

CPDR INQUIRY INTO THE POLICE FIRING  
ON MUSLIM MORCHA

On Friday, February 24, 1989, Bombay police fired more than 100 rounds over one hour on a 2000 - 3000 strong morcha of Muslims in South Bombay, killing 11 Muslims, 9 of them on the spot, and injuring 39. This was the most serious confrontation between Muslims and the police in Bombay. (PAR)

CPDR decided to investigate the firing because of the gravity of the incident itself, and also to find out how justified was the strong feeling among a fairly wide section of people that the firing was necessary as the morcha had turned violent. (PAR)

A fact-finding team comprising the following CPDR members: Advocate P A Sebastian, general Secretary, Vrijendra, college lecturer, M J Pandey, reporter, the Times of India, Bernard D'Mello, assistant editor, EPW and Jyoti Punwani, assistant editor, The Indian Post, met the families of those who died in the firing, the injured, participants of the morcha, its organisers and the police commissioner. (PAR)

The incident :

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Following Ayatollah Khomeini's directive to kill Salman Rushdie, author of The Satanic Verses, one Anwar Sadat, president of an unknown organisation called the Muslim Integration Council, issued an advertisement in the Urdu Times on Feb. 20 asking Muslims to observe a bandh and come out in a procession after the 10' clock namaas on Friday, February 24, to protest against the British government providing shelter to Rushdie. The ad appeared because both the Urdu Times and the Inquilab, the city's main Urdu papers, had refused to carry his statement welcoming Khomeini's death sentence, and announcing that had Rushdie been in Bombay, Sadat would have himself tried to kill him. (PAR)

The ad was not taken seriously by Urdu readers, as Sadat himself was unknown and also because the book had already been banned in India. In addition, Khomeini is not recognised as a spiritual leader by all Muslims in Bombay, especially the Sunnis who constitute <sup>the</sup> a majority. However, Sadat started making preparations for the morcha, contacting Muslim organisations and vice versa. (PAR)

3 announcements then appeared in the Urdu press : One by the All India Tableegh-e-Secrat, a religious organisation comprising the peshimans of the various mosques in Bombay; and the other signed by heads of 13 organisations, called for a bandh and morcha. The third ad was signed by 7 Muslims close to the Congress-I, asking Muslims to desist from taking out a morcha. (PAR).

The Police meanwhile got in touch with the morcha's organisers to find out their programme. They however, did nothing till a day before the morcha. On that day, they arrested Anwar Sadat, Allaudin Siddiqui, leader of the Tanzeem-e-Allah-o-Akbar, and Haji Mastan, head of the dalit muslim minorities suraksha mahasangh, who had just arrived in the city, and whose name had been announced in the papers as one of the leading participants of the morcha. Later that evening, Sec 144 was imposed all over the city, automatically resulting in a ban on the morcha. However, none of those arrested were allowed to get in touch with their organisations to call off the morcha. In fact, they were taken away to lock-ups in Mulund, the outer limit of the city. (PAR).

The next day, the entire Muslim area observed a bandh, but confusion prevailed as to whether the morcha was to be taken out or not, as news of the arrests and the ban had appeared in the morning papers. However, the 1 o' clock namaz was replete with abusive references to Rushdie, and by 2 o' clock, groups of young men started gathering at the venue from where the morcha was to start, Mastan Talao. (PAR).

They had come from all over Bombay, with banners and placards saying "I am ready to kill Rushdie"; "Rushdie-Rush+Die"; etc. Those who came in trucks were stopped by the police before they could reach the venue, but a large number, more than 500, managed to reach the venue. (PAR).

Confusion prevailed at the venue which was swarming with policemen. There was no 'leader' in sight. Two well-known Muslims were seen there talking to the police, but they quickly disappeared. One of them was Khalil Zahed, editor, Akhbar-e-Alam, who had signed the appeal against the morcha (though his name had also earlier appeared in the appeal for the morcha), Zainuddin Motorwala, municipal councillor and well-known trouble shooter of the Syedna, the chief of the Dawoodi Bohras. Ahmed Zakaria of the Cong-I, who had issued a statement welcoming Khomeini's call, sent printed copies of his statement in english, to be distributed in the morcha, but didn't make an appearance himself. (PAR).

As the maidan started filling up, the mike was passed from the hands of one youth to another, each of them telling the restive crowd to stay calm. Suddenly, the loudspeaker connection was switched off and the mike snatched away by the police. Some of those present were taken away in a police van. Soon after, a jeep arrived, a police officer dismounted and

snapped an order to disperse the crows immediately, ..

A lot of things then seemed to happen at once in the maidan. Armed SRP took up positions in a circle inside it, the crowd was asked to move to the back, and the 3 police vans parked outside moved towards the entrance blocking all access to the maidan. Immediately, the crows let out a shout and started moving towards the vans, till they were forced to move out and clear the entrance.

The Police then started arresting the youths in batches, in the process snatching their banners, pushing them around. The atmosphere was very tense, and a stray stone thrown by any one of the by-now very angry youth could have set off a full-fledged clash. But within 15 minutes, the arrests were over, the vans had driven away, the maidan was empty.

