

“Are we not Indians?”

The Development Politics of Uprooting Citizens and Shattering Lives at Chandola Lake



Figure 1: Photo Credits: Hozefa Ujjaini

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ये तालाब हमारा, उसकी मछलियां हमारी,
उसकी जमीन पर छोटी सी बस्तियां हमारी ।
तुम लोग आए, जालिम हुक्मरान बनकर,
और बिछाया ऐसा जाल, पल में खत्म हुई हस्तियां हमारी ।



Figure 2: Photo credits: Hozefa Ujjaini

(This pond was ours, and its fish were ours,
our small settlements rooted in its earth.
Then you came, appearing as cruel rulers,
and cast a net so vast that in an instant,
our very existence was erased.)

- Hozefa Ujjaini



Figure 3: Photo Credits: Hozefa Ujjaini

Contents

Introduction.....	1
Methodology.....	2
Background: Citizenship, Demolitions and Housing Policy in Ahmedabad and Beyond	3
Slum Rehabilitation and Demolition of Illegal Settlements	5
Housing Demolitions in Gujarat (May 2024 to May 2025): An Overview	6
Chandola: Timeline and Documentation.....	9
Historical Context.....	9
Cultural Context	11
Timeline of Deportations and Demolitions at Chandola Lake in 2025.....	12
Demolitions.....	15
The Petition and Response from Gujarat High Court	16
Rehabilitation and Resettlement	17
Violation of Due Process by the Authorities before Demolitions	18
The Curious Case of Narsinhji Chaali	22
“My Kids Were More Scared than during the COVID Lockdown”: The Human Cost of Demolitions	24
Impact on Residents.....	24
The Media Narrative	27
Immediate Crisis Responses	29
Recommendations, Demands and Further Plan of Action.....	30

Introduction

April 2025 saw one of the worst terrorist attacks in India in recent times, when terrorists killed 26 innocent civilians in Pahalgam¹. Its repercussions were felt by thousands of urban poor living in a residential area at a lake more than 1500 kilometres away, in Ahmedabad, India. These urban poor, most of whom belong to the Muslim community, had been living there for almost fifty years. Between April 27, 2025 and May 2, 2025, hundreds of people from the Chandola Talavna Chapra were publicly paraded, detained and had their houses demolished, on the pretext that the area was a hub of illegal activities and a threat to national security.

This report focuses on the demolition of around 12,500 residential, commercial and religious structures at Chandola Lake, Ahmedabad in April and May 2025. It also draws connections to the housing demolitions which have taken place in Gujarat during the year between May 2024 and May 2025. The Chandola Lake demolitions were not the only major demolitions in Gujarat during this time period. Such demolitions were also undertaken in Beyt Dwarka, Vadodara, Bhavnagar, Mehsana, Jamnagar and Rajkot. There appear to be three reasons that cut across these demolitions: (i) to 'punish anti-social elements'; (ii) for development purposes such as road widening, lakefront development or riverbank expansion; and (iii) for 'security purposes. At times it is a combination of these reasons. While the earlier demolitions were an attack on the urban poor, the current wave of demolitions has a religious undertone.

Mapping the demolitions shows that the urban poor of Gujarat face a triple vulnerability in terms of housing. Firstly, they belong in a perpetually flexible state of regulations. Their identity as slum-dwellers leaves them at the mercy of the state and the judiciary, which in recent years have been taking steps to remove the urban poor from their settlements. Secondly, their identity as Muslims makes them susceptible to state violence, being constantly looked at with suspicion, and as threats to national security. Thirdly, this spate of demolitions appears linked to the larger issue of development. Infrastructure development negatively impacts their rights to life and livelihood. This process is unjust and unfair, targeting the urban poor specifically, since demolitions are not undertaken for similar violations by real estate developers or the middle-class population.

The objectives of the report are:

- To document the circumstances of the forced evictions at Chandola Lake, Ahmedabad, creating an archive that centres the voices and rights of the displaced
- To provide an accurate, field-based understanding as grounds for our critique of state, media, and communal propaganda

¹ <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/pahalgam-terror-attack-baisaran-meadow-5-killers-3-spots-10-minutes-of-heavy-fire-how-pahalgam-attack-unfolded-8242547>

- To situate the event within broader national-level patterns of anti-Muslim demolitions and urban authoritarianism

The aim of the report is to serve as a resource for activists, lawyers, journalists, and community organisers.

The report is divided into sections focused on the legal, discursive and social components of the Chandola Lake demolitions. The second section presents the methodology used to arrive at the report, drawing on primary and secondary sources. The third section provides a historical and legal context to the demolitions and deportations. This builds heavily on a report titled *Unmaking Citizens: The Architecture of Rights Violations and Exclusion in India's Citizenship Trials*, which explores the history of citizenship law. It then highlights the laws that have been passed by the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation with regards to informal housing in Ahmedabad. The fourth part of the report then presents the recent histories of demolitions between 2024 and 2025, before focusing on the Chandola Lake demolitions. This section details the timeline of the demolitions, their legal dimensions, mainstream media reporting on the issue and the human costs and differential impact it had on its residents.

Methodology

This report has been prepared by the Ahmedabad District unit of the People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL), Gujarat State. The People's Union for Civil Liberties is one of India's largest human rights organisations, striving to defend civil liberties and human rights of all members of society (People's Union for Civil Liberties, 2022). Its primary functions are to increase consciousness about and commitment to human rights and civil liberties among all sections of the people; provide a platform for all groups of people to come together and further the cause of human rights; energise and creatively use existing institutions like the courts and the press to make them more sensitive to human rights in India; and intervene directly in cases where gross violations of human rights have occurred (People's Union for Civil Liberties, 2022).

The aim of this report is to reconstruct the narrative of the demolitions that took place in the city starting in April-May 2025, but also in the period preceding these. The report draws on discussions with individuals and families impacted by the demolitions, newspaper coverage and journalistic accounts, civil society responses, official circulars and statements issued by political leaders. By approaching the demolitions through a combination of legal and government-issued documents, interviews and focussed group discussions with people affected, the report attempts to point out logics which are deliberately obfuscated and which are linked to questions of citizenship and the right to the city.

The primary sources for the report include:

- interviews with the residents of Chandola Lake informal settlements. These were concerned with understanding in detail the nature of the documents they had,

their history of residing in the area, and their lived experience of the demolitions and the consequent impact it had on their lives;

- focussed group discussions with the residents from Chandola Lake, organised through Sahaj, an NGO working with them;
- interviews with representatives of NGOs, activists and lawyers involved in efforts to stay the demolitions and in filing demands for rehabilitation and resettlement. The lawyers provided oral and written inputs regarding the recent histories of Ahmedabad's housing policies.

It is important to note that in the immediate aftermath of the demolitions, many residents left the city fearing police action. The researchers could not meet them.

The secondary sources include newspaper articles from local and national media coverage, news videos, legal documents, government policies on housing, and the High Court judgements on housing-related matters.

