met with derisive laughter. Listening to their raucous exultation and looking at their gleeful faces, one would have thought it was a festival, but for the arson and loot that was going on.

In the resettlement colonies, the police came out from their passive role and directly participated in the violence against the Sikhs. The team was told by survivors that at the first signs of tension those who felt threatened personally went to the nearby police stations to seek their intervention. But the police did not respond. In Trilokpuri, the police reportedly accompanied the arsonists and provided them with diesel from their jeeps. The Station House Officer (SHO) of Kalyanpuri police station, under which Trilokpuri falls, withdrew the constables who were on duty there when Sikh girls were being raped. Much later, the higher authorities took action against the SHO and his two colleagues by suspending and arresting them for criminal negligence of duties. In Sultanpuri, the SHO, one Bhatti, is alleged to have killed two Sikhs and helped the mob in disarming those Sikhs who tried to resist the mob.

Several residents of Loni Road in the trans-Jamuna area, who were camping at Shakarpur when the team interviewed them on November 7, said that the police announced on loudspeakers two or three times at night on November 8 that they would not be responsible for the safety of the Sikhs and that the latter must look after themselves. One woman from the same area said she had seen a police jeep full of men and that thestoning of Sikh shops was conducted from the jeep. Another resident from the same road said that the police had incited the looting of a watch shop before it was burnt.

In Kotla Mubarakpuri, a domestic worker told the team members that the police had encouraged the looting. Later they were reported to have said to the looters: “We gave you 36 hours. Had we given the Sikhs that amount of time, they would have killed every Hindu!”

In the Kingsway Camp, residents claimed that 70 per cent of the loot was to be found in the police lines, suggesting that the police took a leading role in the plundering. When after the destruction and murders, people went to complain and file FIRs, the police in many areas refused to record their complaints, according to information gathered from the Hindu neighbours of the victims. A respected Sikh professional whose house was burnt on 1st November was not able to register an FIR despite all efforts. In Mangolpuri the team was told that a police officer asked the Hindu complainants why they were protecting sikhs and advised them to look after the safety of Hindus. Typical was the experience of Dharam Raj Pawar and Rajvir Pawar, two residents of Ber Sarai, who on November 1, went to Sector 14, R K Puram police station to ask for protection of a Sikh family (which till then was being sheltered by Hindu neighbours from impending attacks by a mob led by a Congress(I) man, Jagdish Tokas). The officer in charge of the police station reportedly told them that he could not offer any help. Two constables later said to them: “You being Jats should have killed those Sikhs. What are you doing here? Don't you know a train has arrived from Punjab carrying bodies of massacred Hindus?”

A few individual police officials who did try to intervene and stop the riots found their efforts frustrated primarily through lack of cooperation from the top. One senior officer told the team that when on October 31 and November 1 he received reports about some 2,000 to 3,000 people moving around the city in scooters and motorcycles without helmets, he contacted the CID seeking information from them regarding the identity of these people. Till November 7, when we met him, he had not received any report from the CID.

While analysing the role of the police during the crucial period, the responsibility of those in position of authority at the top, namely the Home Ministry, cannot be ignored. The Home Minister, Narasimha Rao, who was inducted into the new Cabinet by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi soon after Indira Gandhi’s death, was empowered in his capacity as Home Minister, to deploy the para-military forces (if the Delhi police force was found to be inadequate or inefficient) to quell the violence. Rao
is not a new incumbent who is unaware of the procedural technicalities. Why did Rao, with his past experience as a Home Minister in the previous cabinet, fail to take the necessary steps and summon the forces available to him to nip in bud the communal elements that organised the riots?

**ROLE OF ADMINISTRATION**

Men at the top in the administration and the ruling party displayed repeatedly a curious lack of concern often bordering on deliberate negligence of duty and responsibility throughout the period October 31 to November 4. From the team's talks with various opposition party leaders and prominent citizens it found that many among them had got in touch with senior Ministers as well as people in the Delhi administration on October 31 itself, warning of impending trouble following the announcement of Indira Gandhi's assassination. The newly sworn in Home Minister Narasimha Rao was said to have assured BJP leader Atal Behari Vajpayee on October 31 evening that "everything would be brought under control within a couple of hours" (The Statesman, November 10). Yet, at the same time on the same day, Gautam Kaul, Additional Commissioner of Police in front of the All India Medical Institute, referring to the disturbances which were just breaking out, said: "We cannot deal with the situation of this nature" (Indian Express, November 1). Strangely enough, even after this, Kaul has been made Additional Commissioner, Security. In spite of such warnings given well in advance, those in positions of authority did not seem to bother to take any firm step.

