

Strategy for the Sikh community to manage Narendra Modi's visit to the UK 12-14 November 2015

Federation of Sikh Organisations (FSO)
Supported by UK Gurdwaras
Meeting held at Sri Guru Singh Sabha, Southall
on Saturday 3 October 2015





Background information



Narendra Modi's schedule in the UK and implications

Modi's visit provides an opportunity to raise issues, but also represents a challenge

What has been achieved to date by those talking to the Indian High Commission?

On 29 April 2005 a UK-based Sikh businessman had the opportunity to hold a short meeting with Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh in Delhi and share a memorandum drafted by Sikhs in the UK. The issues related to domestic matters and issues of concern relating to Sikhs outside of India where a Sikh Prime Minister could assist.

Domestic issues included:

- release of Sikh political prisoners
- lack of justice for the victims of anti-Sikh pogroms of November 1984
- need for the prosecution of police officers involved in human rights violations in Punjab
- Punjab related matters - river waters, inward investment and development, drug rehabilitation, heritage etc.

Sikh issues outside of India included:

- right to wear the Sikh turban in schools in France
- safeguarding the Sikh identity post 9/11
- separate monitoring of Sikhs in the UK to assist with fair provision of public services

The last Indian Prime Minister to visit the UK was Manmohan Singh in October 2006. Despite the memorandum and meeting he did not try and visit a Gurdwara in the UK and there were no attempts to hold a meeting with UK Sikh representatives and address any of the Sikh concerns.

Narendra Modi has not had Sikhs from the UK meet him in Delhi and raise issues with him face to face or hand him a memorandum, so why do some think he is wanting to meet Sikhs when he comes to the UK?



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Our understanding is Narendra Modi's schedule is as follows:

- Arrives in the UK late on Wednesday 11th November
- Thursday 12th November he meets with David Cameron and other senior Ministers (he may also have an audience with the Queen), Jeremy Corbyn expected to meet Modi in his hotel the same day
- Reception for invited guests at the Indian High Commission in London and visit to a Hindu Temple, possibly Wembley to mark Diwali (evening of 12th and/or morning of 13th November)
- Will almost certainly be speaking at Cambridge or Oxford University in the afternoon on Friday 13th November
- Being flown by helicopter to Wembley stadium for his speech around 7pm
- Police will cordon off the Wembley stadium area from 3pm onwards and his supporters will be in the stadium by 5pm
- Leaves on Saturday 14th November for Turkey to attend the G20 summit
- He had planned to go to Leicester, but that appears to have been dropped

The implications are Narendra Modi will:

- have limited time to meet Sikh representatives
- be unlikely to try and visit a Gurdwara unless it can take place on Saturday 14th November before he leaves for Turkey
- greet and shake hands with selected Sikh representatives invited to the reception at the Indian High Commission in London and/or visit to a Hindu Temple, possibly Wembley (like in San Jose)



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What has been achieved to date by those talking to the Indian High Commission?

Narendra Modi is controversial, has clear Hindutva objectives, but his visit to the UK will be high profile politically and from a media perspective. The visit therefore provides an **opportunity** to draw attention to a number of key issues in relation to India in a variety of ways – via UK Government Ministers and officials, opposition parties, backbench MPs, the media and possibly directly.

However, the visit also presents a major **challenge** as some in the Sikh community are completely ignoring Modi's track record and believe it may be possible to engage with him and secure some major Sikh demands. But only those demands that are deemed 'achievable' by the gatekeepers i.e. they argue self-determination or demands for an independent Sikh state are put aside despite the events of 1984.

Others encouraged by the Indian High Commission appear to be simply attracted towards him as he is the Prime Minister, a big 'celebrity' and may simply be satisfied with greeting him, shaking hands and posing for photographs. There are also some who are Indian government agents and simply using the opportunity to make a name for themselves by discrediting Sikhs calling for self-determination/independence and highlighting human rights violations.

From what has been happening in the last few weeks there is little doubt the visit is being used by the Indian High Commission to try and discredit specific individuals and Sikh organisations. Attempts to try and compromise named individuals into attending 'pre-meetings' with the promise that Modi may agree to some major Sikh demands has been tried and failed.