Background: Citizenship, Demolitions and Housing Policy in Ahmedabad and Beyond

Detentions, Deportations and Citizenship Law

India has recently seen a “wave of deportations” of people, particularly targeting Bengali-speaking residents. This has been given state sanction through a Ministry of Home Affairs directive on May 2, 2025 which set a 30-day deadline for States and Union Territories to verify the credentials of persons suspected to be illegal immigrants from Bangladesh and Myanmar who claim to be Indian citizens. After the 30-day period, failing the verification of their documents, such individuals were to face deportation (The Indian Express, 2025).

While this is a recent development, its roots lie in a long history of contestations and disputes around citizenship rights. This section aims to provide a historical trajectory of the deportations that occurred in Gujarat, through the lens of citizenship status as central to constitutional order. As India's Supreme Court has affirmed, citizenship is the gateway to all other fundamental rights (National Law School of India University & Queen Mary University of London, 2025).

Historical Context of Citizenship Act

The Citizenship Act

The citizenship clauses in the Indian Constitution were drafted during the tumultuous period of partition when populations were in flux. The framers intentionally left the law flexible, giving Parliament broad powers under Article 11 to define citizenship. The Citizenship Act of 1955 was initially inclusive. However, a series of amendments, particularly in 1986 and 2003, introduced stricter conditions. The 1986 amendment required at least one parent to be an Indian citizen, a significant departure from the previous "by birth" provision. The most significant change came in 2003 under the

Vajpayee government, and was later notified by the UPA. It stipulated that if even one parent was an "illegal migrant," their child could be denied citizenship. This amendment, coupled with an increase in the naturalization period from ten to twelve years², marked a decisive shift toward an exclusionary approach to citizenship.

The Foreigners Act, 1946

The Foreigners Act of 1946, a colonial law, gives the executive broad powers to detain and deport. In 1958, these powers were delegated to state governments. Although an attempt was made to remove the power to detain, it was reintroduced during the Indo-China War in 1961. Today, authorities are using provisions meant for "staying in a particular place" as a substitute for detention, bypassing due process.

The Foreigners Act, 1946 is a law that grants the central government the power to regulate foreigners' entry, presence, and departure from India. It defines a "foreigner" as anyone who is not a citizen of India and gives the government the authority to issue orders to control their activities and movement, with penalties for non-compliance (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2025). Under this Act, foreign tribunals are empowered to determine the citizenship status of individuals suspected of being foreigners. Under Section 9 of the Foreigners Act, the burden of proof to establish citizenship falls entirely on the individual, who is treated, in the interim, as a "suspect."

Demonstrating belonging is particularly difficult for marginalized individuals who may lack documents due to poverty or displacement. Often, there is a lack of material basis for many inquiry reports, with forms often filled out in a pro forma manner. The famous case of Mohammad Sanaullah, a decorated Indian Army officer declared a "foreigner," is a stark example of this systemic failure. The Foreigners' Tribunals' judgement was arbitrary, in spite of him furnishing proof that he had original documents and spent most of his career in the Indian Army³.

This shows that the process reduces the process of citizenship to a person's ability to produce documents, regardless of their authenticity or context. Many common documents (voter IDs, ration cards) are not sufficient to prove citizenship. The Supreme Court has largely failed to correct this, and the process has rendered them stateless and forcing them to live as "ghosts".

It is as yet unclear whether the deportations from Chandola Lake followed due course of law. The Gujarat Police were in charge of deporting illegal immigrants from cities such as Ahmedabad, Vadodara, Rajkot and Surat. PUCL members filed an RTI inquiring about the process that was followed in deporting the residents. The government refused to give any replies citing national security.

While this section of the report provides an important context to understand how citizenship is framed in India, the particular current case of Ahmedabad is peculiar.

² <https://www.refworld.org/legal/legislation/natlegbod/2004/14043>

³ <https://fiftytwo.in/story/the-foreigner/>

This is one of the first times that housing was linked to the question of citizenship. As subsequent sections will show, the argument for housing demolitions in the recent past has been that they focused on “miscreants” found to be engaging in illegal activities. In the case of Chandola Lake, one of the main narratives spread in their aftermath was that the residents occupied the space illegally and lacked proper documentation. However, this in itself does not justify the demolition of over 12500 structures around Chandola Lake. Thus, it is crucial to understand the recent history of housing policy of the Government of Gujarat, as a background to these demolitions.

Slum Rehabilitation and Demolition of Illegal Settlements

A Human Rights Perspective under the Indian Constitution

Under the Preamble of the Constitution, dignity of the individual is to be maintained. It is a fundamental ideal and objective to be achieved, which is violated when this kind of demolition takes place.

Further, under Article 21 of the Constitution, the right to live is a fundamental right. Without dignified housing, the right to live does not exist.

The Constitution (Seventy-Fourth Amendment) Act, 1992

The Seventy-Fourth Amendment of the Constitution Act, 1992 provided one of the first constitutional directions for slum rehabilitation. Under Section 243W(a)(ii), the Legislature of a State may, by law, endow the performance of functions and the implementation of schemes as may be entrusted to them including those in relation to the matters listed in the Twelfth Schedule. One of the key matters includes slum improvement and upgradation.

Regulations for the Rehabilitation and Redevelopment of the Slums, 2010

In 2010, the Urban Development and Urban Housing Department (UD & UHD) of Government of Gujarat (GoG) released ‘The Regulation for the Rehabilitation and Redevelopment of the Slums 2010’. These regulations, constituted under the Gujarat Town Planning and Urban Development Act (GTPUDA), 1976, were for in-situ redevelopment of slums (irrespective of their ownership – public or private) through participation of the private sector (developer) (Mahadevia et al., 2014).

Under the “Regulations for the Rehabilitation and Redevelopment of the Slums, 2010”, the Government Resolution Order No.-1020093572-L (૫૨૫ – ૧૦૨૦૦૯૩૫૭૨-૬) dated 04-03-2010 was issued by the Urban Development and Urban Housing Department of the Government of Gujarat. This resolution defined an “Eligible Slum Dweller” as a slum dweller who is not a foreign national and is the occupant of a hutment for a period of minimum of ten years and has a domicile of Gujarat for twenty-five years; this would apply to the individual or his descendant.

Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban), 2025

Under the *Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban)* as implemented in the State of Gujarat, the Government of Gujarat issued Resolution No. AHM/10205/128/TH-1, dated 24 March 2025, wherein Clause 2.4 specifically provides for the treatment of *untenable slums* requiring re-allocation. Clause 2.4.1 expressly states that where *in-situ redevelopment* is not possible – such as in slums situated on lake embankments, including those around waterbodies like Chandola Lake – the implementing agency is obligated to relocate the slum dwellers and undertake their rehabilitation/redevelopment in accordance with the prescribed norms.

However, contrary to these statutory obligations and the binding nature of the Regulations for the Rehabilitation and Redevelopment of Slums, 2010, which mandate free housing to eligible slum dwellers, the Municipal Corporation, after demolishing the slum settlements at Chandola Lake, announced an EWS Housing Scheme requiring affected households to pay an initial amount of ₹7,500 and a total contribution of approximately ₹3,00,000. This approach is inconsistent with the 2010 Regulations, which require the State and implementing agency to provide free rehabilitation housing to slum dwellers displaced from untenable slums, without imposing any financial burden upon them. Accordingly, the policy governing untenable slum rehabilitation ought to have been fully applied in the case of Chandola Lake, ensuring *no-cost rehabilitation* for all displaced households.