Soon after the assassination, the team heard from a reliable source, a meeting was held at 1, Safdarjung Road, the Prime Minister's official residence in which the Lt Governor P G Gavai, a Congress(I) leader M I. Fotedar and the Police Commissioner, among others took part. A senior police officer present at this meeting expressed the view that the army should be called as otherwise there would be a holocaust. No attention was paid to the view.

On November 1, when almost all of Delhi was afame, an opposition MP rang up Shiv Shankar, a Minister in Rajiv Gandhi's new cabinet, and the Home Minister, Narasimha Rao, to inform them about the situation in the city and the need for army action. The Ministers were reported to have assured him that army was about to be called and curfew would be imposed. (Several citizens including some senior governmental officials went to the President of India on the afternoon of November 1, and they were told that the government was still considering whether to call out the army.)

But the team’s experience on November 1 tells a different story. As already mentioned earlier, till late night there were no signs of either curfew or army, while miscreants were on the rampage in front of the police. In the heart of the city, Connaught Circus, Sikh-owned shops were being set on fire right under the nose of heavy para-military and police pickets. The team later heard that the DC of Faridabad had asked for army on November 1, but troops arrived only on November 3.

On November 2, although the newspapers that day announced three official measures: (i) clamping of an indefinite curfew; (ii) shoot at sight orders; and (iii) deployment of army since 2 pm the previous day, when the team went around South Delhi in the afternoon of November 2, it found that the miscreants were not only at large, but had swelled in numbers and had become more defiant. In the Lajpat Nagar market, while police pickets sat by idly, hundreds of young men, armed with swords, trishuls and iron rods, blocked the main road. Around 2 pm an army convoy passed through the road. The miscreants did not scatter or panic. They merely moved way for the convoy to pass by temporarily retreating to the by-lanes, and regrouped themselves as soon as the convoy left and began intimidating a peace march that had arrived on the spot.

On the morning of November 2, 8.30 am onwards, two opposition MPs repeatedly requested both Narasimha Rao and Shiv Shankar to provide army protection to trains carrying Sikh passengers arriving from Punjab. NC troops were sent, with the result that every train was left at the mercy of gangsters who dragged out Sikhs from the incoming train compartments, lynched them, threw their bodies on the platforms or the railway tracks and set fire on many. Newspapers report that 43 persons were killed. This was denied by Dordarshan in the evening. Visiting the Tughlakabad station around 3.30 pm the Statesman reporter saw "two bodies still smouldering on the platforms, right in front of the armed force standing on the opposite platform across the tracks" (November 3). The troops had either arrived after the incident or the incident took place in front of the troops who did not intervene.

While analysing the role of the administration, it is not enough to blame the Delhi administration and the bureaucrats only. The Lt Governor, Gavai, who was in charge of administration of Delhi during the period under review and who has been replaced now, could not have acted on his own — whether in regard to acts of commission or omission. Both the Delhi administration and the Union Cabinet Ministers, including the Home Minister, were well-informed of the sequence of events beginning from the evening of October 31 (as is evident from the report of communication between the opposition leaders and the Cabinet Ministers as recorded earlier). The team is left wondering whether the Union Ministers failed to direct the Lt Governor to take action, or did the Ministers direct and the Lt Governor refuse to abide by their directives? In that case, should not the Union government punish the Lt Governor? But the team was merely told on November 4 that Gavai had "proceeded on leave" and that M M K Wali had taken over.