However, a small band of youth managed to get away and make their way unhindered, towards the main road. This group was joined by many other such groups all along Mohammed Ali road till they together formed a full-fledged procession, with police vans bringing up its rear.

This procession was suddenly stopped by a wall of policemen at around 3.30 p.m. a little before the Carwford Market junction and told they could not proceed further. There was some argument. According to Sarfarz Arzu, editor of the Urdu evening paper Hindustan, and one of the organisers of the morcha, he told Additional police commissioner Shangari that he and 4 others could go ahead to the British Deputy High Commission and present their memorandum while the crowd waited for them there. Alternatively, the entire procession could court arrest at the spot. Maulana Kashmiri, another organiser and an active member of the All India Tabloogh-e-Secrat, who was present there, confirmed this report. The police they say told that they had no arrangements for arresting all those present, but allowed Sarfaraz and others to go ahead with the memorandum. By the time they came back, it was all over.

There was resistance when the morcha was stopped, resulting in a lathi-charge which according to eye-witnesses, was brutal, with police chasing the fleeing processionists right inside buildings. Tear gas shells were also fired, but reportedly, the police ran out of them. Within a minute or two of the tear gas shells, the police fired on the crowd.

(There are conflicting versions as to what took place the tear gas and the firing. Did the firing provoke the crowd to turn violent or vice versa?

According to the police, they were forced to open fire because they were attacked by stones, bricks, bottles, and even fired at. According to some eye-witnesses, after the lathi charge and tear gas, stones were thrown on the police from the by-lanes and the buildings. However, other eye-witnesses state that the police were attacked only after they started firing, and then too, they were attacked not by the processionists, who were all fleeing, but by people from inside the lanes. Many of the processionists hid inside buildings and a lot of them took shelter in a branch of the Bombay Mercantile Bank.

According to a report in The Indian Post, pitched battles were fought between the police and Muslims in the by-lanes. An eye witness reports that near Pydhonie Police Station, a group of Muslim boys dared the police to come near them, and the police had to call in reinforcements to deal with these boys.

There is no doubt that the police were attacked. The Indian Post refers to a policeman's leg being broken when "an object hit him". A trainee constable, Bashir Mulani, was hospitalised with a bullet wound in his leg. Though the police commissioner claimed that 3 were injured.

The firing was in all directions. Of the 11 who died, two were shot by the same bullet, as they sat in a balcony overlooking the street. One woman was shot through the eye as she came out to close her window (she survived). According to a friend of his who claimed he saw it all, one Nasir Khan was shot through the forehead at point blank range. The bodies of the dead showed bullet wounds in the heart, neck and skull. (List of dead given separately.)

Bullets hit a number of by-standers, who were out on the road visiting friends on a bandh day or returning from namaz. One of them was eating a biscuit on his walk home when he was hit, the biscuit lay at his bedside in the hospital. (List of injured given separately.).

The firing was over within an hour, and the scene shifted to the JJ Govt. Hospital. The dead bodies were kept in the foyer with a crowd of over 200 persons milling around, most of them processionists, who were insisting that some of the dead were actually alive. The predominant belief was that the doctors had certified those who were still breathing as dead. The mob was trying its own methods to revive the corpses, and every 5 minutes, a group of youth shouting Allah-o-Akbar would barge into the emergency room carrying a body. The doctors kept pointing out that there was no way the victims could have survived, having been shot through the heart or skull. But unable to convince the mob which at one point even shattered the glass window of the room, they resorted to putting the corpses on glucose drips and giving them injections, just to pacify the mob. But this only confirmed the belief that the people left for dead were actually alive. By the end of the evening, the rumour went around that many of the dead had got up and walked out of the hospital, and that those who were dead had succumbed only because the doctors had paid no heed to them.

A near riot situation prevailed in the hospital, with no leader present and only a couple of constables around who didn't know what to do. Frantic phonecalls to the 2 Muslim ministers in the state yielded no response. When they phoned Maulana Bukhari, a prominent Muslim leader close to the chief minister, he told them to send the leaders of the morcha to his house. No senior police officer visited the hospital that evening. At 8.30 p.m. when Ibrahim Gandhi of the PCC-I arrived, the crowd literally pushed and banged his car out of the hospital, and refused to let him enter.

Finally, late at night, after 10.30 p.m., minister Ishaq Jamkhanawala reached the hospital. A youth who had lost his brother in the firing rushed up and caught his collar, demanding to know where he had been for so long. Immediately Jamkhanawala ordered his police escort to arrest the "Harmzada". This



incident was widely reported in the Urdu press, and hasn't yet been forgotten by the community.

#### Aftermath of the incident.

The next day, the chief minister justified the firing saying that had it not taken place, the damage would have been more. He declared that his govt. has determined to put down communal elements with a firm hand. The same day, Haji Mastan was externed from the city for 15 days, and over the next fortnight, city after city refused to allow him in.

After the firing, the police came out with a series of explanations. The Indian Express almost everyday published reports attributed to "intelligence sources" which claimed that the violence had been pre-planned, that the processionists had come to the morcha armed with swords and 'guptis', that the plan had been to start a major communal riot by indulging in violence in the by-lanes where Hindus have their shops, evidence of this being the fact that the vehicles which were burnt belonged to Hindus only, and finally, that the violence was part of the rivalry between various Muslim groups. The inevitable "foreign hand" seen in every clash involving Muslims, was mentioned here too. It was foreign funds that had paid for the expenses incurred in organising the morcha, including the ads in the Urdu press. It was alleged justifying the firing, ACP Shingari told The Sunday Observer, "If they go after our blood, we'll draw more." He denied the statement subsequently; however, the reporter has stood by her report.

