

Wireless messages dent SIT claim on Modi

Vidya Subrahmaniam

NEW DELHI: In its closure report submitted to the trial court, the Special Investigation Team that probed Zakia Jafri's complaint against Narendra Modi and 58 others said there was no evidence to prove that the Chief Minister had sent the bodies of the 2002 Godhra victims to Ahmedabad with a view to parading them before the public.

The SIT quoted Ahmedabad Police Commissioner P.C. Pande to back its claim that there was no parading of the bodies.

Not just this. Anyone reading the report would conclude that peace had prevailed through the time the bodies were transported from Godhra to the Sola Civil Hospital on the outskirts of Ahmedabad, and later too, when the bodies were handed over to the next of kin. There is no mention in the closure report of the charged atmosphere in

the hospital prior to the arrival of the bodies in the early hours of February 28, 2002. Nor does the report indicate anywhere that huge, violent crowds accompanied the funeral processions of the victims; indeed that the processions became the trigger for the anti-Muslim violence that rocked the city and State in the Godhra aftermath.

The real story emerges in a series of desperate wireless messages sent out by police and intelligence field staff positioned at the Sola Civil Hospital and other locations on February 27 and 28, 2002. The wireless extracts, annexed to a protest petition filed against the SIT's closure report by Ms. Jafri in a local court, show the following. One, there was a lot of anxiety over the Modi administration's decision to send the bodies to Ahmedabad. Two, there were repeated pleas for bandobast at the hospital

where crowds had gathered in anticipation of the arrival of the bodies. Three, there were attacks on Muslims by crowds accompanying the funeral processions which set the stage for the large-scale violence that followed.

At 12.30 p.m. on February 27, that is just hours after the Godhra train carnage, a State Intelligence Bureau (SIB) officer sent a fax communication to his headquarters saying there were reports that bodies of the kar sevaks were going to be sent to Ahmedabad. He alerted: "So communal violence will occur in the city of Ahmedabad; so take preventive action."

The warning was repeated in another message which added that kar sevaks were threatening retaliatory violence in explosive interviews given to a TV station in Godhra. In the early hours of February 28, there were two...

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... messages (1.51 a.m. and 1.59 a.m.) from a police van stationed at the Sola Civil Hospital, urging "immediate protection from Special Reserve Police platoons and the presence of DCP Zone 1."

At 2.44 a.m., a message said the motorcade carrying the bodies had reached the hospital. Another message at 4 a.m. said a mob comprising 3,000 swayamsevaks (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh volunteers) had gathered at the hospital. At 7.14 a.m., the police van again relayed the message that a large mob had assembled at the hospital. Three minutes later, a message said a mob of 500 was holding up the traffic.

At 11.55 a.m., there was a

message saying "the hindu mob" had become violent and had set a vehicle on fire and was "indulging in arson on the highway." Another message at the same time said, "Sayyed Saheb, the Protocol Officer" had informed that riots had started in the hospital. A further message said mobs had surrounded the hospital staff.

There were specific messages from the field about crowds of 5,000-6,000 taking the bodies out in funeral processions. A message at 11.58 a.m. said: "Amrajwadi-1 informed that 10 dead bodies have been taken for cremation ceremony from Ramol Janatanagar to Hatkeshwar Cremation Centre with crowd of 5 to 6 thou-

sand." Another message said: "Funeral procession allowed at Khedbrahma town in Sabarkantha district. Situation tense, 2 Muslims stabbed at Khedbrahma."

There was also a message about 150 Bajrang Dal members from Ayodhya reaching Khedbrahma.

The SIT's closure report acknowledged that the bodies of kar sevaks had been handed over to the VHP's Jaydeep Patel but it placed the blame for the decision on M.L. Nalvaya, the local executive magistrate, and said he had issued a letter to Mr. Patel where he mentioned that 54 bodies were being sent with him on five trucks.

The SIT said the five

trucks carrying the bodies reached the Sola Civil Hospital between 3.30 a.m. and 4 a.m. on February 28, and that Mr. Patel handed over the letter from the executive magistrate to the Deputy Collector who was waiting at the hospital with the Collector and other officials.

The SIT blandly recorded that "the relatives of the persons who had died at the Godhra carnage were also present in the hospital. Accordingly, 35 persons were identified and their bodies handed over to their relatives ..."

The SIT denied that there had been any parading of bodies, and quoted Mr. Pande to back its claim: "Shri P.C. Pande, the then

CP, Ahmedabad city has stated that there had been no parading of dead bodies inasmuch as the trucks carrying the dead bodies under police escort reached Ahmedabad city between 0330 hrs to 0400 hrs on 28.02.2002 which means they had started from Godhra at least three hrs earlier and as such there was no one to see them on the highway at dead of night. Shri Pande has also stated that in Ahmedabad city, the dead bodies were kept in Sola Civil Hospital situated on the outskirts of the city and that most of the dead bodies were handed over to their relations after proper documentation by 28.02.2008 morning."

As for the funeral proc-

essions, the SIT said: "... the dead bodies were moved in vehicles and not by foot as the same would have escalated the tension ... R.J. Savani (Deputy Commissioner of Police, Zone V) succeeded in persuading the relatives and well-wishers of the deceased to take each body in a vehicle and the funeral procession was guarded by the police up to Hatkeshwar cremation ground ... The funeral was over by 1400hrs and the crowd which had gathered on the highway dispersed thereafter."

No mention of the unrest in the hospital. No mention of arson by protestors. And no mention of the huge crowds that accompanied the funeral processions.