

The Asian Age, Mumbai, 26 Mar 2008

## Fresh hope for Gujarat victims

The Supreme Court's intervention on Tuesday in favour of the victims of the 2002 post-Godhra state-abetted anti-minorities riots is bound to revive their dormant hopes of securing justice. The court responded positively to a National Human Rights Commission petition, and the pleas of amicus curiae and senior counsel Harish Salve and senior Gujarat government counsel Mukul Rohatagi, requesting a second look at the current status of the investigations into allegations of biased police investigation. It appointed a five-member Special Investigation Team (SIT) to reopen investigations into 10 cases and submit its report within three months.

The composition of the SIT ought to inspire the confidence of all those in pursuit of justice in cases where the state itself was found to be actively involved in suppressing evidence, influencing the course of investigations and coercing witnesses and intimidating them to retract their original statements. Former CBI director R.K. Raghavan and former state DGP C.B. Satpathy are to assist three senior state police officials, Geeta Johri, Sivananda Jha and Ashish Bhatia.

The court itself was apparently dissatisfied with the fairness and impartiality of the probe, and this led it to agree to reopen the investigations into as many as 10 major cases in which the probe was sought to be deliberately derailed.

The ruling is undoubtedly an indictment of the partisan role of the state police and officialdom and vindicates the universal public perception that Mr Narendra Modi's government ignored its constitutional responsibilities and obligations, egged on the pogrom against Muslims, sheltered the guilty and till today has done little to rehabilitate the victims. The questionable role of the state police in the probes into the post-Godhra riots came to the Supreme Court's attention earlier too in two specific cases, including the Best Bakery case, the trials of which were ordered to be conducted outside Gujarat. The anti-Muslim massacre claimed nearly 2,000 lives and left thousands of Muslims homeless. Most of them continue to languish in makeshift camps and have been left by a cynical government to fend for themselves as best as they can.