The entire incident left the Muslims extremely bitter with the govt., the police and with their established leaders. The police statements further hardened the Muslims against the police, we are poor, but are we so poor that we cannot pay for ads in Urdu papers and for posters, they asked contemptuously.

They had other questions too. Why had their morcha been banned, they wanted to know, when that very day, a Dalit morcha had been allowed, the trucks carrying processionists having gone by the same route as their morcha. The morcha had been neither against the Hindus nor against the govt. What then had made it worthy of a ban?

More importantly, as one old Pathan, a retired bus conductor, whose son had died in the firing pointed out, "with all due respect", the history of Muslim morchas in the city showed that they had always been peaceful, whereas the record of "Hindu morchas" showed that they were invariably rowdy. Yet they were never banned.

After the ban, why had the morcha not been stopped at Mastan Talao itself? Having been allowed to proceed as far as Crawford Market, why had it not been allowed to go any further?

Finally, why had the police resorted to firing, and to such extent? Was there no other way for them to handle the crowd?

Getting no logical answers to these questions, the Muslims drew their own conclusions. The handling of the episode, they said, pointed to a conspiracy. Saharad Pawar had to prove to his main political rival, the Shiv Sena, that he was not appearing Muslims, and he had accordingly instructed the police. The morcha had been allowed and then stopped at Crawford Market so that police could fire on it in a Muslim locality, so that all casualties would be Muslims. The stones that were thrown on the police were thrown by the Shiv Sena which had a branch near Crawford Market. The J.J. Hospital doctors were part of the conspiracy. They deliberately neglected the victims, who therefore died. The CM's justification of the firing only confirmed their suspicions.

While we cannot agree with this conclusion, we can certainly conclude that the police acted wrongly at every step. The police commissioner was in a detailed interview, tried to answer these questions, but not very successfully. (The interview is being carried separately, in full.)

### Was the Police Right ?

Our conclusion is that there was no justification for banning the morcha in the first place, even if the organisers were of no standing, and even though one of them, the Tanzeem-e-Allah-o-Akbar, had a record of violence. The police could have deployed elaborate bandobast which would have prevented unruly elements from indulging in violence, precisely because Bombay Police have enough experience in handling the unruly morchas so often taken out by the Shiv Sena to take out morchas while Hindu-Muslim riots were on in the city (in 1984). Thane police have allowed them to take out morchas despite a ban on them (in Bhiwandi), and allowed them to change the assigned route at the last minute (Bhiwandi).

There was no need to arrest all the organisers on the eve of the morcha and prevent them from calling it off. Both the ban and the arrests led to confusion and resentment, and made a manageable situation volatile.

Having banned the morcha and arrested the leaders, the police should have come prepared to arrest every single processionist from the venue itself. Obviously, their intelligence failed. They hadn't come prepared to deal with the crowd that gathered at Mastan Talao. Even at that stage, they could have agreed to Sarfaraz's proposal to lift Sec. 144 and allowed the morcha, seeing the number of youth that had gathered. Instead, they vacillated and let a tense situation build up at Mastan Talao for over half-an-hour.

Having allowed the morcha, they should have let it continue till it reached its destination, providing it with heavy police escort. Even if it had reached Azad Maidan, from where another Dalit morcha was scheduled to start, the police could have staggered the timing of the two morchas, a practice resorted to quite often.

② Extra-cautious, what stopped them from agreeing to Maulana Kashmiri's suggestion and arresting all the processionists where they stopped them, at Crawford Market?

Finally, even when they were attacked, they could have been more restrained in their firing. How does one justify this: One boy came up to a policeman, opened his shift and dared a policeman to shoot at him. The policeman obliged by shooting him dead through the heart. Another came out of a lane waving a white handkerchief the police shot him dead. How does one justify their running out of tear gas shells but not of bullets?

Was the violence pre-planned?

There were no arms in evidence at Mastan Talao, where most of the processionists gathered. Participants deny that they were armed. Eye-witnesses echo this view. Most important, in the interview with us; the police commissioner ruled out any possibility of the violence being pre-planned.

We talked to the various groups which had organised the morcha. It was obvious that none of them had anticipated such a turn of events not even the most notorious of them, the Tanzeem-e-Allah-o-Akbar. In fact, at one point in our conversation with him, the chief of the Tanzeem, Allaudin Siddiqui, almost blurted out that he had suggested an alternative form of protest to the morcha, something less risky.

It emerged from conversations with the organisers that none of them had come to the marcha with any special preparation. They had mobilised supporters for it, and the SIM had made placards and banners, but beyond that they had come expecting only to march, shouting slogans. As the SIM boys put it, "We never thought we would have to control the crowd."

Animosity towards the government, the police or the Hindus was the last thing that had motivated the organisers in planning the morcha. In fact they had planned to publicly thank the Indian government for having been the first to ban the book. Their motives and been quite different. Those of them who had joined the morcha out of any conviction, had been motivated by religious hatred for Rushdie and the British Government.