We need to unite, show we are one step ahead and make them sit up & take notice



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What has been achieved to date by those talking to the Indian High Commission?



There are several 'gatekeepers' that have either been approached by the Indian High Commission in London or vice versa and they have had recent communications.

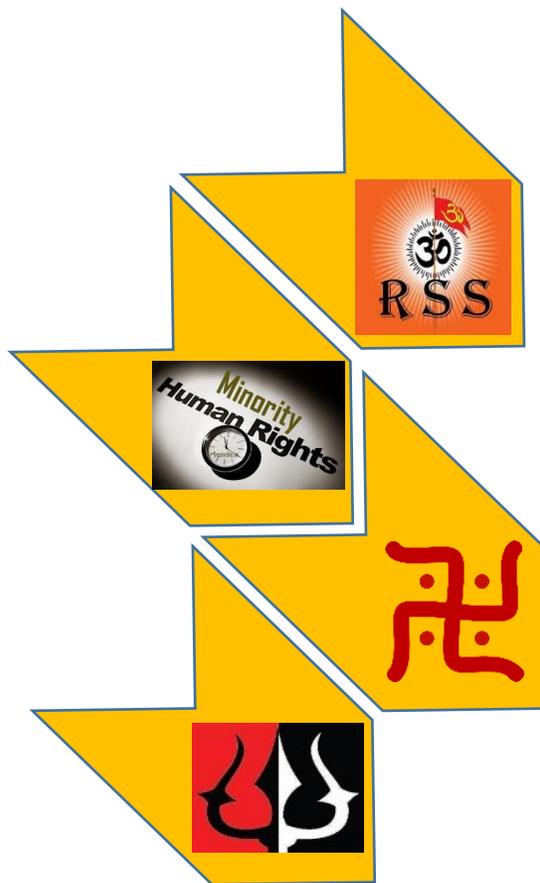
They should each be asked:

- i) Did they approach the Indian High Commission or were they approached, if the latter who were they approached by?
- ii) Were the communications in writing and/or oral?
- iii) What real authority did the person at the Indian High Commission have to make promises on behalf of Narendra Modi?
- iv) What have they said is possible – pre-meeting with Indian High Commission, meeting with officials accompanying Modi, simple opportunity to meet and greet Modi at a reception at the Indian High Commission or Hindu Temple, meeting around a table with Modi, visit to a Gurdwara by Modi etc?
- v) What have they said about those who should be at any meetings on both sides?
- vi) What if anything have they indicated Modi could agree to before coming to the UK?
- vii) What is Modi prepared to discuss or not discuss?
- viii) Any that have been invited by the Indian High Commission to receptions or other events where Modi will be present and plan to attend should identify themselves



General issues

Oppression of religious and ethnic minorities in India



Narendra Modi has clear Hindutva objectives and trained with the ultranationalist right wing Hindu group, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). The RSS is a Hindu nationalist paramilitary group that has been involved in extreme violence, including acts of terrorism and been banned several times in India. This includes when RSS member Nathuram Godse assassinated Mahatma Gandhi in 1948. The most recent ban was in 1992 after the demolition of the Babri Masjid.

The BJP government led by Modi presents a significant threat to religious and ethnic minorities in India with the declaration by right wing Hindu groups that they will ensure India becomes a Hindu Rashtra by 2021. These groups have an objective of attacking the Sikh faith so it leads to its eventual assimilation and is driving a campaign to convert Muslims and Christians to Hinduism by force. There have been numerous examples of forced conversions since Modi came to power in May 2014.

Following Indian independence Sikhs refused to be signatories of the Indian Constitution as Article 25 denies Sikhs exist as a distinct religion with a separate identity. Successive Indian governments have refused to amend Article 25 and various laws concerning the Sikh way of life (i.e. marriage, inheritance, adoption etc.). The current Chief Minister of Punjab burnt a copy of the Indian Constitution in Delhi on 27 February 1984 to press the then Union Government to amend the Constitution. The current BJP government, although supported by the Chief Minister of Punjab is plainly opposed to make any changes.