Furthermore, it is pertinent to note the clear contradiction in the narrative advanced by the concerned officials regarding the status of the Chandola Lake slum residents. Prior to demolition, the authorities consistently portrayed the residents as “illegal slum dwellers” “anti-social Elements”, “Encroacher”, “Bangladeshi” in order to justify eviction and clearance activities. However, the very same authorities, after demolition, initiated the process of granting these households accommodation under the EWS Housing Scheme, which is a welfare scheme applicable only to *eligible* and *recognized* beneficiaries. This conduct demonstrates an inherent inconsistency: if the residents were genuinely “illegal occupants” as claimed, they would not qualify for EWS housing benefits. The subsequent provision of EWS housing not only undermines the earlier narrative of illegality but also implicitly acknowledges the residents as legitimate slum dwellers entitled to rehabilitation. This contradiction further strengthens the claim that, in accordance with the Slum Rehabilitation and Redevelopment Regulations, 2010, the affected households ought to have been provided free rehabilitation housing, rather than being directed to pay substantial amounts under the EWS scheme.

Housing Demolitions in Gujarat (May 2024 to May 2025): An Overview

This section discusses the housing demolitions in Gujarat in the year preceding the Chandola Lake demolitions, taking stock of the reasoning offered to justify them in each instance.

Coastal Security: Bet Dwarka: January 2025

Around 45–50 unauthorised structures were removed in a mega demolition drive on Bet Dwarka island in Gujarat on January 11, 2025. These demolitions occurred in Gujarat's 'Devbhoomi' Dwarka district (Bet-Dwarka). These were a part of a larger drive against illegal residential and commercial structures in the Balpar area of Bet-Dwarka, spread across three years, on the grounds that these habitations could 'pose potential security threats'⁴.

Invoking coastal security, the demolition drive began in Bet-Dwarka in 2022, and since then, illegal constructions have been cleared in several districts, including Devbhoomi Dwarka, Kutch, Porbandar, and Junagadh, as part of a larger demolition drive⁵. In March 2023, the houses of around 700 people from fishing communities, mostly Muslims, were demolished, after which their names were removed from the voting list⁶. These demolitions have had an adverse impact on the livelihoods of the fishing community, as they have been denied access to the coast⁷.

Action against “anti-social” elements: Ahmedabad, Rajkot and Vadodara: March to May 2025

On March 15, 2025, the Gujarat Police Chief Mr. Vikas Sahay asked every police station to draw up lists of anti-social elements by March 19, 2025. The order was concurrent with the joint police and municipal corporation action which saw the demolition of the illegally constructed houses of 6 out of 14 accused in the Vastral violence case in Amraiwadi and Khokhra. There were other cases in Morbi as well. Till March 21, 77 illegal properties were either demolished or the process was underway, and 200 power connections of those named on the police list were cut, according to DGP Sahay. This included a haveli in the South West Zone on March 22, demolitions in Vejalpur of a property belonging to a Kalu Gardan, the third floor of Central Gymkhana belonging to a gambler and illegal portions of bungalow in Sindhu Bhawan Road. There are two main types of illegal structures being demolished by the civic bodies across Gujarat – illegal additions made to buildings on privately owned land, and illegal structures encroaching land belonging to the government⁸.

A similar action was taken in Vadodara, where the Vadodara Municipal Corporation removed unauthorised sheds and encroachments outside the residence of Firozabanu and her son, Sultan Ajmeri, in the Santosh Nagar area of Tandaljar. The police took the lead by making a list of 'notorious offenders' along with the VMC authorities to demolish houses⁹.

⁴ <https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/ahmedabad/gujarat-devbhumi-dwarka-islands-9791627/>

⁵ <https://www.indiatvnews.com/gujarat/gujarat-unauthorised-structures-removed-in-mega-demolition-drive-on-bet-dwarka-island-latest-updates-2025-01-11-970722/>

⁶ <https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/ahmedabad/after-their-houses-were-raze-names-of-700-fishermen-deleted-from-voters-lists-9312406/>

⁷ <https://thewire.in/rights/homes-demolished-the-right-to-fish-denied-the-lives-of-gujarats-muslimfishermen>

⁸ [Demolition drives in Gujarat: How, which, and when of the 'whole-of-government' approach | Ahmedabad News - The Indian Express](#)

⁹ <https://english.gujaratsamachar.com/news/gujarat/vadodara-police-raze-illegal-structures-linked-to-female-bootlegger>

On May 20, 2025, the Rajkot Municipal Corporation demolished 60 properties linked to 38 "history-sheeters", describing them as unauthorised as they stood on government land. While the Supreme Court judgement had stated that the demolition of a house needs to be undertaken only after due process, the Rajkot police have said that notices were sent to these occupants, most of whom were accused of murder, theft and prohibition violations¹⁰.

Between March 2025 and April 2025, the police had prepared a list of 7,157 'anti-social elements' across the state since the crackdown initiated in March. In coordination with various institutions, 372 demolitions of illegal structures were initiated against these persons and 1,046 electricity connections were cut in coordination with the utility providers¹¹.

Removal of Illegal Encroachments on Government Land: Bhavnagar 2025

In May 2024, at Bortalav in Bhavnagar, around 85 illegal structures including four temples and one mosque were demolished to remove illegal encroachments on government land¹².

In May 2025, at Bapunagar in Ahmedabad, the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC) carried out a massive demolition operation in the Akbarnagar area of Bapunagar on Thursday morning, flattening over 450 illegal huts and small mud-brick houses within two hours¹³.

River Widening and Projects on Water Bodies: Jamnagar, Bhavnagar and Ahmedabad

During the same time period, various local governments have undertaken river-widening, riverfront and lakefront projects. These have led to bulldozing of residences on the banks of these projects.

In Bhavnagar, around 776 structures were demolished over 5 days in March 2025, in order to clean the banks of the river for the upcoming development of the Gadhechi Riverfront¹⁴.

In a step towards its proposed Riverfront Development Project, the Jamnagar Municipal Corporation (JMC) in Gujarat launched a mega demolition drive to clear illegal encroachments along the Rangamati riverbed, from Kalavad Naka to

¹⁰ <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/60-houses-of-history-sheeters-razed-in-gujarat/articleshow/121277321.cms>

¹¹ <https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/ahmedabad/illegal-hutments-demolished-chandola-lake-ahmedabad-9972526/>

¹² <https://deshgujarat.com/2024/05/21/mega-demolition-drive-against-illegal-encroachments-in-bhavnagar/>

¹³ <https://english.gujaratsamachar.com/news/gujarat/demolition-drive-in-ahmedabads-bapunagar-over-450-illegal-structures-razed>

¹⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tvv6cfrSa4I>

Nageshwar. The operation led to the removal of 116 unauthorised houses and shops across three locations, freeing up approximately 50,000 square feet of public land¹⁵.

