

## India remembers Rajiv Gandhi on death anniversary

India paid homage to former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi on his 17th death anniversary Wednesday, observed as Anti-Terrorism Day with government employees taking a pledge to fight the scourge.

India's top political leadership gathered at Vir Bhumi, Gandhi's memorial here, to pay homage in a drizzle.

President Pratibha Patil, Vice President Hamid Ansari, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, Home Minister Shivraj Patil, Defence Minister A.K. Antony and Delhi Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit were among those who paid floral tributes and attended a prayer meeting.

The late leader's widow and Congress president Sonia Gandhi paid homage with her son and MP Rahul Gandhi and daughter Priyanka Vadra.

A speech Rajiv Gandhi delivered in 1985 was played at the end of the prayer meeting, which brought back memories of the popular leader.

In Chennai, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi administered an oath to legislators at the secretariat to combat terrorism. The chief minister also paid floral tributes to Gandhi.

Parliamentary Affairs and Overseas Indian Affairs Minister Vayalar Ravi and several state Congress leaders paid their respects to the departed leader at the memorial to him in Sriperumbudur, near Chennai, where he was felled by a suicide bomber on this day in 1991.

Tamil Nadu Congress president M. Krishnaswamy and party workers offered flowers at Rajiv Gandhi's statue at Satyamurthi Bhavan, the party's state headquarters in Chennai.

Governor Surjit Singh Barnala also offered rose petals to Rajiv Gandhi's portrait at Raj Bhavan in Chennai.

Congress leaders paid floral tributes in party offices in several states across the country.

In Madhya Pradesh, Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan paid tributes to Gandhi and administered oath to police officials to weed out terrorism.

Every year, May 21 is observed as Anti-Terrorism Day across the country.

Employees in government offices, state-run undertakings and other public institutions throughout the country took the pledge. Home Minister Patil administered the oath to the officers and staff of the home ministry on North Block lawns in New Delhi.

Seminars and debates were organised in educational institutions and elsewhere on the dangers of terrorism.

Gandhi, who was prime minister 1984-89, was killed when a woman suicide bomber from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) detonated a bomb attached to her at an election rally while

pretending to touch his feet. The LTTE denied killing Gandhi.

Seventeen people were also killed with Gandhi, who was then 46 years old, in the explosion and 44 others were injured.

A special court set up under the Terrorists and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act sentenced 26 accused, including five women, to death in the case.

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