In January 2015 President Obama while speaking in Delhi criticised the Modi led BJP government by making a plea for freedom of religion to be upheld in India, a country with a history of strife between Hindus and minorities. In a veiled threat he also warned otherwise India could break up.



General issues

Narendra Modi blamed for Gujarat 2002 massacre of at least 2,000 Muslims



STOP GENOCIDE



Narendra Modi is described as a man either responsible for mass-genocide or the saviour of India's Hindus - depending on your point of view. Britain imposed a 10-year diplomatic boycott of Narendra Modi after he was accused of failing to stop the sectarian murder of at least 2,000 Muslims in Gujarat in 2002. An internal British report at the time described the violence as pre-planned with the support of the state government.

It led to a de facto travel ban imposed on Modi by the UK, the US and some European nations, as well as the boycott by all but junior officials. In 2005, Modi was refused a US visa as someone held responsible for a serious violation of religious freedom.

Modi, who was the chief minister of Gujarat at the time and was severely criticised for not doing enough to stop Hindu mobs who went on a spree of raping, burning and murdering. He is on record as saying he felt the same pain over the bloodshed as a passenger in a car that has just run over a puppy. In August 2012, Maya Kodnani, a former aide to Modi and State Minister, was handed 28 years in jail for her part in the murder of 97 people.

Three of those killed in Gujarat in 2002 were British Muslims visiting India on holiday. Their car was stopped by a mob at a road block when they were returning to Gujarat after a visit to Jaipur. The three men and their driver were all set ablaze with petrol and burnt to death. The family of the Britons have led a lengthy campaign for justice, including petitioning the Home Office to try and deny Narendra Modi a visa.

Human Rights Watch earlier this year accused the Gujarat authorities of harassing rights activists rather than pursuing justice for the victims. Sikhs champion human rights and cannot turn a blind eye to the actions of someone termed 'the Butcher of Gujarat' for the injustices of 2002.

Sikh specific issues

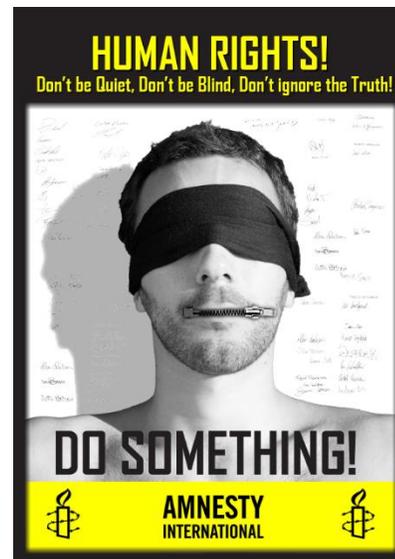


Release of Sikh political prisoners

There are 84 known Sikhs political prisoners languishing in India's prisons some have been in prison for over 25 years. The list consists of 1 death row conflict, 20 life term prisoners who are mainly in Punjab's prisons and many have served their minimum terms, 8 senior citizens whose health has deteriorated and 55 other Sikhs held in various states around India, such as UP, Haryana, Jammu and Jaipur. One of the first steps for resolving political conflicts is the release of all political prisoners and a general amnesty for those that have cases pending.

Justice for the Sikh Genocide of November 1984

The Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh in late December 2014 referred to what happen to the Sikhs in November 1984 as 'Genocide' and that 'justice would be meted out to the victims only when the perpetrators of the crime are punished' and 'that until these persons are punished, victims will not get relief'. This is at odds with the recent decision in September 2015 by the Central Bureau of Investigation to give a clean chit to Jagdish Tytler.



Prosecution of police officers involved in human rights violations in Punjab

To resolve the political conflict with the Sikhs international admission of the truth around widespread human rights violations by India is essential. For over 30 years UN rapporteurs and independent experts as well as Amnesty International have been denied access to Punjab to investigate widespread allegations of torture, disappearances, false encounters and extra-judicial executions. If India wishes to be taken seriously it must allow the truth to emerge by removing such restrictions, allowing independent investigations followed by prosecutions.