What is further intriguing is the appointment of Wali as the Lt Governor. Wali was the Home Secretary before his new appointment. The record of what happened in Delhi from October 31 to November 3 (the eve of Wali's appointment) is sufficient to prove the failure of the Home Ministry administrative machinery in suppressing the riots. The team wonders why the former Home Secretary, in spite of the proven failure of an administration of which he was a leading component, has been appointed the Lt Governor. As evident from its review of official relief operations (see below), Wali's administration seems to continue the same policy of callousness and inefficiency towards the refugees as was demonstrated past towards the Sikh victims during the riots.

**ROLE OF ARMY**

Enquiries made by the team at various quarters ranging from the affected localities to army sources led it to two questions. First, why was there a delay in calling out the troops? Second, even when the army was called in, why were they not effective in imposing a curfew and curbing the violence?

The authorities at the top, including the four Ministers and senior officials of the Delhi administration, were repeatedly informed about the exact situation in the city and its outskirts from the evening of October 31. Prominent citizens, VIPs and members of the opposition parties and people from affected localities both phoned and personally went and informed these authorities. Yet during the seven valuable hours, between the time of the assassination and the time of the news of the death was made public, no security measures were taken.

As a senior government servant put it, there are standing instructions on dealing with such situations. The SP and DCs have powers under the Criminal Procedure Code (Sections 130-131) to call in the armed forces in aid to civil powers. Further, the para-military troops, including the Delhi Armed Police, CRPF are always available for such a situation. According to the team’s information, one brigade was available at Delhi which could have been requisitioned immediately.

The troops were alerted on the afternoon of the 31st. This means that within a few hours brigades from Meerut and Agra could have arrived at Delhi by the night of the 31st. As senior army officers put it, it is not the numerical strength of troops that is the crucial factor for imposing curfew. The crucial factor is clarity of intent and firm and clear instructions.

Despite announcements in the papers, the AHR and Doodarshan about shoot at sight orders and imposition of curfew the troops were left without specific information from the police on the exact locations of the riots. No joint control room was set up. In contrast, only a few days later, the authorities did not find any difficulty in moving a full brigade to the Indian Army consisting of 3,000 men and another 1,000 personnel from the navy and the air force to line up the route of Indira Gandhi’s funeral.

The procedure to call in troops is simple. The Lt Governor has to inform the Home Minister of the law and order situation and the latter informs the Defence Minister (Prime Minister
Rajiv Gandhi was holding this portfolio who gets in touch with the army to call in the troops.

An essential ingredient for successful joint army-civilian administration operation is the setting up of a joint control room. During 1947 riots, when Lord Mountbatten was requested by Jawaharlal Nehru to control the communal situation, the former set up a joint control room at Rashtrapati Bhavan in order to coordinate the efforts of the, civil, administration and the armed forces. This precedent was quoted to Narasimha Rao by an elderly resident of Delhi, who is well-versed in army operations.

Yet, from October 31 to November 4 (the peak period of the riots which according toeld-timers were reminiscient of the 1947 riots in Delhi) no effort was made to set up a joint control room. The Commissioner of Police was operating from his office at ITO Police headquarters. The Army area commander was at the Dhaula Kuan cantonment, and the Lt Governor was at Raj Nivas. As a result, even after the deployment of troops, army people constantly complained about lack of information and co-operation from the police regarding the areas of tension. Even with the imposition of curfew, there were no authorities to implement it. An army major complained to a Delhi news reporter on November 4 that his men were not only getting no co-operation from the Shakarpur police station, but were often being deliberately misled by the police. The same reporter during a tour of the city on November 2, came across army personnel ranging from JCOs to majors, roaming around pathetically after having lost touch either with headquarters or with their formations.

Army officers complained that they were not provided with scouts by the police to lead them to the trouble spots. In one instance a major who was asking for directions was carrying a map dated 1974, where the resettlement colonies (where the violence reached its peak during the period under survey) did not figure.

One army source told the team members that the deployment of troops followed a strange pattern. They were deployed by the civil authorities in stages, and in almost every case they were deployed after houses in the trouble spots had been burnt to cinders and the massacre was over. This explains the limited number of army firings (12) and the casualties from army firings (2 deaths and 4 injured) during the entire period (Major-Gen J S Jamwal's statement of November 7, Indian Express, November 8). The deployment reached full strength only after the 3,000 troops and vehicles reserved for the funeral were made available to curb the violence.