The Chandola Lake demolitions are part of the larger narrative of lakefront development at Chandola Lake, in addition to narratives of the area being a space of residence of illegal Bangladeshi immigrants and illegal activities.

Chandola: Timeline and Documentation



Figure 4: Photo Credits: Hozefa Ujjaini

This section provides a historical context to informal settlements at Chandola Lake and covers the events that occurred post the Pahalgam attack on April 22, 2025, including the parading of the residents, their detainment, the demolition of their residential, commercial and religious structures and the difficult conditions of rehabilitation and resettlement.

The informal settlements at Chandola Lake, also known as Chandola Talavna Chapra, belong to the Dani Limda Ward. With an estimated population of around 2.5 lakh, Dani Limda is one of the densest wards in the South Zone of Ahmedabad. The ward is also one of the poorest wards in the city, with limited state attention given to its development.

Historical Context

The idea of the Chandola Lake development emerged in 2015. A resident of Maninagar, the Mamlatdar of the Maninagar City Taluka, Mr. Divakar Badheka had requested the AMC to create a development for Chandola Lake, the way Kankaria had been developed. After getting permission from the Kalpasar and Water Department, as well as the Narmada Water Resources Development Department, the AMC earmarked 10,96,127 square meters of land¹⁶.

¹⁵ <https://english.gujaratsamachar.com/news/gujarat/demolition-drive-launched-in-gujarats-jamnagar-riverfront-project>

¹⁶ Sandesh, 2025

Urban researchers have pointed out that the first settlement around Chandola Lake date back to after Hindu-Muslim riots in 1969. “After these riots, the Jamaat-e-Islaami, a Muslim charity, rehabilitated some of the riot affected Muslims on land belonging to the Karaliya Group, a construction firm owned by Abdul Latif, a noted gangster and bootlegger. This land was located on the city’s southern periphery on the eastern side of the river, behind Chandola Lake. The locality came to be known as “Millat Nagar”¹⁷.



Figure 5: Residents hold this municipal receipt of the slum named Nilgiri Na Chappra. Photo Credits: Hozefa Ujjaini.

In the 1990s, while there private housing in forms of chawls and chaalis was coming up, the area remained a ghetto, outside the ambit of state’s urban planning and susceptible to land grabbing by land mafias.

Even though some schemes and housing societies were developed, the area remained largely inhabitable. However, the adjoining area of Shah-e-Alam had a huge population that was spilling over into the Dani Limda area as well. The area also attracted construction of small-scale textile and chemical factories¹⁸.

The 2002 riots had a major impact on the area, leading to the emergence of relief camps and resettlement colonies in Dani Limda, but once again, very little attention was given by the authorities in providing aid and relief or shelter. In 2013, the Town Planning Scheme (TPS) 38(2) was proposed for the area. ‘Illegal’ settlements with high population density started appearing in the area. TPS 38(2) met with stiff resistance from a significant section of the residents who were going to lose their property/assets. Finally, a settlement was reached between the residents and the AMC. The AMC agreed to make a new TPS which would involve very few demolitions, but would not have the same services layout and quality as the other TPS.

¹⁷ Desai et al., 2019.

¹⁸ <https://countercurrents.org/2025/06/demolition-drives-near-the-chandola-lake-area/>

Cultural Context

Chandola Lake is one of the most ancient and significant water sources in Ahmedabad. What makes this lake unique is that it is not a man-made reservoir created solely by constructing embankments; rather, it is believed to be a naturally formed body of water that evolved over time alongside human settlement. Estimates suggest that the lake has existed since the Middle Ages, with its development likely taking place during the Gujarat Sultanate period—specifically under the reign of Mahmud Begada or Shah-e-Alam.

During this era, traditional water systems such as lakes, stepwells (*vavs*), and canals gained immense importance for water storage, irrigation, and public utility. The tradition of preserving natural water sources to serve the community and strengthen the city's expansion and agrarian economy dates back to this time.

Like many other lakes and stepwells in Ahmedabad, Chandola Lake has served as a public space where daily life, social gatherings, and communal interactions unfolded. Traditionally, such lakes did not just fulfill the need for water; they were deeply intertwined with the memories, relationships, and social fabric of the people.

The most vital aspect of Chandola Lake is its role in Ahmedabad's tradition of "Sanjhi Virasat" (Shared Heritage) and peaceful coexistence. According to folklore, there was a deep bond of friendship between the Sufi saint Shah-e-Alam and Narsinhji Bhagat. This is not merely a legend; it is visibly manifested in the religious and cultural life of the area even today.

- **Shared Spaces:** On the banks of Chandola Lake, the temple of Narsinhji and the *Rauza* (mausoleum) of Shah-e-Alam stand side by side.
- **The Symbolic Lamp:** To this day, a lamp in honor of Narsinhji is lit within the Shah-e-Alam *Rauza*. This tradition exemplifies how certain spaces in Ahmedabad became platforms for interfaith dialogue and social bonding.
- **Exchange of Sweets:** Local belief holds that during Eid, laddoos (sweets) were sent from Narsinhji's temple to the Shah-e-Alam *Rauza*, and during Diwali, the *Rauza* sent sweets to the temple. This was more than just a festival ritual; it was a profound social message of mutual respect and participation.

The lake's historical significance is also evident from its water capacity and utility. According to local memory, Chandola Lake stored so much water that it was distributed to various surrounding areas through a network of canals. This water was used for irrigation, serving as a lifeline for the agriculture and horticulture that once sustained the semi-rural parts of old Ahmedabad.

In essence, Chandola Lake is a historical landmark that represents Ahmedabad's past—reflecting its water management, agrarian lifestyle, urban growth, and socio-religious harmony. Its natural origins, medieval development, irrigation network, and

the enduring traditions of Shah-e-Alam and Narsinhji together make it a powerful symbol of the city's shared cultural heritage.

Timeline of Deportations and Demolitions at Chandola Lake in 2025

On April 27, 2025, at least 2,024 people, "suspected" to be illegal immigrants from Bangladesh, were under investigation in four major cities of Gujarat on Saturday. This included 890 people from Ahmedabad, 134 people from Surat, 800 residents of Rajkot, and 200 residents of Vadodara.

In Ahmedabad, the detained persons were raided by the Gujarat Police at 3 am, and then were paraded through the streets of the city, covering the distance between Kankaria Football Ground, where they were first assembled, and Gaikwad Haveli Headquarters of the Crime Branch, with drone videos of the march being circulated by the police. Those detained in Ahmedabad include 457 men, 219 women and 214 children, said an officer of the Ahmedabad City Police. Most of the people were picked up from the Chandola Lake area of Ahmedabad. According to the Gujarat Minister of State (MoS) for Home Mr. Harsh Sanghavi, those detained were "ghuspatiyee" (infiltrators), coming through (West) Bengal illegally on fake documents and reaching Gujarat and other states of India. According to Mr. Sanghavi, many of them were those who are involved in drug cartels, human trafficking, and working as sleeper cells for Al Qaeda¹⁹.