Families of those who died in the firing confirmed the view that what occurred was totally unplanned. All those whose sons had gone for the morcha, stated that the boys had come after namaz, had lunch and announced that they were going for the morcha. Being a Friday, the boys had taken special care to have a bath and wear clean clothes that day. The parents' advice not to go for the morcha had been met with assurances that nothing would happen. ~~Some of them had been met with assurances that nothing would happen.~~ Some of them had told their parents that it was their religious duty to go for the morcha, others had gone because their friends were going.



One of them had planned to see a film in the evening. After the morcha the ticket was found in his packet.

#### Response of political parties :

The Chief minister's response the very next day set trend for the rest of the parties. When the issue was raised in the assembly session which started a week after the incident, the focus of the opposition was not to seek an explanation for the firing, but to attack the chief minister for having entertained a delegation of Muslims after the incident. Nihal Ahmed of the Janata Dal was the only MLA who attacked the firing.

The day after the incident, the minister of state for home Vilas Sawant visited the area accompanied by Union Minister Jaffer Sharief, who he justified the ban on the morcha, and said nothing about the firing itself.

No Congress-I Muslim leader visited the area. The feeling in the community was that none dared to. Taherbai Kapasi of the Mass Aid cell of the BRCC(I) sent Rs.1000 to some of the families where deaths had taken place. 17 days after the deaths, a compensation of Rs.10,000 to the families of those dead and a magisterial inquiry was announced, in the Assembly.

The response of the opposition parties was divided. Communal parties like the BJP and the Shiv Sena condemned the govt. for not being touch enough, the Left was quiet, as usual. The Janata Dal was the only party which responded in a sensitive manner. State Janata Dal chief Mrinal Bore, who had lost their sons, and also visited the injured in hospital. However, she did not raise the matter in the assembly, nor did her party take it up as an issue. This despite the fact that that her brief visit had a very good impact on the families of the dead. (3)

#### Role of traditional Muslim leadership:

The traditional Muslim leadership in the city had opposed the morcha from the beginning, not because they thought it unnecessary and rash, but because except for GM Banatwala of the Muslim League, all of them are supporters of the present chief minister. The most prominent of them is Maulana Ziauddin Bukhari, a former Muslim League leader who has turned builder reportedly with Sharad Pawar's help when Pawar was Chief Minister in the PDP government in 1978.

In his current term, Bukhari has helped Pawar by defusing popular Muslim anger against the politically influential chief of the Dawoodi Bohras, Syedna Burhanuddin, for his utterances during Moharram last August, which led to the first Sunni-Bohra riot in Bombay. He also got the Syedna to apologise for his utterances.

As a builder, Bukhari stands discredited in the community because of having allegedly duped a number of poor muslims. His fall from grace occurred during the 1984 Hindu-Muslim riots, He did nothing at all as his community reeled

under the onslaught of the Shiv Sena and the police. The Shahbano affair in 1985 helped him to bounce back.

His skill at oratory is, say Muslims, his main asset. He can sway the sentiments of a crowd at the last minute as he wants. In this case too, people were hoping that Bukhari would make a last-minute appearance at Mastan Talao and prevent the morcha. But he didn't, and even the frantic calls to him from the hospital that evening, failed to move him.

However, Bukhari was the first to jump into the fray after the firing. He first met the CM, asking for a probe into the incident. He then announced his decision to distribute Rs.5000 each to the families of the dead. (This, say Muslims, came from his own 'Relief Fund', set up with contributions from the community meant for survivors of the Maliana massacre in 1987.) Finally, on March 18, Maulana Bukhari led a 5000 - strong morcha against the police firing !

This morcha presented a stark contrast to the one that had been the target of the firing. A day before it took place, vans fitted with loudspeakers went around the Muslim areas asking them to come for the morcha, not to be afraid, "this time the police are with us." At the J.J. Hospital junction, from where it was to start, loudspeakers had been fitted on the main road, asking Muslims to prove Shingari wrong (he had said. "They will not look at a police van for another 6 months ") to prove that the firing had not dampened their spirit by joining the morcha. Anti-police slogans were raised all through the morcha, which ended with a mass prayer on the road seeking destruction on all those who were guilty of the firing. For the first time the notorious slogan of Hindu fanatics. "Gary se kaho hum Hindu Hain" was answered with a similar slogan by Muslims. This morcha passed through the same Muslim "sensitive" areas which the first one had, and these had been made more sensitive by the firing. Yet, the police escorted this morcha all the way upto Fountain.

The morcha obviously had the blessings of the CM (in fact, many Muslims spread the rumour that half the processionists were plainclothesmen), and had been organised only with a view to woo back the Muslim vote-bank. Not everyone saw through the game, unfortunately. Nor did the Urdu press help ordinary Muslims see through it, as it is almost editorial policy for Urdu papers not to write against Bukhari, thanks to his political clout.