Returning rare and priceless items stolen by the Indian Army in June 1984 from the Sikh Reference Library

These included rare and priceless manuscripts of Guru Granth Sahib Ji, Hukamnamas carrying signatures of the Sikh Gurus, documents related to the Sikh Raj and Sikh contribution during the independence movement and books on Sikhi and our history.



Sikh specific issues

20,000

acres of Sikh-owned land confiscated by Gujarat government

1,000

Sikh farmers affected by the move

Compensation for Sikh farmers in Gujarat forced to leave and prosecution of those responsible for violent attacks against them

In 2010, the Narendra Modi-led Gujarat government had over 20,000 acres of land belonging to Sikh farmers in Gujarat confiscated. These Sikh farmers migrated there about five decades ago. They were being uprooted under a law enacted by the Gujarat government that stopped Sikhs from owning land in the state. The Sikh farmers won their case in the Gujarat High Court but the state government challenged the order in the Supreme Court. In the run-up to the Lok Sabha polls, Narendra Modi had assured that no Sikh farmer in Gujarat would ever be evicted. However, since the May 2014 elections attacks by land mafia and goons have increased and charges have brought against Sikh farmers for defending themselves. These attacks have forced many to flee the land they had successfully made their home.



UN-led inquiry into the 1984 Sikh Genocide orchestrated by the Congress Party

Backing for a UN-led inquiry into the atrocities committed by the Congress Party in June 1984, the killings and disappearances in the months that followed and the systematic and deliberate killing of innocent Sikhs in November 1984. The UN inquiry should also look into the use by the police of criminals, goons, gangsters and smugglers to impersonate Sikh 'militants', widely known as Black Cats.

Application of self-determination to the Sikhs

Acceptance by India of the general principle that self-determination is a basic human right founded in international law and it applies to the Sikhs. Withdrawal of India's 'reservation' at the UN Human Rights Council that self-determination does not apply to the people of India. Internal self-determination by Sikhs since 1947 has been violently rejected and crushed with state terror so remedy via external self-determination is possible. The persecution of Sikhs in 1984 and in the years that followed and the lack of justice is the basis on which the Sikhs continue to raise the legitimate demand for an independent Sikh homeland.



**What should be shared?****Who should it be shared with?****How should it be shared?****Agreed strategy of the Sikh community for dealing with Modi's visit**

UK Sikh organisations, Gurdwaras & Sangat

Verbally on TV stations & Gurdwara stages
News item in Ajit & Punjabi newspapers**When: Immediately after the 3 October meeting****Key issues in a two-page glossy leaflet**Relevant UK Government Ministers and officials
Opposition UK political parties and shadow ministers
Backbench UK politicians
Modi and officials at the Indian High Commission
UK Sikh organisations, Gurdwaras & SangatWriting: email, twitter & meetings
Writing: email, twitter & meetings
Writing: email, twitter & local meetings
Writing: email
Hard copy for use locally with MPs**When: English version finalised for sharing via email by Wednesday 7 October, hard copies available from Monday 12 October, meetings at national level between Monday 12 October (after the party conference season) & Tuesday 10 November (eve of Modi's arrival), local meetings with MPs from Friday 9 October to Sunday 8 November****Key issues & high level strategy for dealing with Modi's visit (Punjabi version)**

UK Sikh organisations, Gurdwaras & Sangat

Adverts in the Punjabi newspapers
Press release in Punjabi**Press release for Indian media (English)**

Modi, Indian government & international community

Targeted press release via email

Press release for mainstream media

British public & international community

Targeted press release via email

When: Weekly Punjabi newspapers released on 13/14 October, English newspapers & TV in India (around 12 October, one month before Modi arrives) & mainstream media a week before Modi arrives (there may be separate Press Releases following meetings with politicians)



Will Modi show some goodwill before he comes to the UK i.e. by releasing all Sikh political prisoners?

Narendra Modi will need to take concrete steps if he wants to try and change the relationship with Sikhs, but not on petty matters like getting rid of blacklists.

VERY UNLIKELY



Will the Indian High Commission or those close to them suggest pre-meetings to discredit Sikhs or meetings with officials with Modi?

