

## **“On Behalf of Govt., I bow my head in shame” PM’s Reply to Debate in Parliament - Aug. 11, 2005**

**THE PRIME MINISTER AND THE LEADER OF THE HOUSE (DR. MANMOHAN SINGH), intervening in the debate, said:** I must confess at the very outset that speaking on this occasion has meant a great emotional strain for me as the issues being discussed have grave implication on the future of a brave community and also for the future of our nation. Four thousand people were killed in this great national tragedy that took place in 1984. This is an occasion which should be an occasion for introspection, how working together as a united nation, we can find new pathways to ensure that such ghastly tragedies will never again take place in our country.

This can not be achieved by pursuing partisan goals and I, as 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 times of peace and war, who brought victory to this country in the eventful days of Bangladesh War, was a great national tragedy. What happened subsequently was equally shameful. We all know the events of 1984, the tragic events in the Golden Temple. There was top level demand 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.” What took place after Indiraji’s death was a great national shame, a great national tragedy.

**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 as enshrined in our Constitution. On behalf of our Government, on behalf of the entire people of this country, I bow my head in shame that such a thing took place. There are ebbs and tides in the affairs of nations. The past is with us. We cannot rewrite it. But as human beings, we have the willpower and we have the ability to write better future for all of us.**

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. Our Gurus gave us a message of an inclusive society. Attempts have been made by the hon. Opposition Members to separate the Sikh community from the great traditions of the Congress Party. I respectfully say to our Opposition Members that the post-partitioned Punjab would not have been a prosperous State 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.

It took the Sikh community a lot of time to regain its self-confidence after the tragic events of 1984. It 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. It is a tribute to our national leadership to defeat the nefarious designs of forces inimical to our country. The Sikh community has regained its self-confidence. 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.

This 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.** The Commission has not come forward with conclusive

conclusions. These are in the realm of probabilities. The Commission has in its wisdom found it necessary to draw an adverse inference about their conduct or behaviour. We will reopen those cases. One of my colleagues has tendered his resignation and the same 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 have retired 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.

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.

In conclusion, I would once again, say that 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 State of our country. Let us do nothing to weaken its spirit of self-confidence and its legacy throughout its history.

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. I respectfully submit that it 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.

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.

People across the globe 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. This is 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.

**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.**

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