¹⁹ <https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/ahmedabad/bangladesh-nationals-detained-gujarat-pahalgam-terror-aftermath-9966992/>



Figure 6: People being paraded. Photo credits: Hozefa Ujjaini

From among the 890 people, 143 were identified as Bangladeshis. The families and relatives of the detainees were not formally informed about whether this was an arrest or detention without arrest; this led them to spend almost 2 days in this heat outside the DCB office at Gaekwad Haveli, the Cyber Crime Office at Shahibaug, and the SOG Office at Juhapura. They were told that documents related to identification, residence, and other types of proof would be verified, and if found satisfactory, they would be released²⁰.

²⁰ https://www.business-standard.com/india-news/over-550-illegal-bangladeshi-immigrants-detained-in-gujarat-operations-125042600115_1.htm

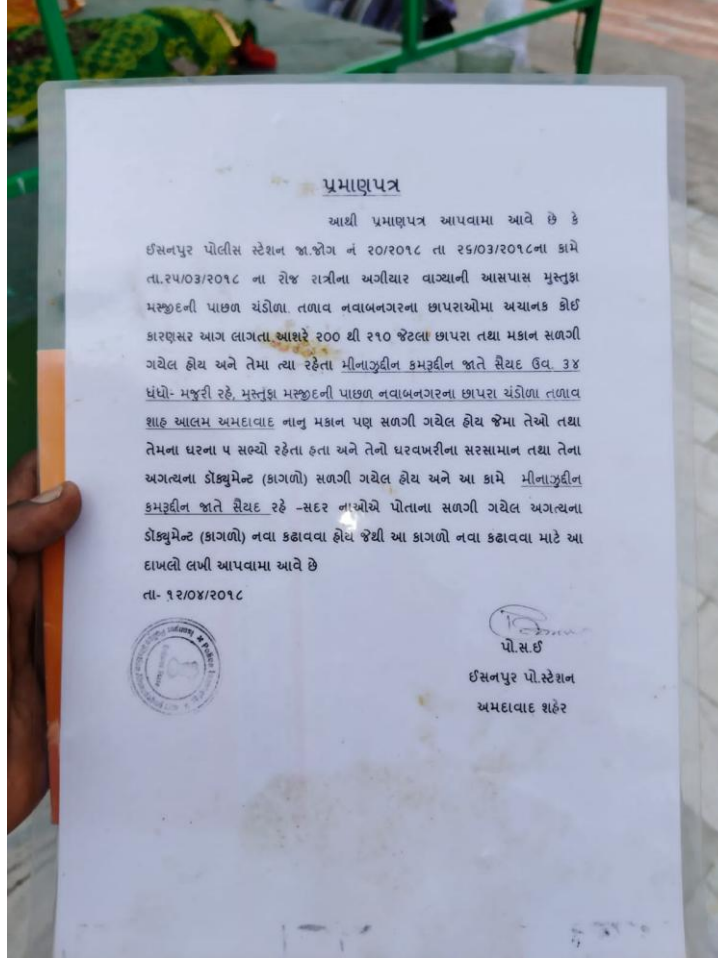


Figure 7: Police document for the residents who cannot fill forms as their documents were burnt in the fire of 2018. Photo Credits: Hozefa Ujjaini.

The police did not provide a clear idea of which documents were valid; and in many cases, Aadhaar cards and other documents were deemed insufficient or fake. This is despite the fact that most of the people are from Bihar, Rajasthan, Gujarat, and West Bengal and possess relevant documentary evidence; and are not Bangladeshis, as claimed by Gujarat's Minister of State (MoS) for Home, Harsh Sanghavi.



Figure 8: The parade in progress. Photo Credits: Hozefa Ujjaini.

Demolitions

After the arrest, ill-treatment, and release of Indian citizens, the police informed them that they were being given a few hours to vacate the settlements where they had been living for decades in Chandola. On April 29, 2025, under the protection of Ahmedabad Police, the AMC demolished more than 1500 residential units. It should be noted that people of all religions live on the banks of Chandola Lake, but the arrests/detentions over the 3 days and the demolitions carried out then selectively targeted only Muslim citizens of the Chandola settlements.

The Government ignored the plight of nearly 2500 children from the displaced families, their trauma, and their right to education, showing an inhumane attitude towards people who have been living in that area for at least 3–4 decades.



Figure 9: The demolitions in process at Chandola Lake. Photo Credits: Hozefa Ujjaini.

The Petition and Response from Gujarat High Court

An application was filed by citizens in the Gujarat High Court (Special Civil Application No. 6119 of 2025: Fulijaha Nurmohammad Shaikh and 17 others versus Chief Secretary, State of Gujarat and two others) which was heard on April 29, 2025, for urgent consideration. After hearing the arguments of the victim applicants as well as the state authorities, the High Court refused to grant a stay on the eviction and demolition on grounds that the applicants are on a proposed water body and since this is government land, the residents never obtained permission to construct there and are therefore encroachers on public land. The High Court further stated that the recent judgment of the Supreme Court of India on the issue of eviction and demolition of houses of suspects would not apply to the present case because that judgment provides an exception in its own applicable capacity in the context of encroachments on public spaces, water bodies, etc., and therefore, the applicants do not need to be given any notice before their houses are evicted and demolished.

However, while dealing with the issue of rehabilitation and resettlement of the applicants, the High Court clearly observed that if the applicants can prove through an application made to the competent authority that they were residing in Chandola Lake before 2010 and are covered under the amended Gujarat State Slum

Rehabilitation Scheme 2010 of 2013, then the state shall provide alternative accommodation to such applicants.

Further, it is important to understand the legal vacuum around rehabilitation and resettlement. The state government is in charge of notifying slums. The Gujarat High Court passed a judgement that non-notified slums would not be eligible for compensation. Since the Gujarat Government has not been able to notify slums, a vast number of slums are unable to access rehabilitation and resettlement. Further, the 2025 Slum Policy of Ahmedabad ensures that rehabilitation and resettlement would be provided to notified slums before 2020. But since the government has not notified many slums, this remains an empty promise.

In addition, the 2025 Slum Policy raises the issue of untenable slums. Untenable slums are those slums which are located on the banks of water bodies such as lakes and rivers. The Supreme Court judgement by Justice Gavai which protected homes from demolitions did not include untenable slums, thus allowing for the exclusion of Chandola Lake slums which are located on the banks of water bodies.



Figure 10: Chandola Lake after demolitions. Photo Credits: Hozefa Ujjaini.

Rehabilitation and Resettlement

In its meeting on May 8, 2025, the Standing Committee gave in-principle approval for alternate housing to be provided to those residents of Chandola Lake, who resided there since before December 1, 2010. These residents were to be given EWS

category houses under the heading of Affordable Housing In-Partnership in the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojna (PMAY) (Urban) under certain conditions: collect the forms from the Dani Limda office, fill the form, and submit two documents of proof of residence before the cutoff date. The annual family income of beneficiaries would have to be less than Rs. 3 lakh. Those found eligible were to be granted 70 square metres EWS, with the cost set at Rs 3 lakh per house. Those eligible and ready to pay would be allotted the houses. They had around 10,000 houses under construction that were expected to be ready in 12 months. The chairman said that the filing of forms and verification will take time²¹.

