

# THE HINDU

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## “Muzaffarnagar riots politically motivated”

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STAFF REPORTER



The communal riots are said to have displaced more than 40,000 people. File photo: PTI

The Muzaffarnagar riots were “violence by political design” and it can be categorised among the worst instances of communal strife in the country.

This is what a six-member fact-finding team from the Capital has found. The team, while releasing its report on Tuesday, said “it is deeply apprehensive at the short/long-term consequences of this massive and systematic internal displacement and of the chasm that has opened between the two communities (Jats and Muslims)”.

“What aggravates the situation further is the fact that the victims have lived in close proximity of the aggressors. They were farm labourers in the fields owned by the people who attacked them in their homes,” the report noted.

The fact-finding exercise was co-ordinated by the Centre for Policy Analysis. The team comprising human rights activist Harsh Mander, former Border Security Force director-general E.N. Rammohan, Jawaharlal Nehru University professor Kamal Mitra Chenoy, National Integration Council member John Dayal, and senior journalists Sukumar Muralidharan and Seema Mustafa, noted that even a week after the violence there was no agreed narrative on what led to it.

The report noted that the State Government seemed to have been taken by surprise. “There was probably a deliberate disregard to rising tensions and intelligence reports. Muslims were attacked not so much with the intent of causing deaths, which would invite serious opprobrium, but with the objective of chasing them out of Hindu majority villages,” said Ms. Mustafa.

The team noted that the police response had been too little too late. “We were shocked at the inability and incompetence of the State Government. Even the basic measures were not taken to

ensure that those provoking a communal conflagration were thwarted in their design. The essential steps involved in prevention, control, rescue and rehabilitation, and justice were not taken,” she added.

Stating that the ‘absence of the administration’ also shows in the absence of official records of the magnitude of human suffering, Mr. Dayal said: “The State Government has still not been able to initiate the process of justice in the district. The State Government failed to stop rumours that spread through the area like wildfire, adding to the tension and pushing the communities towards confrontation.”

Calling the situation akin to ethnic cleansing, Mr. Cheney noted that the team came across uprooted Muslim people in the affected villages. “While government figures have placed the number of those displaced at 25,000, villagers insist that the numbers are twice as much. Those displaced are afraid to come back to the villages and eyewitnesses to the violence told the team that they have not been interviewed by the police. The State Government seems to have already undertaken a ‘safai operation’ even before ‘panchnamas’ with victims have been registered about losses they have suffered,” the report said.

Indicating that there was politics behind the violence, the report said the “Bharatiya Janata Party has been actively involved in the violence and could emerge — when the embers die down — as the major gainer. The Samajwadi Party now has the most to lose. The level of violence in Muzaffarnagar has taken away whatever advantage it could have had through a polarisation of the votes.”