

A long wait

The Supreme Court's decision to constitute a three-member Special Investigation Team (SIT) to reopen 186 cases related to the anti-Sikh violence of 1984 is yet another reminder that due process was not followed in probing these crimes and the state has failed to deliver justice to the victims. The apex court's move comes after a supervisory panel it appointed in August last year recommended that these cases, among the 250 cases probed by a government-appointed SIT and recommended for closure, need to be reopened and re-investigated. The SC's decision is welcome, but the promise of closure comes much too late. Political parties have already started claiming credit for the SIT and apportioning blame on others for the miscarriage of justice so far, but the failure is a collective one.

Nearly 34 years have passed since armed mobs targeted the Sikh community in the national capital in the aftermath of the assassination of then Prime Minister [Indira Gandhi](#). Homes and gurdwaras were attacked and businesses run by Sikhs targeted. Nearly 3,000 persons were killed as mobs had unchecked run of Delhi's streets for four days. Leaders of the then ruling Congress were accused of instigating and even leading the mobs. Inquiry commissions under Justices Ranganath Mishra and G.T. Nanavati indicted the state police for complicity in the violence. P.V. Narasimha Rao, the then home minister, to whom the Delhi Police reported, became prime minister seven years later. Congress leaders accused of involvement in the violence were allowed to continue careers in politics and even given ministerial responsibilities till severe public criticism later forced the party to deny them office. It took 20 years before the Congress would issue a public apology for its role in the '84 violence — Prime Minister [Manmohan Singh](#) gave a statement in Parliament on August 12, 2005. Singh said: "I apologise not only to the Sikh community, but to the whole Indian nation because what took place in 1984 is the negation of the concept of nationhood enshrined in our Constitution."

A closure in the cases will be possible only if the perpetrators are identified and punished through due process. Many of them have died or are too old for any punishment and evidence gathering may be difficult, but the process must not be abandoned. There needs to be serious reflection on why the state failed to book the guilty or pin responsibility on those who abdicated their responsibility to uphold the rule of law.

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