A third morcha was organised on March 20 by Haji Mastan, and the manner in which this was handled exposed the whole cynical political game at work. He ~~was~~ asked to postpone his morcha so that the Bukhari morcha could be organised before his, to dispel the (justified) impression that the Cong-I was the only party doing nothing about the firing. He was asked to restrict himself to a short route, and refused permission to cover the traditional route, which the other 2 morchas had. He was also instructed not to shout any "anti-national" slogans. Finally, the police saw to it that ~~it~~

supporters were stopped at the various points from where they set out, resulting in a pathetically small march of 1500 persons.

It is revealing that Bukhari's frantic efforts to make the most of the postfiring situation, did not include a visit to the area. As one bereaved father put it, "We need the money he sent, but I'd rather have had him come here himself even if for 5 minutes, so I could talk to him. "What would you have told him, we asked him. "Nothing much, just shared my grief with him. Whats the use of just sending money in an envelope with some stranger.

Banatwalla of the Mulsim League was one Muslim leader who did visit the families of the dead, but significantly only at the insistence of some young Muslim League sympathisers.

Despite this total apathy on the part of the traditional Muslim leadership, the new groups who had organised the morcha didn't gain much simply because not one of them had the capacity to lead the community, and the community knew it. It is doubtful whether they will be trusted by the community even with organising other morcha.

#### The organisers of the morcha:

Three of these groups drew crowds at the morcha. The most controversial of them is the Tanzeem-e-Allah-o-Akbar. The general impression that Tanzeem is a 'Muslim Shiv Sena' is only partly true. It can, at short notice, mobilise a crowd ; in addition, it has a strong base among poor, small-time criminals. Its claims of a membership of two million all over Maharashtra, 200,000 of whom are in Bombay alone, seem exaggerated. However, it is possible that it has as many as 85 units in Bombay.

The story of Tanzeem illustrates the conditions in which Muslims in Bombay are trapped. The 1984, riots, during which the community got a terrible beating at the hands of the Shiv Sena and the police, highlighted the vacuum in its leadership. The only two well-known local leaders, Maulana Ziauddin Bukhari and G.M. Banatwalla, with their separate factions of the Muslim League (the party today is a spent force in Bombay), did nothing during the riots, and lost the faith of the community. (The Shahbano issue gave them a chance to make a comeback, but they lacked the capacity or will to sustain it). Haji Mastan then emerged as the Muslims' saviour providing relief at once and everywhere.

A groups of educated boys decided, even as the riots were on, that there must be some way of channelising the energies of Muslim youth away from drugs and crime to education, discipline, self-employment, and even self-defence. But knowing their community, they were aware that to attract its youth they had to have a charismatic leader, and that mere persuasion and sincerity on their part would never work.

There was no one who could fit the bill, but these boys were desperate, and also very young. They invented a leader and, within two months, the group had clicked its name caught the popular imagination, as did its imaginary, shadow chief.

Today, only one of the founders remains in the group. He has, ironically, become its 'chief': Allauddin Siddiqui, who owns a building on Foras Road, and is addressed by his followers as 'Sadar Sahab'.

What happened to Tanzeem's original aims? A few months back, it started free coaching classes for Muslim students. All these years were spent building up membership, staving off splits over money and leadership (three splinter groups are today reported to be in existence in Bombay alone). Meanwhile, it has built a cadre with little to do; so it gets involved in small riots (as in Agripada in 1987), or is up in arms against issues like the sketch of Prophet Mohammed that appeared in The Indian Post in August. The morcha was thus ideal activity for Tanzeem members.

About 150 participants were members of another youth group which in its composition and character is quite the opposite of Tanzeem. Members of the Students' Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) are known for their discipline and their religious grounding. They are also, unlike Tanzeem's members, educated and well-off. It is they who brought most of the English placards to the morcha.

SIMI is reported to be the brainchild of Saleem Khan, described by a classmate as 'a brilliant student'. Way back in the early '70s, he resolved to bring his community's youth back to the fold, believing that if Muslims practised Islam the way the Prophet had, the community could regain the glory it had once enjoyed in India.

Khan's zeal attracted the attention of the Jamaat-e-Islami-e-Hind in Uttar Pradesh, and SIMI quickly became its youth wing. However, the Jamaat found that it could not entirely control SIMI, and it now has its own students' organisation which works with SIMI on certain issues. The Jamaat does not believe in agitational methods, says its secretary, Shahab Bankoti, and hence did not participate in the morcha.

SIMI is known for its annual conferences at which Islamic theology is debated. It was very active in the 'Shahbano affair in 1985, when its burqa-clad women carried placards denouncing maintenance for divorced women. However, it also holds painting and elocution competitions on subjects such as dowry and bride-burning.

The third group which attracted a sizable section of the marchers was the All India Tableegh-e-Seerat, made up of peshimams of various mosques, each of whom has a loyal following. Their role was vital in their sermon at the important Friday afternoon prayers roused the faithful to immediately join the morcha.



Maulana Abdul Kuddus Kashmiri, peshimam of the Handiwali Masjid at Saif-e Jubilee Street, one of its more colourful spokesmen, describes the Tableegh as a non-political organisation which is activated by religious issues such as the Shahbano affair. At that time, too, it had not taken the initiative but had supported the Muslim Personal Law Board.

