

May 8, 2002: Atrocities in India - Kansas City Star

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May 8, 2002 India's ruling Hindu-nationalist party, charged recently by a human rights group with violence against Muslims in Gujarat state, should acknowledge any complicity and remove anyone responsible. A coalition led by the Bharatiya Janata Party holds power in India's parliament, which has been debating the party's role in Gujarat, the only state the party controls. More than 900 persons - the count may be much higher - have died in religious violence there in the last several months. Human Rights Watch, an international advocacy group, has charged that Bharatiya Janata Party officials and police in Gujarat were culpable in those deaths. Smita Narula, author of the new report, said it was not a spontaneous uprising but a "carefully orchestrated attack against Muslims. The attacks were planned in advance and organized with extensive participation of the police and state government officials." The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom said Monday that American officials must "press Indian authorities to exercise their power to halt the atrocities and violence" in Gujarat. The commission pointed to Hindu militancy as a major problem. Hindu nationalists promote Hindu purity and seek to prevent marriages between Hindus and Muslims. Although the country's 120 million Muslims have experienced religious strife with the majority population of Hindus, members of the two faiths live peacefully together in many parts of the country. Officials who helped plan retaliatory attacks on Muslims in Gujarat must be held responsible. The ruling national coalition must prevent any such outrage from happening again. Continued violence in India is in no one's interest.