Violation of Due Process by the Authorities before Demolitions

Arbitrary Notices Sent Only to a Section of Residents

After three phases of demolitions around Chandola Talav, around 12,500 households were estimated to have faced demolitions and were rendered homeless. On-ground conversations and meetings with families affected by the demolition revealed that only half of the households were issued notices, whereas the remainder of the households were not issued a single notice.

As per the Supreme Court in its order with regards to WP (Civil) 295/2022 order, a notice shall contain the following:

- The nature of unauthorized construction
- The details of specific violations and grounds for demolition
- A list of documents that the notices is required to furnish along with his reply
- The notice should also specify the date on which the personal hearing is fixed and the designated authority before whom the hearing will take place

²¹ <https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/ahmedabad/week-after-demolition-drive-civic-body-gives-in-principle-nod-to-resettle-people-evicted-from-ahmedabads-chandola-lake-9991774/>



અમદાવાદ મ્યુનિસિપલ કોર્પોરેશન

મહાનગર સેવા સદન, અમદાવાદ, એસ્ટેટ/નગર વિકાસ ખાતું, દક્ષિણ ઝોન
૨૪૦ મુખ, ડે.મ.પાનચરમ્યુનિસિપલ, અપાર્ટમેન્ટ-૧૦૫, નવરંગપુરા, અમદાવાદ. ૩૮૦૦૦૮. email:tdost@ahmedabadcity.gov.in

તારીખ:-૨૩/૦૧/૨૦૨૫

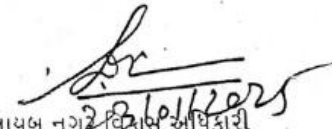
પ્રતિ

શ્રી. શ્રી. શ્રી.

દાણીલીમડા, અમદાવાદ.

વિષય:- ચંડોળા તળાવની જમીનમાં આપશ્રી તરફથી કરેલ દબાણ દુર કરવા બાબત..
સંદર્ભ:-કલેક્ટરશ્રીનો હુકમ ક્રમાંક:સીબી/અજકા/અ.મ્યુ.કો./તળાવ વિકાસ/શરત કમી/ક-૮૫૧૬/૨૦૨૨
, તા.૨૧/૦૭/૨૦૨૨

ઉપરોક્ત વિષય તથા સંદર્ભથી નામ. સરકારશ્રી દ્વારા ચંડોળા તળાવને ડેવલપ કરવા માટે અમદાવાદ મ્યુનિસિપલ કોર્પોરેશનને ફાળવણી કરવામાં આવેલ છે. સદરહુ ચંડોળા તળાવનો વિકાસ કરવાની કામગીરી અમદાવાદ મ્યુનિસિપલ કોર્પોરેશનને ઇજારા પિનનામ દ્વારા ચાલુ છે. સદરહુ કામગીરીમાં આપશ્રીએ કરેલ અનઅધિકૃત દબાણવાળું કાચુ/પાકુ બાંધકામ આવેલ છે. જે વિકાસના કામમાં નડતરરૂપ તળાવની જમીનમાં આવેલ દબાણવાળું તમામ બાંધકામ નડતરરૂપ રહેણાંક પ્રકારના બિનઅધિકૃત દબાણવાળા બાંધકામને દિન-૨૧(એકવીસ)માં દુર કરી ખુલ્લો અને પ્રત્યક્ષ કબ્જો અમદાવાદ મ્યુનિસિપલ કોર્પોરેશનને સોંપી દેવા તમોને આ નોટીસથી જણાવવામાં આવે છે. જો તમો તરફથી તેમ કરવામાં નહીં આવે તો તમારા ખર્ચે અને જોખમે ઉપરોક્ત અનઅધિકૃત દબાણવાળા બાંધકામ દુર કરી તેનો કબ્જો વિકાસના હેતુથી અમદાવાદ મ્યુનિસિપલ કોર્પોરેશન દ્વારા લેવામાં આવશે. જેની ગંભીર નોંધ લેશો.


નાયબ નગર વિકાસ અધિકારી
(દક્ષિણ ઝોન)

નો.બ.તા.૨૩/૦૧/૨૦૨૫

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No surveys and document verification done before large-scale demolitions:

The Supreme Court in its order with regards to WP (Civil) 295/2022 (para 91, page 87), states, “At the outset, we clarify that these directions (stay order on unauthorized settlements) will not be applicable if there is an unauthorized structure in any public place such as road, street, footpath, abutting railway line or any river body or water bodies and also to cases where there is an order for demolition made by a court of law”.

However, even in cases where unauthorized settlements are around water bodies, like in the case of Chandola talav, the state must still act within constitutional constraints. It cannot act arbitrarily, disproportionately, or with malafide intent. Since many Chandola households likely straddled the water boundary, the state’s wholesale demolition cannot be insulated by para 91 for the portion outside the water zone.

Moreover, the residents of unauthorized structures, even under the exempt clauses in Supreme Court order, are citizens whose rights to live with dignity and safety are protected under fundamental rights mentioned under Article 14 (right to equality) and Article 21 (right to life and personal liberty) of Indian Constitution. Even if the state is using the exemption mentioned in para 91, this raises questions with regards to the authorities’ consideration of the following aspects:

- Did they inform the residents about the plan of lake redevelopment or other kinds of constructions proposed around Chandola talav?
- How much of the area and the revenue plots will be covered under the development project?
- If development is proposed around Chandola talav, did the authorities produce the resolution taken in the corporation’s standing committee regarding demolitions around Chandola talav with regards to a proposed development and construction plan for new structure? What measures did the corporation take into consideration with regards to compensating and/or rehabilitating residents whose structures are demolished?
- It is also a function of the corporation under 74th constitutional amendment to carry out slum surveys before any kind of redevelopment within the corporation’s boundary. Why did the corporation ignore the said provisions under 74th constitutional amendment before demolishing structures at a mass scale?

It must also be added that in the notices shared previously by the authorities with regards to demolitions, a TP map is attached showing the exact area, plot numbers, and the part of the structure (whole or partial) which will be demolished. In the present notices, such a TP map or the exact area that comes within the demolition range, was not shared even in the notices sent to a section of the residents. (Refer Annexure 2.) This goes against the aforementioned Supreme Court order with regards to WP (Civil) 295/2022.



Figure 14: Photo Credits: Hozefa Ujjaini.



Figure 15: The Narsinhjini Chali that was not demolished. Photo Credits: Hozefa Ujjaini.

“My Kids Were More Scared than during the COVID Lockdown”: The Human Cost of Demolitions

This section details the human cost of the demolitions carried out during a period when children were writing their exams and when temperatures had touched 43 degrees Celsius. Residents were forced to search for alternative housing while facing shame and dehumanization. Not knowing where their allotted house would be made it impossible to look for employment and decide where their children should be sent for education.

Impact on Residents

There was a severe impact on the livelihoods and housing of the residents. Immediately after the demolitions, most of them took refuge in houses of their relatives, who had to then facing the pressure of an additional burden.

Narrative: Were they involved in illegal activities?