How powerful are the peshimams? Educated Muslims feel sorry for the average peshimam, whose monthly salary seldom crosses Rs. 600/-, whose material needs are met by the residents of his area, and whose only knowledge is religious. Hailing mostly from UP, the peshimam, like most priests in every religion, tends to develop a mutually beneficial relationship with the wealthy but uneducated members of his community. In Bombay, such patrons are the underworld dons: Karim Lala, Dawood Ibrahim. Those who follow him blindly are the poorest and most illiterate sections. Added to this is the fact, in Bombay, the last five years have seen an upsurge in mass religious fervour, expressed in bigger and flashier festivals, dominated by lumpens and financed by criminals.

Finally, some mention must be made of the group which first thought of the morcha, the mysterious Muslim Integration Council and its general secretary, Anwar Sadat, whose very name evokes a laugh if not a dismissive grimace. To the Indian Post goes the dubious credit of having created it; the sketch of the Prophet which inadvertently appeared in its pages made a few youths decide to get together to prevent further such insults to their religion.

Aslam Kiratpuri, editor of Al-Fateh, an Urdu weekly Lok Dal-B, are its other members. According to Aslam, they were only responding to readers' demands that they do something about the Khomeini-Rushdie affair. The Urdu press initially ignored them because of 'personal dislike for Sadat'.

It's obvious that none of these groups anticipated any trouble, although they had made no preparation at all for the morcha. Till the last day, it was not even decided whether the march would be silent or not (the morcha of over 500,000 Muslims on the Shahbano judgement had been a silent one).

Obviously, not one of them is experienced in such mass political activity. Naively, they thought the Bombay police, which had so vividly demonstrated its feelings for Muslims in the 1984 riots, would give them full cooperation, "because the morcha was not against the government". The more experienced politicians decided to stay away, unsure of the outcome of such a hotch-potch gathering.

As things stand, the city's Muslims have only two choices the known devil or the unknown one. "Given our illiteracy, the lack of incentive, to remove it as long as Gulf jobs are available, the type of jobs we get in Bombay, the corrupting influence this city has on everyone, the alienation of the educated rich section from the mainstream of the community, the domination of people like Dawood Ibrahim and Karim Lala, can we hope for any other kind of leadership except this lumpen-fanatic-mullah combine? Is it possible that there is someone waiting, waiting for the right moment to come and deliver us? asked one youth.

## 1. Mohammed Shamin Azmat Ali (23).

Hails from UP, his parents live there.

Used to run a shop at Dongri for the last 6 years.

Was a member of Tanzeem-e-Allah-o-Akbar.

He shut his shop to join the procession, came back in the afternoon and went again. When he didn't come back, his neighbours thought he had spent the night in the shop. They read about his death the next day in the papers, and claimed his body from the JJ Hospital morgue. He had 3 bullets through his chest, they say. Nobody had come to offer any financial help so far.

## 2. Nisar Khan (21)

According to his father, Umer Deen Khan (70), a former tram driver ~~driver~~ in the BEST, with 32 years' service behind him, his son, the youngest in a family of 4 daughters and 3 sons, had gone to Mastan Talao after namaaz, despite his parents' objections, as he was very hot-up over the Rushdie book. They were informed about his death at 11pm - his elder brother, who was in Noor Hospital at the time of the firing, tending to his wife who had just delivered, immediately went to JJ Hospital to help the wounded. He found his younger brother among the dead. He had been shot through the skull. Nisar was unemployed, very religious-minded, an 'Allah-walla ladka'. He had studied upto the XIth standard in Burhani College.

His father, a Pathan, said he had heard about Maliana, and now this incident ranked next to it. He was convinced that it was a conspiracy by the police to kill Muslims. No amount of stoning by the crowd could justify the firing. If the crowd had fired, would it have stopped at 1 bullet only? Wouldn't more policemen have died? The police can never be majboor, he said. He himself had participated in a procession of 4 lakh Muslims when the Al Aqsa mosque had been desecrated. It had been peaceful. It was unbelievable that the police could not control a procession of 3000 persons. Their action and its defence by the government showed that Muslims were regarded as 'worms from the sea'. 'I lost my chacha in the freedom struggle. Do our lives not count?'

Though he was now dependent on his children, he would spend the Rs 5000 he had received from Maulana Bukhari on a lavish feast:

'I will celebrate my dead son's wedding with the money.'

Khan said his son had died for Islam, and he was willing to sacrifice his other 2 sons too for the same cause.

## 3. Rahim Ismail Waghdhare (28) (deaf-mute)

Married, with 2 sons & 1 daughter.

Worked as an auto-electrician at Dongri, earning about Rs 200 a day. Youngest among 4 sisters & 2 brothers. His old mother seemed unable to express herself. His father was dead.

His family told him not to go, but he explained he was going for Islam. He was shot through the neck, died on the spot. They found his body at 4.15.

His wife said he thought a lull in the firing meant everything was over & he was beckoning to his friends (the whole neighbourhood had gone for the morcha) to come out of their hiding, but the police misinterpreted it and thought they were advancing towards them. Also, the others could hear the gunfire, he could not.

He had bought a ticket for the movie at Maratha Mandir, the 6.30 show, it was found in his pocket. That showed he had expected to come back safe.

His uncle felt the morcha had been unnecessary and the firing took place because it became a prestige issue between the police & the processionists as to who should withdraw. He described the Tanzeem as a useless and foolish group, which misled youth.