The entire nature of using the army as revealed from the above sequence of events compels the team to suspect whether there was not a deliberate design to keep the army ineffective even after it was called in—and that too following a long interval during which the arson, looting and massacre were allowed to continue, sometimes with the direct connivance of the local police force.

Whatever might have been the motive for such a curious manner of utilising the army and whoever might have been responsible for reducing it to an impotent observer, the effects of such a policy have been quite disastrous for the morale of the army. Every army person the team talked to expressed anguish over the way that the army's authority was being undermined. The 6th report of the National Police Commission has stated: "We note with concern the growing tendency on the part of the district authorities to seek instructors from higher quarters where none are necessary." It appears that the civilian administrators in Delhi although armed adequately with powers under the law to use the army to suppress disturbances, did not care to use those powers.

The question that needs to be probed is: why did the civil administration betray a set pattern of acts of omission, marked by a consistent failure to take steps against erring policemen and a stubborn refusal to deploy the army properly? Further, an analysis of the role of the army during the period under survey leaves a few questions that need to be answered by the people in positions of authority. According to the procedure laid down under the law, the Lt Governor can request the Home Minister who in turn can ask the Defence Minister for army deployment. On October 31, the new cabinet had already been sworn in with Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi himself in charge of Defence and Narasimha Rao as the Home Minister. With the growing deterioration in the law and order situation in Delhi, when by November 1 the local police machinery had proved its failure to control the situation—either through negligence or inexperience with the rioters—did the Lt Governor request the Home Ministry for army aid? Even if he did not, was it not the responsibility of the Home Minister to deploy the army? Since the Prime Minister had taken over the Defence portfolio, was it not his responsibility to deploy the army as soon as he realised that the police had failed (which was quite evident by November 1)? By removing a few civilian administrators (like Gavai) or police officers (like the Delhi Police Commissioner, Subhash Tandon) how can the government at the Centre absolve itself of the blame of neglecting its obligations to the citizens and its responsibility to maintain law and order—and in this in spite of several warnings to the effect that Hindu-Sikh riot was bound to take place?

The experience of the team members gives rise to the suspicion that both the administration and the Cabinet might have abdicated their responsibility and that extra-administrative forces were stering the deployment and operation of troops. On November 3, a group of concerned citizens visited Trilokpuri where they were requested by panic-stricken survivors of a widespread holocaust (described later) to intervene on their behalf and seek army protection. They tried to get in touch with various people both in the administration and the Cabinet to convey to them the request of the Trilokpuri victims. No one was available, either in their offices or homes.

Hoping that opposition MPs might have a better access to the authorities the group approached Biju Patnaik, Goerge Fernandes, Chandra Sekhar and Madhu Dandavate among others—all of whom told the group that their repeated attempts to contact Ministers and officials had yielded no results. In a final desperate move, accompanied by Dandavate, they went to I, Safdarjung Road, the Prime Minister's official residence, and managed to meet a Congress(I) MP, Arun Nehru. When the group conveyed to him the request of the Trilokpuri residents, he said that he would send a "wireless message" for army deployment. Only after this, were troops sent to Trilokpuri—but that also again merely for patrolling.