The Gujarat Government, the police and a significant part of the media built a narrative of the demolished area as inhabited by illegal immigrants involved in anti-national and illegal activities. The reality is different. The very few illegal Bangladeshi immigrants ‘in confinement’ following the demolitions at the Chandola Talav told the

police as part of the ongoing investigation that their means of subsistence came from rag-picking, begging at traffic signals, and working as manual labourers, mostly masons. They arrived in Gujarat hoping “for better livelihood opportunities”, but the joint interrogation revealed that most continued to “remain entangled in the vicious cycle of debt and owing money to their agents”. In other areas of central Gujarat, senior police officers said that although the male illegal immigrants managed to find jobs as labourers, several women were allegedly forced to take up commercial sex work to support their families, while others work in beauty parlours or do patch embroidery work²².

Humiliation and Loss of Dignity

After the raid at 3 am, children were traumatised and scared, left with a deep sense of humiliation. “We had no sense of time, just humiliation. The police banged on doors with their lathis, people were pulled out of their homes and rounded up. They said they would let the women and children go but they herded them too. The police had a couple of buses and some people were sent in those, while most of us were paraded through the streets to the Crime Branch (headquarters),” said a man in his thirties, among those who were released the following day, as he recalled the events of Saturday morning. A group of people collected documents to create not only a backup of legal data ready to be presented to the authorities, but also proof that Indian citizens were detained and paraded through the streets. Commissioner of Police GS Malik told *The Indian Express*, “Till now, 143 people have been identified as Bangladeshis and several people identified as Indians have been released as well.”²³

Increased Economic Burden and Loss of Livelihood

Taking advantage of the demolitions and of the dire situation of the people who have lost their shelter, landlords asked for deposits of up to Rs. 40000 and rents of Rs. 6000 per month. Many landlords refused to rent out to them, because of the stigma attached to the residents now branded ‘illegal Bangladeshis’ as well. These too enabled other landlords to add a premium to provide rented accommodation, and enabled the rental market to profiteer.

Since not every family could afford rental accommodation, several returned to the fenced-off Chandola Lake at night. They slept outside the fence, and dispersed in the mornings.

The demolitions also had a dire impact on self-employed residents who were dependent on their customers. One of the women the team spoke to owned the house that was demolished where she stitched clothes for a livelihood. She had no

²² <https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/ahmedabad/debt-gujarat-police-crackdown-illegal-bangladeshis-petty-jobs-9980611/>

²³ <https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/ahmedabad/what-was-our-fault-we-are-indians-rounded-up-in-drive-against-bangladeshis-chandola-lake-residents-recount-3am-raid-9971390/>

male members in the family and provided for herself and her loss of shelter also meant that she lost several clients.

Other affected families involved in welding, painting, handwork and daily wage jobs were similarly dependent on their proximity to Chandola Lake. Some others drive auto rickshaws for a living. While they eventually went back to their jobs, in the short run they lost several days of wages because of demolitions, search for alternative accommodation and the lengthy processes of rehabilitation and resettlement, which in the dire subsistence conditions in which they live constitute a threat to their life and health.

Dispersion and Fragmentation: A Loss of a Community

There were several thousand households at Chandola Lake. After the demolition, the residents dispersed to different parts of the city and within Gujarat state, both to search for affordable accommodation and to flee from the police. They reached cities like Vadodara, Bharuch and Nadiad, and within Ahmedabad several areas like Fatehwadi, Sarkhej, Juhapura, Vatwa²⁴, Dani Limda, some of which were also targeted in demolitions after Chandola Lake.

Education

One of the most severely impacted areas was children's education. Most of the children had to drop out of school. The dispersal to different parts of the city led to difficulties in commuting to schools in Dani Limda, both in terms of the distance they had to travel and in the added economic costs of commuting. Education in such conditions cannot afford to be a priority.

The new academic session began in the middle of the chaos of demolitions and some children have already missed an entire academic year because their parents were unable to apply for admission before the deadline. At the Republic School, Teen Darwaza, 19th May 2025 was the last date of re-examination, but some families were still trying to recover and shift their belongings till 20th, right after their house was bulldozed. As of June 2025, they were still not able to find a house, and were compelled to sell their belongings, as they had nowhere to keep them.

Rehabilitation and Resettlement

The Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation opened three shelter homes in Khokhra, Paldi and Isanpur. Each provided one communal hall per gender, basic kitchen access and security registration on entry. These shelters were located far from Chandola Lake and the residents were unable to access them because of the prohibitive costs of daily rickshaw fares, loss of work opportunities and the baseras' "hostel-like" restrictions on movement and privacy (Divya Bhaskar, 2025).

In addition, the conditions of rehabilitation and resettlement were exclusionary in nature due to their economic costs. The forms and the documents had a prohibitive

²⁴ <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/ahmedabad/ahmedabad-demolition-underway-at-vanarvat-lake-area-450-structures-razed/articleshow/126848560.cms>

cost of around Rs. 8500, including Rs. 800–900 for an affidavit, and Rs. 7550 for requesting alternative housing, refundable in case the application is rejected. However, those whose applications for a house were approved, would have to pay Rs. 3.5 lakh in a year. Even a single mistake in the form would require the purchase of another form for the same price, i.e. Rs. 900.

The team that sat on behalf of the government to submit the forms and check documents for alternate housing followed no specific process or guidelines. One person would accept the form, money and documents; the next person would reject a document previously approved; the third person would point out another gap, with the applicants caught in between, unable to proceed.

During elections, local politicians rush to have documents prepared for residents of areas such as Chandola Lake. This leaves them with errors in names and addresses, making it impossible for the applicants to fill out the forms and have them verified by the authorities who appear to be waiting for an opportunity to reject their applications. One of the women the team spoke with had her Voter ID photograph rejected, but money was still taken for her form, and her case is not unique.

This points to malafide intent by the authorities, leaving little hope for rehabilitation.

The Media Narrative

What is already obvious from the details above is the strategic transformation captured in media coverage of an urban planning and encroachment issue into a high-stakes national security crisis. This conversion was achieved through a relentless application of the "securitization frame," which utilized police sources to establish links between the physical occupation of land and threats to national safety.

Weaponizing the "Illegal Immigrant" Label

The state apparatus deliberately and consistently designated the target population as a collective security risk by emphasizing the presence of unauthorized immigrants. This fundamentally altered the public discourse surrounding the humanitarian aspects of the demolition, making it impossible for concerns to be raised.

Official Designation and Targeted Geography

Official statements, cited widely in mainstream media, explicitly defined the operational targets. Joint Commissioner of Police (Crime) Sharad Singhal stated clearly that the area included "Siyasatnagar Bangal Vaas where a majority of Bangladeshis used to stay". The implication was direct: the demolition was not merely about reclaiming land but about eliminating a specific demographic pocket identified as a security liability. This narrative was reinforced by reports characterizing the operation as part of a "wider initiative across Gujarat to act against illegal immigration." The operational scope extended beyond Ahmedabad, with media detailing parallel police actions, such as the detention of Bangladeshi

nationals in Umargam, thereby strengthening the impression that the Chandola drive was merely the highest profile manifestation of a state-wide security crackdown.