4.

## 4. Nazim Abdul Rahim (20)

Fruit vendor in Surti Mohalla, lived in M-lod with mother, Father (mentally deranged), & younger sister & brother, & wife, who is pregnant. Married 5 months back. Only earning member.

He told his uncle (living near Chor Bazar) that he was going to ...

he went for the morcha or not. He was shot through the lung. They claimed he was alive from 3.30 to 6.15 pm, but was left for dead. His uncle said they were not the sort who went for morchas, they were businessmen. He condemned the morcha decision, since the book was already banned. He felt those who went were doing so on the orders of leaders, and these leaders were immature and out for a name. His mother asked why only young people were killed in the firing.

5. Naushad Ali (18)

Filter assistant, living at ~~XXXXX~~ Null Bazar with his 2 brothers.

His elder brother Ibrahim, said that Naushad had met him at 3 pm when Ibrahim was on his way home and told him he was going to work. But there he was persuaded by his friends to join the morcha. He was going back after participating in it for some distance, when he saw police aiming at a group of people. He rushed to warn them, but a bullet hit him.

The 2 brothers heard about this at 5 pm from other participants; they found his dead body in the JJ corridor.

His other brother Iqbal was also to join the morcha but could not make it. Naushad was passionate about his faith, Iqbal said.

The brothers blamed the weak, vacillating leadership and the police for taking advantage of them.

The police had so far questioned Ibrahim twice about Naushad's activities, but he had told them that they should have known better if he was an anti-social.

Ibrahim hoped that no one, Hindu or Muslim, meets his brother's death.

6. Imtiaz Ahmed Khan (18)

SSC student.

In the afternoon of Friday, children were playing outside the house when someone came on a cycle and suggested, 'Go play with bullets near Minara Masjid,' and cycled away. Some boys including Imtiaz, went there out of curiosity. His family came to know later he was not around.

One of his friends informed them in the evening that Imtiaz had been shot dead. He was shot through the chest. His mother moaned that he had been destined to die for Islam.

The next week, on the eve of Friday, police took away his brother under preventive detention and released him on Friday evening. They suspected him of putting up a notice board outside his building condemning the police.

7&8. Mohammed Kunju & Mohammed Ali (25 & 22)

Residents of a guest house off Mohammed Ali Road, in Bombay on their way to umra, a minor pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia. They hailed from Kerala.

They were looking out of their window, one standing behind the other. A policeman reportedly aimed at them. The bullet hit Ali and passed out from his chest to hit Kunju. Ali died on the spot. Kunju was rushed to hospital where he died within a few hours.

9. Zuber Ahmed Lakdawala (24-25)

Ran a timber shop at Kazi Mahalla.

Zuber & his 2 brothers decided to close shop, sensing the trouble. On their way home, they saw the disturbances, and hid behind a tempo. Within minutes, a stray bullet hit Zuber in the head. It was around 4 pm.

The brothers dragged his body till they saw a police jeep and forced the policemen to rush the body to JJ. No doctor attended to him till 8pm, they said. A part of the bullet remained in the head. He was operated upon the same night, & died after 4 days in the hospital.

We could not meet the other 2 families.



CONCLUSIONS

1. We cannot but conclude that the situation was handled badly by the police, from the very beginning. The government's decision to ban the morcha was unfair and discriminatory, given its leniency where morchas by other parties are concerned. The police's execution of the government's decision was clumsy to the extreme, and betrayed both a lack of adequate intelligence feedback and a lack of sensitivity. Unprepared, hostile, abusive and prejudiced, the police managed to convert an easily manageable situation into a highly volatile one. The great harm caused by the almost total lack of Muslim officers at senior levels of the police force was once again illustrated in this morcha, as also the great harm caused by the practice of the ruling party of deciding everything on the basis of what political mileage it will derive from it, not on its own merits.
2. The series of police actions led to a situation wherein the processionists, who started out with no animosity at all for the government, were provoked into a violent confrontation with the police.
3. Whether the tense situation, created entirely by the police, necessitated ~~xxx~~ any firing or not can only be decided by a judicial inquiry (the govt has ordered only a magisterial firing). We find it difficult to come to any categorical conclusion given the different eye-witness accounts we recieved.
4. What we can categorically say is that the firing was excessive and totally unrestrained. 11 casualties in just over an hour of firing is too high a toll given a situation which started off with no communal overtones. The violence of the crowd against the police, even according to the police's own version, did not justify the violence of the police against the crowd. The police were armed with guns, the processionists unarmed. Stones and bottles were the commonest missiles used against the police; firing from the crowd, alleged by the police, injured only one policeman, going by ~~hospital records~~ the number of policemen hospitalised and their injuries.
5. While we uphold the right of the organisers to take out a morcha, we feel that in the given situation (where the book had already been banned here - though CPDR does not support the ban), the decision to hold the morcha unwarranted and unwise. The leadership which took this decision was opportunistic. But the leaders who opposed the morcha were dishonest. They could have prevented it, even at the last minute, by making an appearance at Mastan Talao, and intervening. But they reserved their intervention so as to make the most of the 11 deaths, proving themselves to be absolutely callous and equally opportunistic. Not a single one of those involved in the entire affair - either for the morcha or against - can escape this charge.