**ROLE OF CONGRESS(I)**

The surmise that during the period under survey the legitimate authorities were superseded and decision-making powers were assumed by a few individual Congress(I) leaders is confirmed not only by the above mentioned incident, but also the experience of residents in the riot-hit areas. The team was told by Hindus and Sikhs—many among the latter Congress(I) supporters—that certain Congress(I) leaders played a decisive role in organisng the riots. Residents of Mangolpuri told the team that they saw Ishwar Singh, a Congress(I) corporator among many others (their names are given as annexure to the team's report) actively participating in the orgy of violence. All these people were described by the local residents as lieutenants of the Congress(I) MP from the area, Saajan Kumar. Similarly in Anand Parbat, Congress(I) councillors like Bhairava, Mahendrda and Mangat Ram, considered to be loyal followers of the Congress(I) MP Dharamdas Shastri, were named as the main culprits. In Prakash Nagar, Congress(I) people were found carrying voters' lists to identify Sikh households. In the Gandhi nagar area again, a local Congress(I) councillor Sukhanial was identified by the victims as the main leader of the assailants. Escapees from the area whom the team met at the Shaktarpur relief camp on November 6 blamed the Congress(I) MP from the area, K H L Bhagat, for having master-minded the riots. On November 1, Satbir Singh (Jat) a Youth Congress(I) leader brought buses filled with people from Ber Sarai to the Sri Guru Harkishan Public School at Muniarka and burnt the school building and buses and continued looting and assaults on Sikhs the whole night. Another group of miscreants led by Jagdish Tokas, a Congress(I) corporator joined the above group in looting and assaults. In the Safdarjung-Kidwai Nagar area of south Delhi, eyewitness accounts by those who stood in front of All India Medical Institute from where Indira Gandhi's body was taken out in procession on the evening of October 31, confirmed the presence of the Congress(I) councillor of the area, Arjan Dass, at the time when attacks on Sikh pedestrians, bus drivers and conductors began.
The allegations against these individuals repeatedly voiced by the residents of the respective localities which the team visited, cannot be dismissed as politically motivated propaganda, since many among the Sikhs who accused them dismissed as politically motivated propaganda, tive localities which the team visited, cannot be houses here by Indiraji. We have always voted and Mangolpuri resettlement colonies whom the team met looked dazed and uncomprehen- sing when they said: “We were allotted these houses here by Indiraji. We have always voted for her party. Why were we attacked?”

Additional indications of the involvement of the above-mentioned Congress(I) leaders in the riots was provided later when the team heard that the Congress(I) MPs from the respective areas were putting pressure on the local police station to release the culprits who had been rounded up on November 3/4. On November 5, Dharmadas Shastri went to the Karol Bagh police station to protest against police “misbehaviour” with those who were found in possession of loot property (Indian Express, November 6). Shastri however dismissed the report as false. At about the same time, H K L Bhagat, another Congress(I) MP, was reported to be trying to secure the release of several criminals who had been arrested by the Gandhinagar police station. Describing the dilemma before the police, a senior police official said to the team members: “Sher pinjre se nikal diya: phir kahte hain pakad ke le ao!” (First the tigers are let loose from their cages and then we are ordered to round them up.) When asked who was releasing them, he gave a knowing smile.

The same official told the team that when some Congress(I) leaders came to a police station seeking the release of their followers, they were asked to accompany a police party in a raid on some houses for recovery of loot property. But these leaders refused when they were told that they would have to be witnesses.

The team also heard of cases where even Sikhs close to the Congress(I) leaders were not spared. In Sajjan Kumar’s house at Paschimpu on November 6, the team members were introduced to an elderly Sikh gentleman who claimed to be an old Congressman whose shop was burnt by miscreants. He said that he knew who the culprits were. When the team members asked him why he did not file a complaint with the police, he said he would do it at the right time. Sajjan Kumar’s secretary drew the team to an elderly Sikh gentleman who was presiding over the offices of the political parties every hour, ways of October 31 to November 5. Although news of arson and carnage was pouring into the offices of the political parties every hour, they hardly made any effort to rush to the spot with their cadres, stop the violence and organise peace committees in the localities, and remained content with issuing a joint statement with the Prime Minister on November 1 pleading for peace and amity.

ROLE OF MEDIA AND OPPOSITION

Although the team does not intend at this stage to go into the role of the media during the riots, a few words in this connection may not be out of place. The first day’s evening bulletins (October 31) brought out by different newspaper establishments stated that there were “two Sikhs and one clean shaven Sikh” among the assailants. The reporters did not clarify whether the news was from official or unofficial sources. Nor was it clear how a “clean shaven Sikh” could be identified as a Sikh. In later reports the next day and the following days, we were told that only two assailants, both Sikhs, were involved. What happened to the earlier reported third one? No newspaper has yet followed up the discrepancy.

But what is of immediate relevance is the question: should the media have described the assailants immediately as Sikhs? Given the background of the Punjab situation, such mention of a community by name was bound to excite communal passions and inflame communal hatred. It may be worthwhile in this context to refer to a recommendation made at a seminar on communal writings held in New Delhi in November 1970 under the joint auspices of the Press Institute of India and the Press Information Bureau of the Government of India. It was suggested that certain facts which may aggravate the situation if published straight away should be printed after a stipulated period.

