

The following is the text of the Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh's intervention in Rajya Sabha yesterday, during the debate on the adjournment motion regarding action taken report of the government on Nanavati Commission report:

THE PRIME MINISTER (DR. MANMOHAN SINGH): Mr. Chairman, Sir, I must confess to you, at the very outset, that speaking on this occasion has meant a great emotional strain for me. We are discussing the issues, which have grave implications not only on the future of a brave community but also on the future of our nation. Four thousand people were killed in this great national tragedy that took place in 1984. This should be an occasion for introspection, how working together as a united nation, we can find new pathways to ensure that such ghastly tragedies never again take place in our country. I respectfully submit that this is not achieved by pursuing partisan goals, apportioning blame. And I, as the Prime Minister of this country, have no hesitation in saying that what happened -- the death of a great Prime Minister who had served our country with the greatest distinction in peace and war, who brought victory to this country in the eventful days of the Bangladesh War; her death at the hands of her own bodyguards -- was a great national tragedy. What happened subsequently was equally shameful. I know for certain, having worked with Indiraji, she would have never approved of any harm coming to a single individual on account of anything that was done to her. We all know the events of 1984, the tragic events in the Golden Temple. There were top-level demands on the Prime Minister to change her Sikh bodyguards and she said, "I would not be worthy of being the daughter of Indian revolution, if I were to start suspecting people on the basis of their religion or community." Sir, I have no hesitation in saying, and I said it that what took place after Indiraji's death was a great national shame, a great national tragedy. I have seen public statements of the honourable leaders of the Opposition saying that I should ask the forgiveness of the country. I accompanied the Congress President to Harmandir Sahib some five or six years ago, when we together prayed, "God give us the strength, show us the way that such things never again take place in our country." I have no hesitation in apologising not only to the Sikh community but the whole Indian nation because what took place in 1984 is the negation of the concept of nationhood and what enshrined in our Constitution. So, I am not standing on any false prestige. On behalf of our Government, on behalf of the entire people of this country, I bow my head in shame that such thing took place. But, Sir, there are ebbs, there are tides in the affairs of nations. The past is with us. We cannot rewrite the past. But as human beings, we have the willpower and we have the ability to write better future for all of us.

DR. MANMOHAN SINGH: This debate serves to focus attention on the quest for that better future, that all our citizens to whichever community they may belong, that they should feel honourable members of our nation, that they have every right and ability to lead a life of dignity and self-respect as equal citizens of this ancient land of ours with glorious traditions of over 5000 years. If the debate had turned on these events it would have served its purpose. But reading out extracts sometimes out of context, sometimes in context does not lead us to those pathways. I started by saying, Sir, that we are discussing the future, the conduct, the aspirations, emotions, fears of a brave community which has played a glowing role in India's history. Ahluwaliaji quoted Guru Nanak but I also know what significant, social economic and societal changes came to this blessed land of Punjab after the advent of our Gurus. No less a person than Dr. Mohammed Iqbal said about Guru Nanak:

* फिर उठी आखिर सुबह तोहीद की पंजाब से,
मर्द-ए-कामिल ने जगाया हिन्द को फिर ख्वाब से ॥*

That is the role of the Sikh community at a time when religious bigotry seemed to overwhelm our country. Our Gurus gave us a message of an inclusive society, secularism in practice and also subsequently, the Sikh history saw difficult periods and we saw examples of great valour. Guru Gobind Singh after he lost all his four sons, his mother and his father did not lose heart and he said and I quote:

* इन पुतरन के सीस पर, वार दिए सिख चार ।
चार मुये तो क्या हुआ, जीवत कई हजार ।।'

This is our legacy. This, Mr, Chairman, Sir, this is the legacy of this brave community. After a great deal of struggle for the first time, it came to Maharaja Ranjit Singh to expand our frontiers and to prove to us and to show to us that our frontiers do not lie in traditional manners where we define that India's defence lies as far as what happened in Afghanistan. This is the proud history of this community. During the British times, it was the brave Sikh community, which developed the canal colonies of the erstwhile united Punjab which made Punjab the granary of India. With Partition the Sikhs suffered the grievous loss. Our community was divided into two parts. All of them were forced to migrate to this part of the Punjab; and I know hundreds of cases where people came to India with their clothes. They had nothing else to fall back upon.

