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Patel agitation turns Gujarat into a battlefield

The bandh call given by Patel leaders brought the city to a grinding halt

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The Hardik Patel-led Patidar Anamat Sangarsh Samiti, which is asking for reservations for the powerful Patel community in government jobs and colleges, has also demanded that murder charges be pressed against cops who allegedly fired at protesters. Photo: PTI

New Delhi: A police constable in Surat was among nine persons killed, six in police firing, Wednesday in a violent turn to the Patel community's **agitation** for other backward classes status and reservation in Gujarat, reported *The Indian Express*.

However, several other papers put the toll at eight.

Notwithstanding Prime Minister Narendra Modi's appeal for peace, protesters resorted to arson, stone-pelting and attacks on public and private properties. The **bandh call** given by Patel leaders brought the city to a grinding halt. Curfew has been clamped in Ahmedabad, Surat, Rajkot, Mehasana, Patan, Palanpur, Unjha, Visnagar and Jamnagar towns. "Five companies of Army were called in Ahmedabad city to control law and order situation as the violence escalated," Ahmedabad district collector Rajkumar Beniwal told *PTI*. Schools and colleges will remain closed on Thursday too.

The Hardik Patel-led Patidar Anamat Sangarsh Samiti, which is asking for reservations for the powerful Patel community in government jobs and colleges, has also **demanded** that murder charges be pressed against cops who allegedly fired at protesters. It has also demanded Rs.30 lakh compensation for those killed in the violence in the state since Tuesday.

The sheer numbers of Patels who turned up for Hardik Patel's rally in Ahmedabad on Tuesday, and the violence that followed his detention, has unnerved the BJP that had got used to the absence of opposition, almost since 2002. Clearly, this is a **wake-up call** for the monolith called BJP in Gujarat. The Patidar agitation for OBC quota began on 6 July, with small rallies in towns dominated by them. The PAAS had successfully mobilised Patels in the 18-35 age group at a rally in Surat on 17 August when an estimated crowd of 4.5 lakh showed up, bringing the city of diamond and textile units to a standstill.

The violent turn to the Patidar reservation stir and the rise of 21-year-old Hardik Patel as a formidable leader has come as a **heavy blow** to the otherwise surefooted Gujarat government. Its handling of the protests, that have crossed 50 days now, leaves much to be desired.

In fact, the stunning success of the Kranti Rally organized here by Patidar bodies to demand OBC quota, and the violence that followed the arrest of Hardik Patel, has surprised all. It's unlikely that Patel alone could have mobilized 5 lakh people at the GMDC Ground here on Tuesday. Equally interesting was the way the event was managed—from getting parking for thousands of vehicles to obtaining permissions to mobilizing funds. But the question of who is behind this stormy agitation and Hardik remains **unanswered**.

What has also left many in the BJP unit in Gujarat and other communities puzzled is why the **police arrested** Hardik Patel, albeit only for a brief period on Tuesday evening. There are two theories floating around it. One, there is an argument that since the repercussions of Hardik Patel's arrest could have been foreseen even by a lay man, somebody outside of the state government's structure with substantive control over police department gave nod for the young Patel leader's arrest. The second theory is that in the last few years, there have been massive recruitments in the police force and since the appointments were done with reservation for OBCs, the newer recruits from

the constable to Assistant Sub-Inspector level largely belong to the existing OBC communities. It is these recruits who have dealt with Patel activists and even their families, in some instances, rather heavily.

On the surface, the agitation is for OBC status. Not everyone is convinced. OBC leaders suspect the Patidars are out to get the very quota system scrapped. At the Tuesday rally, several youngsters said they would like to see caste-based reservation **scrapped** and instead have a quota for economically backward across communities.

In all the caste-based **politics** Gujarat has seen since it became a state in 1960, the Patels or Patidars have been the most dominant community. “Caste has always remained a pivotal force behind Gujarat politics. Since Sardar Patel was a prominent leader in the Freedom Struggle, the Patel community has remained influential,” said Ahmedabad-based historian Achyut Yagnik.

Who are Patidars and what do they want? What is their financial status and how do they control the industry and politics in Gujarat? **[Read here.](#)**

The Patels have a reputation that extends far beyond their home in the western Indian state of Gujarat. From motel chains across the US to corner stores in the UK, from diamond business in Europe to trading in Africa, this pioneering Gujarati clan has often been at the forefront of the expansion of the **Indian diaspora.**

Meanwhile, the social media was abuzz with conspiracy theories about the antecedents and backers of Patel, responding to the situation with its sardonic humour. **[Read more](#)**

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