The team is also intrigued to find Doordarshan allowing the recording of highly provocative cloges like ‘khoon ka badla khoon’ (blood for blood) by some members from the mourning crowd at Teen Murti. There was a tendency among many reporters to concentrate on the names of important politicians instead of on earnest efforts made by individuals or groups. Thus, when a peace march was organised by a group of concerned citizens in South Delhi on November 2, which was joined by the Janata leader Chandrasekhar and some of his followers, some newspapers the next day described it as a Janata Party march. This created temporary misunderstandings and hampered the efforts of the non-party group to bring together all citizens, many of whom did not want to identify themselves with any particular political party. The need to keep party politics out of ventures like peace marches to put down riots is yet to be recognised by media people who seem to remain obsessed with names of political personalities.

Coming to the role of Opposition political leaders, the team regrets that by and large they failed to rise to the occasion during the crucial ways of October 31 to November 5. Although news of arson and carnage was pouring into the offices of the political parties every hour, they hardly made any effort to rush to the spot with their cadres, stop the violence and organise peace committees in the localities, and remained content with issuing a joint statement with the Prime Minister on November 1 pleading for peace and amity.

On November 3, when following the carnage at Trilokpuri, the group of concerned citizens went to the opposition party leaders (referred to earlier), some among the former appealed, to the Janata Party leader Chandrasekhar to lead them in a deputation to Teen Murti and appeal to the Prime Minister. Chandrasekhar rose, folded his hands and pleaded: “I cannot do it. I don’t want to be accused of ruining the [sic] Prime Minister’s['] mental!”
ROLE OF PUBLIC

While the disturbances that shook Delhi from October 31 to November 5 could be described as an ‘organised disorder’ with signs of meticulous planning by certain groups in some areas, deliberate laxity on the part of the administration in other areas and wilful relinquishment of responsibility by senior ministers as well as opposition parties on a wider scale, at the same time the existence of hostility and suspicion among large sections of the Hindu population against the Sikhs because of the happenings in Punjab during the last two years cannot be ruled out. By not solving the outstanding economic and political issues in Punjab, by allowing Sikh extremism and Hindu communalism to spread on each other leading to the army raid on the Golden Temple and antagonising thereby large sections of the Sikh community, the ruling party at the Centre had sown the seeds of communal divisiveness between Hindus and Sikhs.

As a result, when from October 31, organised assaults on the Sikhs began (as distinct from a spontaneous mass upsurge against Sikhs which some observers are trying to make out to be), the Hindu public by and large appeared to be in a mood that sanctioned such assaults. Comments by responsible Hindu citizens in Delhi indicate to some extent the popular psyche. An officer belonging to IPS was heard to comment that the government was not preventing the violence so that people could let off steam and the Sikhs in Punjab would be ‘taught a lesson’. An Indian who works for the UN in Geneva and who flew to Delhi for Indira Gandhi’s funeral, told a member of the team that the orgy of violence had been allowed to proceed unchecked and the Sikhs in Punjab would be told “teach the Sikhs a lesson”. When asked about the suffering that this was causing the common people, he said: ‘Who is suffering?’ The long record of uninterrupted depredations by the Sikh extremists in Punjab had possibly created a desire for retaliation that blinded even those who are regarded as responsible people among the Hindus.

How did the Sikh victims view this attitude of their Hindu neighbours? Victims in Gurgaon said: “People stood on their rooftops watching our houses burning, just as they do when observing the Republic Day Parade.”

It was this mood again that allowed the Hindu public to believe in all sorts of rumours ranging from the story of poisoning drinking water to that of armed Sikhs prowling the streets to attack Hindus. The next step from such belief in rumours is acquisitiveness in the rampage that had started from the evening of October 31 and even active participation by the younger and more aggressive Hindus in some cases.

The anti-Sikh communal partisan feelings that had penetrated the lower ranks of the administration also, as evident from the behaviour of the police force, who were given the reins for three or four days by their superior officers.

Given this mood of vicarious exultation at the plight of the Sikhs among the public, it was easy for an organised group enjoying the patronage of the ruling party to carry out the plan of systematic destruction and killings.