DR. MANMOHAN SINGH: But, they converted that adversity into an opportunity to reconstruct, to rebuilt their lives and rebuilt the life of our nation. And, we all know how a very deficit, poor, East-Punjab State, once again emerged on the screen of India as number one State in terms of per-capita income, as the State known for the start of the Green Revolution in our country. I think, attempts have been made by the hon. Opposition Members and I don't want to quarrel with any one of them on this occasion to separate the Sikh community from the great traditions of the Congress Party. I respectfully say to our Opposition Members the post-partitioned Punjab would not have been a prosperous State as it is today but for the visionary leadership and support that the people of Punjab received from Shri Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India. There are no Akali Members sitting here and I do not want to score any point. But, it is also the fact that when that glorious chapter in the history of Punjab was being written, the Akali Dal was busy in dividing the people of Punjab on communal lines. I am not scoring any point. History is there. The first Akali Government came to power in Punjab in 1967 and what result it produced, I am not going to talk about that...(Interruptions)...

SHRI BALBIR K. PUNJ: Who gave Bhindranwale?

DR. MANMOHAN SINGH: Therefore, we are discussing events. We must view them in a proper perspective. Then, came the events of late 70s. There was a nefarious design developed outside our country, as a part of the theory of inflicting on our country a thousand cuts. And, out of that, came the sad period in Punjab's history which lasted until the mid-1990s. The events of 1994 are all part of that great tragedy. It took the nation great effort to get Punjab out of that sad chapter. The Sikh community had the vision to fight back the nefarious designs of the enemies of our country to create a situation where there would be a permanent strength between the Sikh community and the national mainstream. It took the Sikh community a lot of time to regain its self-confidence after the tragic events of 1984. I have interacted with hundreds and hundreds of Sikh young men who doubted, at that time, whether they had a place in building a prosperous united Indian nation. I went abroad and several young Sikh people -- students and teachers -- used to come to me with the same questions. And, I think, that would have been a great national tragedy had we allowed the enemies of our nation to bring about a permanent rift between the Sikh community and the national mainstream. I think, it is a tribute to our national leadership of all shades -- I am not finding fault with anyone -- that defeated the nefarious designs of forces inimical to our country.

DR. MANMOHAN SINGH: The Sikh community has regained its self-confidence. I think, today terrorist elements do not sway the minds of our people, the way it was feared in the 1980s. But someone said, "Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty". And, I appeal to all the segments of this House, let us not create a situation; let us not use a language which will, once again, give handle to those forces who are inimical to our country's unity and integrity and who play upon the sentiments of innocent Sikh youths. It is no service to the Sikh community. It is no service to our nation. I say so with great respect that some of the things which have been said, they do not promote that objective. I started by saying that we cannot undo the past, but we have an option,

today, to build a better future. Let us help the Sikh community to get out of that trauma of 1984. Valiant efforts have been made by all our national leadership to achieve that task, and we have succeeded. Let us not do anything, which will reverse that process. You may not like the Congress Party, but who can deny India's history? I mention the role of Jawaharlal Nehru. After the tragic events of 1984, the uppermost thing that was in the mind of Rajiv Gandhi, when he became the Prime Minister, was how to bring back the Punjab into the national mainstream. I recall the first thing that he said to me, when he appointed me the Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission. He said, "This is my top priority". And, he worked assiduously to end that sad chapter. I know he was asked in a meeting, where I was also present, that, in the process, he had harmed the Congress Party; he had handed over the Government of Punjab to the Akali Dal. And, I still recall what Rajivji said on that occasion. He said, "It is immaterial whether the Congress Party wins or loses. What is really of substance is that India should prosper and India should develop." That's the legacy. There were lapses in 1984. Several commissions have gone into this matter. We all know that we still do not know the truth, and the search must go on. This present commission is no exception to that. I said in the other House, and I think Nilotpalji also pointed out, that this Commission was not appointed by us. The records of this august House would show how this Commission came to be appointed. A question was put to the then hon. Home Minister about the 1984 riots. A supplementary was, then, asked about setting up of a commission. And, there was some discussion. I was sitting on the other side, at that time, on the Chair where Shri Jaswant Singhji is seated. And, I thought that the Question Hour was not an occasion to discuss such serious issues. So, I did not rise from my seat. After the Question Hour, I walked out. And, what did the then hon. Home Minister of State say when he went out? He said, "I was to appoint a Commission of Inquiry to go into the 1984 events, but Dr. Manmohan Singh prevented me from doing that".