Pre-emptive Action and Detention as Evidence

To solidify the security narrative, media reports highlighted pre-emptive actions taken by law enforcement. Ahead of Phase 1, the police detained 202 individuals identified as Bangladeshis living illegally in the Chandola Lake area. This pre-emptive detention served as powerful, tangible evidence supporting the state's claim that the settlement was indeed a hub of foreign nationals illegally residing in India.

The application of the "illegal Bangladeshi" frame was critical because it provided the necessary moral license for the state to execute the demolition without adhering to the typical welfare protocols expected when displacing Indian citizens, such as providing adequate notice or immediate rehabilitation. By labeling the victims as foreign and illegal, the state and the supportive media implicitly revoked their entitlement to constitutional protection, welfare, and due process associated with local eviction cases. The state successfully shifted the public perception of the legal status of the entire displaced population, even if a significant portion held valid Indian documents, effectively arguing that these were foreign elements being removed, not citizens being relocated.

Direct Linking to Organized Crime and Terror

The security narrative was further amplified by directly associating the settlement with severe organized crime and, in some instances, transnational terror financing. This linkage served to justify the massive, high-risk deployment and the haste of the demolition.

Crime Branch Sources as Authority

Mainstream digital and television news platforms, such as News9 and India Today, frequently leveraged statements from the Crime Branch and senior police officials to establish a criminal nexus within the Chandola community. The source authority, the Crime Branch, lent significant weight to these severe accusations, implying that the operation was indispensable for curbing regional and national security threats²⁵.

Enumeration of Criminality

Reports explicitly detailed a litany of criminal activities alleged to originate from the settlements, including narcotics trafficking, human trafficking, running prostitution rackets, and document forgery. Furthermore, specific criminal figures, such as Lalu Bihari, were named as central to these activities, running rackets and allegedly funneling funds to Bangladesh. These reports transformed the illegal construction site into a "den of crime" and a "no-go zone" that required forceful eradication.

This strategic dissemination of specific crime linkages served to preemptively justify both the overwhelming use of force and the zero-tolerance policy observed during

²⁵ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6TLot_gFkHk

the drive. By painting the entire settlement as a "criminal enclave," its clearance became framed not merely as a civic administrative task but as a necessary moral and national security victory. This framing minimizes any potential critique regarding the demolition as arbitrary or unjust targeting of a vulnerable community, turning the victims into perpetrators or accessories in the public eye.

Source Selection and Narrative Control

The efficacy of the securitization frame rested heavily on the selective reliance of mainstream media on specific, authoritative state voices. Media outlets that prioritized this narrative relied almost exclusively on official quotes from the AMC, the city police commissioner (G.S. Malik), and the Joint Commissioner of Police (Sharad Singhal). The heavy use of official nomenclature (Joint CP, SRP, Crime Branch) conferred an air of unquestioned legality and objectivity upon the security narrative, ensuring that the state's intended perception dominated the initial public consciousness. The event was framed as an appropriate state response to the Pahalgam attack, that could not be questioned.

Beautification and Environmental Reasons

The large-scale demolition drive at Chandola Lake also claimed to protect the lake's ecosystem and address long-standing issues of illegal settlements. Officials stated that prior notices were served, and the operation was carried out peacefully under heavy police presence. The move is part of an urban renewal and environmental conservation initiative, signalling a firm stance against unauthorized construction. Efforts are reportedly still underway to explore rehabilitation options for affected families, ensuring lawful development moving forward.

Immediate Crisis Responses

Several NGOs and relief organisations provided water and food to affected slum-dwellers in the immediate aftermath of the demolitions. The families evicted often stated that there were trucks of food and water bottles that would arrive at Chandola Lake and each person was given food, typically khichdi.

Activists and lawyers also worked hard to secure the release of detained Indian nationals.

Rahethan Adhikar Manch, a housing rights group, wrote to the AMC that some Chandola Lake residents have lived there for over 80 years. Many lost their homes in the 2002 riots and were given government camp cards. With Ahmedabad's temperatures reaching 43°C, they demanded urgent help, including clean water and temporary shelters for those evicted. Local officials in Bihar confirmed the identity of some detainees, leading to their release. Raising concerns on social media, Ritu Jaiswal, State President of the Women's Wing of the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) in Bihar, highlighted that several youths from Bihar were caught up in the operation (Patel, 2025).

Recommendations, Demands and Further Plan of Action

It has been almost a year since the Chandola Lake demolitions. By now, the residents of the Chandola Lake have largely been forgotten. They wait endlessly for the completion of the rehabilitation and resettlement process so that some of them can get houses for which they have to pay, in lieu of those that have been taken away from them.

Since then, there have been other major demolitions in the city. 925 residential structures on the banks of Isanpur Lake were demolished in November 2025 (ETV Bharat, 2025). More than 400 structures were demolished in the Bapunagar area in May 2025 (ETV Bharat, 2025). The AMC has not spared the middle class as well. In December 2025, notices were sent to residents of Snehanjali Society, Thaltej, over disputes in ownership (Desh Gujarat, 2025). In all of these instances, two words remain constant: “illegal” and “encroachments”.

These terms are often used by the government to mask the vast urban inequalities that exist between the living conditions of the rich and the poor. They not only demean the urban poor, who form the backbone of this city, but also delegitimize their claim to a city whose growth they actively contribute to.

The current regime seems to operate on a policy of “Demolition first, discussion later”. This is a far cry from the government that formulated pro-poor programmes such as the Slum Networking Programme in the 1990s. A city’s development cannot come at the cost of the urban poor.

Moreover, as has been seen in the numerous demolitions before and since the Chandola Lake demolitions, there is a lack of transparency in the processes: be it lack of notices or the lack of clarity about rehabilitation and resettlement. PUCL has the following recommendations and demands:

- **Immediate stop on demolitions:** The PUCL demands an immediate stop on demolitions of structures in Ahmedabad. These demolitions are arbitrary and have a huge human cost for thousands of residents.
- **Immediate rethinking of current urban planning policy:** The current urban planning policy seems to be that of demolishing any structure on public land or water body in the name of national security or environmental benefits. While national security, law and order and improvement of a city’s environmental resources are important, these cannot come at the cost of the lives of the urban poor, some of whom have been residing on these lands for more than four to five decades.

Developmental policies need to be made taking into account the needs of the urban poor and the vulnerable groups within the urban poor, namely the women and the children.

- **Delinking law and order and housing:** There are several problems with linking illegalities and housing, be it in terms of activities or property. There is no reason

to target family members, including children and older people who have nothing to do with the alleged crimes.

- **In case of properties which lie on public land, attempts should be made to regularize them.**
- **Demand for transparency and clarity in process:** There needs to be complete transparency in the land acquisition process, ensuring that all the residents get notices, adequate time is given to hear their grievances, and houses be provided before demolitions begin.
- **Priority to rehabilitation and resettlement:** It needs to be ensured that demolitions do not happen without due resettlement processes. The resettlement process should not impact the livelihoods and lives of the affected people.

Ahmedabad has recently been selected as the host city for Commonwealth Games, a matter of great pride for the city's residents. However, its development cannot come at the cost of the houses of the urban poor, who have played an important role in building this city.