The anti-Sikh sentiments in some areas also stoked by some isolated expressions of happiness at Indira Gandhi’s death among some Sikhs, and of bravado and attempts at resistance against depredations by the Hindu mobs. It is possible that attempts at resistance could have been taken as a challenge by the marauding hordes who were sure of getting police protection at every step. The team came across reports, corroborated by some responsible residents of a few neighbourhooods, of Sikhs dancing the ‘bangra’ on the night of October 31. Such incidents reinforced the simmering hostility against the Sikhs.

But these stray incidents were marginal and do not explain the wide-scale explosion of indiscriminate violence against all Sikhs throughout India on the same date and the same time, which could be the result of only a well designed strategy.

The only signs of courage and initiative in an otherwise ominous landscape were demonstrated by those Hindu and Muslim neighbours who helped Sikh families in the affected areas. The team came across a large number of Sikh inmates in the relief camps who said repeatedly that but for these neighbours they would have been butchered.

In a makeshift camp opposite the Kalyanpuri police station on November 3, the team met a Hindu family, whose house was burnt down by the miscreants because he had given shelter to his Sikh neighbours. A postal employee living in Bhogal told the team how his house was damaged and partly burnt because he helped two Sikhs. With army assistance he moved the Sikhs to his village in Faridabad.

Members of a voluntary organisation traced two Sikh families who were given shelter by Hindus in Khichipur on November 3. Defying a belligerent mob that stood at the entrance of the lanes, a local Hindu youth led the members to the house and rescued the families who were being sheltered by a poor Hindu family. The next day, the volunteers following a request by a mother in a relief camp went to trace her daughter in Trilokpuri who was being looked after by a Hindu family. The latter restored the daughter to the volunteers, kept with them two other Sikh children whose parents were still untraceable. “It is our responsibility to look after them”, they said.

Near Azadpur, a Hindu factory owner hid a Sikh inside the factory premises. When the Hindus surrounded the factory demanding that the Sikh be handed over to them, the factory owner persuaded the Sikh to shave his hair and beard, gave him a cycle which helped him to pass through the crowd and escape.

On the GT-Karnal Road, Hindus saved a Gurudwara and a Sikh doctor’s clinic from being burnt down. In the same area, from November 1 to 5, Delhi University teachers and students kept vigil around the entry points to lanes where Sikhs lived.

Hindus from Munirka village and residing in Munirka colony provided protection in their own homes to ten Sikh families.

Thirty Sikh families residing in Mayur Vihar were guarded all through the period by young Hindu neighbours who resisted attempts by outsiders to raid the compound.

According to a rough estimate based on information gathered from different sources, at least 600 Sikhs were saved by Hindus of Trilokpuri. According to an army officer posted in Shahdara, of the Sikh families he rescued from different parts of the area, at least 70 per cent were sheltered by Hindus.

It is these acts of courage, however, few they may be, which are reassurance that sanity still prevails in our country.

RELIEF AND REHABILITATION

Taking into consideration the extent of violence and arson on the night of October 31 it would be reasonable to expect that the Delhi administration would have anticipated the need to set up relief camps. Neither the government nor the administration seemed to be concerned with the problem and their attitude of deliberate inaction seems to be a continuation of their stance during the carnage.

The authorities have refused to make realistic estimates of the number of people killed and injured, the number of widows and orphans, or the extent of damage to property. Further, the administration to date refuses to recognise most of the people who have taken refuge in the Gurudwaras as displaced persons who are entitled to relief and compensation. The administration recognises only ten camps whereas a voluntary organisation, Nagarik Ekta Manch, has identified at least 18 others within Delhi and several on the outskirts. (The list of these camps is given in an annexure to the team’s report.) According to the government there are about 20,000 displaced persons. In fact there are at least 50,000.

The administration has tried to manipulate figures and thus gloss over the enormity of the problem. For instance, the former Police Commissioner, Subhash Tandon, at a Press Conference on November 2 said that the number of dead was between 15 and 20. To this the then
It is pathetic. The army had clear instructions not to allow anyone to photograph the camps. A member of the team was rouged up by the army and his film snatched away at the Shakurpur camp when he took a photograph of the people in the camp.