DR. MANMOHAN SINGH: I protested that because that was not true. I speak from my memory, and I hope I am correct. Shri L.K. Advaniji then had to apologise to this House that what he had stated outside was not correct. The Commission was born in circumstances over which we had no control, we had no choice about its terms of reference and we had no choice about who will be heading this Commission. The Report is before us, and one thing it conclusively states is that there is no evidence, whatsoever, against the top leadership of the Congress Party. That lie, which has over the last 21 years been used to poison the minds of the Sikh youth, stands nailed conclusively. There are, of course, individuals mentioned. The Commission has not come forward with conclusive conclusions. These are in the realm of probabilities. And, I stated yesterday, in the other House, that there is such a thing as perception, there is such a thing as the sentiment of both the Houses of Parliament, and respecting that sentiment, whosoever figures in the Nanavati Report -- and the Commission has in its wisdom found it necessary to draw an adverse inference about their conduct or behaviour -- we will reopen those cases. So, that commitment I have given.

One of my colleagues, a valued colleague, has tendered his resignation. That resignation has been accepted.

Questions have been raised about the rehabilitation of the affected families. I recognise that there may have been shortcomings. I have committed our Government to do all that we can to ensure that these widows, children and other relatives who did suffer in the wake of the 1984 riots, whether in Delhi or outside -- we have a solemn obligation to help them to forget that sad chapter -- lead, once again, a life of dignity and self-respect. There are some police officers against whom the ATR has made a mention. There is a normal rule that you can take action against Government officers four years after retirement. Many of them retired many, many years ago. But within the ambit of law, whatever action we can take, we will reopen those cases also if the law of the land permits that.

So, Sir, you have my assurance that our Government stands committed to do all that we can humanly do to go to the root of the problem, that all those individuals about whom the Commission has drawn adverse inferences, suggestions, and recommendations, we will have a relook at them, and that we will provide effective assistance to all the widows, children and the

affected families so that they can lead a life of dignity and self-respect. Those police officers, whose conduct the Commission has adversely commented, we will see what can be done, we will have a relook at those cases within the ambit of law.

In conclusion, Sir, I would, once again, say what I started by saying at the beginning, we are dealing with the past, the present and the future of a very brave community which has bold traditions, which has been a part of our national mainstream, which has contributed far above its proportionate share in our population, in the national freedom struggle, which has contributed, admirably, to the processes of social and economic development in our country, which have, as a result, made Punjab one of the most prosperous States of our country. Let us do nothing to weaken its spirit of self-confidence and its legacy throughout its history to be the sword arm of Punjab.

I was pained yesterday when one hon. Member in the other House brought up instances where Sikh personnel of the Armed Forces suffered in 1984. Shri Rajnath Singh brought up that sad chapter again. I respectfully submit to you, that was the most painful chapter in the history of our country. By reliving that, by reminding us again and again you do not promote the cause of national integration, of strengthening our nation of sense of security. Please do not play politics with the sentiments of a brave community like the Sikhs.

Sir, with these words, I once again, appeal to this House that these events of 1984 should be viewed from a wider perspective, that the past cannot be brought back, cannot be undone, but let us, as a united nation, find new pathways to ensure that our nation will never again go through such traumas, whether they are in Delhi or in Gujarat or in any other part of the country. Our minorities, religious, cultural and social, have an honoured place in our Constitution. The founding fathers of our Republic gave us a Constitution of which we can be legitimately proud. And as I said, participating in the debate on my visit to the United States some days ago, wherever I go, people marvel about the polity that India is a country of 100 crores, seeking its destiny, seeking its salvation, in the framework of an open society, an open economy and deep and abiding commitment to the dignity of individuals and respect for all fundamental human freedoms. There have been aberrations. To err is human. I can only conclude by saying that all of us should ask forgiveness of those who have suffered in this tragedy. Yesterday, in the other House, I quoted a sentence from Gurbani, and my friend, Sardar Balwant Singh, who was the Finance Minister of the Akali Government, a friend of 35 years' standing, who studied with me in college, narrated to me how that period of sadness, of turmoil, ended when Rajiv Gandhi signed the Accord with Sant Harchand Singh Longowal.

Santji was of two minds. And, then Sardar Balwant Singh said, he said to me, "Let me seek guidance from Guru Granth Sahib". And, both of them went to the upper storey of Sardar Balwant Singh's house and they opened up the page from the Guru Granth Sahib, and the first stanza that was on that page was like this.

"Hoye Ikkattar, milo mere bhai, duvidha chhad, karam liv layee"

It means, "Come and join together, oh, my siblings of destiny, dispel your sense of duality, and let yourself be lovingly absorbed in the Lord."

I conclude my speech by appealing to this august House, let the spirit of working steadfastly for national reconciliation, for wiping out tears from the eyes of each and every one of citizens be our guiding principle. It was the firm belief of the Father of our Nation, Mahatma Gandhi, to wipe every tear from every eye as mortals, human beings. That goal may be not attainable, but that is the inspiration, which should inspire us in what we discuss and what we do in this august House.

I thank you, Sir.