DEMANDS

1. CPDR demands a judicial inquiry into the firing. It should be recalled that no such inquiry was held after the bloody and prolonged 19-84 riots and nobody was punished for them.
2. We demand higher compensation to the families of those killed. The Rs 10,000 announced by the government is a shameful pittance compared to the lavish compensation given to those who die in plane crashes. This government, we have to conclude, computes the value of human life on the basis of the class to which one belongs. The suspicion that the police are trigger-happy when confronted with a large gathering of poor people because their lives are expendable (unless they have some political clout, like Shiv Sena mobs do), is confirmed when such measly sums are announced as compensation.

Brought out by The Committee for the Protection of Democratic Rights,  
c/o Super Book House, Sind Chambers, Colaba Causeway, Bombay 400005.  
Dated: April 13, 1989.



Injured whom we met in JJ Hospital

1. Sher Khan who had come to Pydhonie from Linking Road, Bandra, to meet a friend. He was shot seriously.
2. Mohammed Shahid, 20, shot in the arm, as he was returning after namaz in Zakaria masjid. He was running seeing the others running.
3. Sufian Mansuri, 20, going to collect something from an acquaintance near Noor Hospital, when he was shot in the thigh near Crawford Market.
4. Irfan, 20, from Govandi, out on work, shot in the thigh.
5. Abdul Sattar, 19, coming from his aunt's house near Pydhonie police station.
6. Mirza Naushad, shot in the left foot, participant in the morcha.
7. Sheikh Ali, 21, student in Maharashtra College, police caught him near Pydhonie police station & cased him. He was out shopping. Nakhuda Market shops were open, he said.

BOMBAY, ON MARCH 29, 1989.

Q. Please give us your assessment of the organisations which gave the call for the morcha of February 24, the situation and events preceding the morcha and the decision to ban it.

A. In our view, there were none in the leadership of the organisations like Tanzem-e-Allah-O-Akbar who could control an emotionally surcharged gathering. Proclaiming that our "mazab is in danger" was certainly provocative. We felt that the leadership lacked integrity and stature. It was not an established leadership. In the absence of known leaders and given the mood and situation, there was an apprehension that it would lead to violence. Similar morchas had turned violent elsewhere, for instance, in Kashmir, Karachi (Pakistan), etc. We tried to contact Mr. Anwar Sadat, one of the leaders, but he initially seemed to be evading us. Finally when we got in touch with them (the leaders), we tried to persuade them against taking out the morcha. We agreed to a large delegation presenting a memorandum (to the British Deputy High Commissioner) and even offered to arrest up to even 5000 of them if they decided to court arrest as a token of their protest. Finally, when they refused to agree to our request to cancel the morcha, we issued the ban order.

Q. If there was a ban order on morchas in the city, why was the dalit morcha permitted?

A. You must take into account the composition of the two morchas and the issues involved. The composition was totally different. This was largely a women's morcha, small in number - about 1,500 persons. And the issues were economic ones unlike the other (Muslim) morcha.

where the issue was a sensitive, religious ~~one~~.

Q. Could you briefly highlight some of the incidents leading to the provocation to fire.

A. We did not stop the demonstration at Mastan Talab because we felt it might lead to a stampede there..... We resorted to a lathi charge and firing of the tear gas shells to disperse the crowd at the police cordon (across the road before Mahatma Dhule Market). Goondas and hoodlums (anti-social elements) threw stones, bricks and empty (aerated water) bottles at the police from the top of nearby buildings. I am not saying that these missiles were stored there specifically for the purpose. The residents of these areas habitually store empty bottles etc and bricks remain from unfinished construction. One policeman was hit with a big stone and broke his leg. Three policemen received bullet injuries. We had to control the situation. We were also afraid that it would take a communal turn.

Q. Was the order given to shoot to kill ?

A. There was no order to shoot to kill. In fact, in a chaotic situation it is not possible to aim to kill. The police fired more than 100 rounds. The casualties were 11 dead and 27 injured.

Q. But from the bullet marks on the dead it seems the police aimed to kill. For instance, two persons from Kerala (on their way to a Haj pilgrimage), who were looking out of Noor Manzil building were shot dead with one bullet.

A. I know about the incident you are referring to. But those killed might be expected to be found to have been hit above the waist. What about the injured ?

Q. According to a report in the Indian Express dated March 13, which quotes from a police intelligence report, "the aim of the morcha was to create a riot and zoom in on two commercial centres : Zaueri Bazaar and Kapad Bazaar and create a communal conflagration". Your comment please.

A. This is a misrepresentation. Intelligence sources only pointed to the probability of violence breaking out.

Q. What about the subsequent morchas on March 18, led by Siauddin Bukhari and on March 20, led by Haji Mastan ?

A. Here the mood was entirely different. Siauddin Bukhari took the lead. There was a credible leadership and they gave guarantees of peace. These morchas were against the police and yet we allowed them. Also, the legislative assembly session had begun.

Q. There is an allegation that the organisations which organised the morcha receive foreign funds. Do you have any information regarding this ?

A. We have no information on this.

(The answers have been paraphrased in parts and are not exactly verbatim)