Attempts have been made to try and compromise specific individuals and Sikh organisations into attending 'pre-meetings' with the promise that Modi might agree to some Sikh demands. Those close to the Indian High Commission are using the opportunity to make a name for themselves by trying to discredit Sikhs calling for self-determination/independence and highlighting human rights violations.

EXPECTED BUT BEST AVOIDED



Will Modi meet around a table with UK Sikh representatives to discuss key issues?

Narendra Modi has limited time, provided no indication he is prepared to meet and given his track record a meeting is very unlikely to take place.

VERY UNLIKELY



Will Modi try and visit a Gurdwara in the UK?

Narendra Modi has limited time and it is even more unlikely he will risk visiting a Gurdwara. He visited a Gurdwara in Vancouver with the Canadian PM, but in the UK he will face massive protests from Sikhs.

VERY UNLIKELY



Will the Indian High Commission invite Sikhs to meet and greet Modi and pose for photographs?

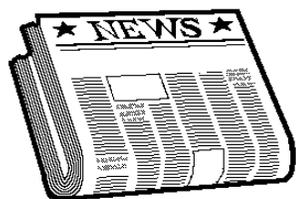
We have seen this happen to Sikhs during Modi's recent visit to the US. There will be a reception at the Indian High Commission, Wembley Stadium and/or Hindu Temple and individual Sikhs will be hand-picked to be seen shaking hands with Modi.

BEST TO BOYCOTT



Narendra Modi is so controversial that protests are possible wherever he turns up in the UK - At the airport, 10 Downing Street, Parliament Square, Indian High Commission, hotel where he is staying, Wembley Stadium, Hindu Temple he will visit, Cambridge or Oxford University etc.

Protests will take many forms and range from:



Individual statements and adverts - A number of prominent individuals (personalities, academics) are being lined up to write letters and make statements. Adverts may also be taken out in the national press.



Mass demonstrations & rally – Outside 10 Downing Street, moving to Parliament Square (where there may be a rally) on Thursday 12 November from 12 noon, outside Wembley Stadium on 13 November from 4pm.



Meetings in Parliament – There is likely to be a meeting in Parliament towards the end of October or start of November to raise awareness of politicians on the key issues. Another is planned for Thursday 12 November at 3.30pm.



Picketing – This could happen wherever Modi appears to dissuade others from supporting him and to draw public attention to relevant issues.



Direct action - The three British families who lost loved ones could bring a 'Pinochet-style' private prosecution against Modi. This would have very little chance of success, but would create huge publicity during Narendra Modi's visit.



Die-ins – Where participants simulate being dead. Protesters would occupy an area for a short time i.e. outside the Indian High Commission.



Lockdowns – These could take place at 10 Downing Street, Indian High Commission, the hotel in which Modi is staying etc.



Social networking – Twitter will play an important part with use of appropriate hashtags, Instagram will be used with suitable pictures etc.



Boycott – Sikhs avoid meeting and greeting Modi with a hand shake and photographs at receptions at the Indian High Commission, Hindu Temple etc.



Agreeing the strategy for the Sikh community to manage Narendra Modi's visit to the UK

1) Understand the context – A meeting is very unlikely and no indication there will be movement on Sikh demands

2) Decide on the key issues

General issues

- Oppression of religious and ethnic minorities in India
- Narendra Modi blamed for Gujarat 2002 massacre of at least 2,000 Muslims

Sikh specific issues

- Release of Sikh political prisoners
- Justice for the Sikh Genocide of November 1984
- Prosecution of police officers involved in human rights violations in Punjab
- Returning rare and priceless items stolen by the Indian Army in June 1984 from the Sikh Reference Library
- Compensation for Sikhs farmers in Gujarat forced to leave and prosecution of those responsible for violent attacks against them
- UN-led inquiry into the 1984 Sikh Genocide orchestrated by the Congress Party
- Application of self-determination to the Sikhs

3) Agree the communications strategy and start to implement it

4) Accept a proper meeting is very unlikely and use appropriate means of 'protesting'