No attempt has been made to take a census of the people at the camps and estimate the number of men, women and children. None of these people have been given identity cards on which basis they could claim the compensation and now they will get entangled in red tapes and possible litigation.

According to Press reports more than rupees two crore worth of looted property has been recovered but no attempt has been made to arrest the looters who if arrested are released on the intervention of the local leaders.

Further, there is no system worked out by which the recovered property will be returned to its rightful owners. Already VCRs are finding their way to the market at a ridiculous price.

Within a week the administration started to forcibly evacuate the displaced persons and sending them back to what used to be their homes, which are now cinders and ashes. Their houses destroyed, their property looted, and the murderers and looters wandering free, the people are terrified of returning to the areas which are full of memories of murder and arson. Officially there have been 2,960 arrests but hundreds of these people have been released either on intervention of local politicians or are on bail.

The government and the administration have in a ruthless manner got DTC buses to pack off the people, given them Rs 50 per family and sometimes a bundle of bedding and sent them back without making appropriate arrangements for their security. No attempt has been made to create an atmosphere of trust and security. Despite the presence of army it was reported to the team that stray incidents of looting and murder continue.

The government did not mobilise all the resources at its command (e.g., the army) to provide medical care and sanitation, nor did it print enough forms for compensation claims. A voluntary agency had to have thousands of forms printed for the camps in its care. The government's callousness towards the problem of relief and rehabilitation is in consonance with its earlier policy of calculated inaction during the carnage. How could the government not have anticipated the need for an effective machinery for relief and rehabilitation? Further, how was it that just at the time the government was announcing the setting up of a Relief Commissioner the forcible evacuations of the people started without any assurance to them of their future security?

CONCLUSION

The social and political consequences of the government's stance during the carnage, its deliberate inaction and its callousness towards relief and rehabilitation are far reaching. It is indeed a matter of grave concern that the government has made no serious inquiries into the entire tragic episode which seems to be so well planned and designed.

The riots were well organised and were of unprecedented brutality. Several very disturbing questions arise that must be answered:

(1) What was the government and the administration doing for seven hours between the time of the assassination and the announcement of Indira Gandhi's death?

(2) Why did the government refuse to take cognisance of the reports of the looting and murders and why did it not call in the troops even after alerting them?

(3) Why have a few individual Congress(I) leaders close to the Prime Minister been allowed to arrogate to themselves powers belonging to ministers and officials?

(4) Why was there no joint control room set up and who was responsible for not giving clear and specific instructions to the army on curbing violence and imposing curfew?

(5) Who was responsible for the planned and deliberate police inaction and often active role in inciting the murder and loot?

(6) Who was responsible for the planned and directed arson?

(7) Why were highly provocative slogans ('khun ka badla khun' or 'blood for blood') allowed to be broadcast by Doordarshan during the recording of the mourning crowd at Teen Murti?

(8) Why has the Congress(I) not set up an inquiry into the role of its members in the arson and loot?

DEMANDS

On the basis of its findings, the team has made the following demands in its report:

(1) A public high level inquiry into the role of the government and the ruling party in planning, instigating and executing the riots between October 31 and November first week, and immediate publication of the report of inquiry.

(2) Exemplary punishment of those found guilty by the inquiry committee, according to the law.

(3) A well formulated and clear cut policy on relief and rehabilitation and effective machinery for its immediate implementation.

[The People's Union for Democratic Rights and the People's Union for Civil Liberties place on record their gratitude for the valuable information given by the survivors of the carnage at tremendous risk to their lives, the volunteers of the Nagarik Ekta Manch and many others who by their dedicated work made possible the investigation and publication of the team's report. In addition to the above extracts, the team's report contains case studies of the riots in Sultanpuri, Mangolpuri and Trilokpuri and annexures setting out the chronology of events, some eyewitness accounts, the contrast between official pronouncements and news reports on the events, lists of those identified by the survivors as those having instigated violence and/or protected alleged criminals as well as of others allegedly involved in looting, arson and other criminal activities and lists of relief centres recognised by the Delhi administration and of those not recognised.]