

India: BJP seizes on Jaipur bombing to promote communalism and social reaction

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India's official opposition, the Hindu supremacist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), has seized on the recent terrorist atrocity in Jaipur, the capital of the northwestern Indian state of Rajasthan, to promote anti-Muslim and anti-Bangladeshi prejudice and to press for a further strengthening of the repressive powers of the state.

At least 63 people, Hindus and Muslims alike, were killed and 200 injured by a series of bomb blasts that occurred in quick succession in Jaipur on the evening of Tuesday, May 13. The attack, which reportedly consisted of seven separate explosions—an eighth bomb failed to go off—was planned to produce a massive loss of life. Bicycles laden with bombs were placed at locations where large numbers habitually congregate. One blast occurred near a Hindu temple dedicated to the Hindu god Hanuman, and Tuesday is the traditional day of worship to him.

The coordinated bombings are India's deadliest terrorist attack since the July 2006 bombing of Mumbai commuter trains, which killed almost 200 people.

Whoever carried out the bombings, it was a criminal attack on innocent civilians designed to whip up communal animosity in India and embitter relations between India and Pakistan, which are set to resume their comprehensive (peace) dialogue this month.

The BJP state government of Rajasthan along with sections of the police-intelligence establishment and the press were quick to blame, without offering any tangible proof, the attack on a Bangladeshi-based Islamicist militia, the Harkat-ul-Jihadi Islami.

BJP leaders and sections of the press have harped on a police claim that a bicycle shop owner, to whom the police traced several of the bikes used in the attack, said that a group of young Bengali-speaking men had purchased them. Bengali is the main language of both Bangladesh and the east Indian state of West Bengal.

Meanwhile, a little-known group that terms itself either the Indian Mujahedeen or Guru-al-Hindi has claimed responsibility for the Jaipur blast. It has sought to substantiate its claim by e-mailing video-clips that purport to

show one of the bicycles and a bag used in the bombing to two Delhi-based media organizations.

Rajasthan Chief Minister Vasundara Raje has expressed skepticism about the authenticity of the video-clips. But there are press reports that claim the police are now considering them genuine because the frame registration number of the bicycle in the video matches that on one of the mangled bicycle-bombs.

Raje, her government, and the national BJP are bent on using the alleged Bangladeshi connection to the Jaipur atrocity as a pretext for a foul communal campaign against Bangladeshi migrant workers. Without presenting any evidence, K.L. Charurvedia, the BJP's publicity chief in Rajasthan, declared the blasts were "the handiwork of Bangladesh immigrants living unlawfully in Jaipur as laborers."

Then last Friday Rajasthan's parliamentary affairs minister, Rajendra Rathod, told a press conference that the BJP state government is giving district collectors 30 days to compile comprehensive lists of Bangladeshis living "illegally" in the state, as a prelude to their deportation.

"District authorities," said Rathod, "have been issued orders to compile data on the Bangladeshis in their areas. They have also been directed to initiate the process for retrieval of ration cards of those who have managed to get them [and to] cancel their names from the voters list."

Police have launched house-to-house searches in neighborhoods with large concentrations of Bangladeshi migrants. Dozens have been taken into custody, but none has been charged, at least with anything connected to the Jaipur atrocity. Declared police spokesman Jeewan Bishnoi, "We must verify that every single person here is registered with us."

According to an Indian press report, eight Bangladeshi migrants were arrested last Friday in the city of Ajmer near a shrine to a famous Sufi (Muslim) saint "after they were found moving under suspicious circumstances." The report added that a police officer had said that "the eight had come from Dhaka eight years ago and were working as servants."

Understandably, the Bangladeshi migrants, who are poor and denied citizenship rights in India, are scared. Daulat Khan, a 60 year-old man who earns his living by picking up scraps and garbage, told reporters: “We are a poor community. We don’t have the funds to orchestrate this kind of thing or the time. . . . They hassle us just because we are Muslims. It’s very wrong.”

According to a BJP state government representative the number of Bangladeshis in Jaipur has grown substantially in recent years, rising from 2,500 in 2004 to more than 10,000 today.

The BJP has long complained about Bangladeshi migrants, claiming that there are as many as 20 million in India, and attacking the Congress Party, the dominant partner in India’s ruling coalition, for being “soft” on Bangladeshi migration because it wants to court the Muslim vote.

The figure of 20 million Bangladeshis in India is a gross, communally-inspired exaggeration. But undoubtedly millions have sought to escape poverty and communal and ethnic strife in Bangladesh by coming to India. The 1947 communal partition of the subcontinent carried out by India’s departing colonial overlords and the bourgeois Congress Party and Muslim League defied economic logic and the history of India, and has served only to perpetuate imperialist oppression and institutionalize communal conflict.

The BJP’s claim that Bangladeshis living in India are “foreigners” is a communal slur, based on the championing of the 1947 communal partition. But the entire Indian establishment endorses it. Citing concerns about terrorism, India’s government—with the enthusiastic support of the Left Front government of West Bengal—recently completed construction of a fence along the entire Indo-Bangladeshi border.

Whipping up anti-Bangladeshi prejudice and terrorizing Bangladeshi migrants is only one plank in the BJP’s response to the Jaipur atrocity.

In the wake of last week’s bombings, the BJP has amplified its denunciations of the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) central government for “failing” to fight “terrorism.”

“There is a complete failure of central intelligence and UPA policies in tackling terrorism,” said BJP spokesman Prakash Javadekar. “The UPA government failed to treat terrorism as a national menace.”

The BJP is now going to convene its national executive on May 31 in Jaipur, where, according to senior party leader M. Venkaiah Naidu, it will “discuss the menace of terrorism faced by the country and decide the future course of action.”

The BJP has never agreed to the UPA’s decision to rescind a draconian anti-terrorism law that the BJP-led

National Democratic Alliance government pushed through parliament in the wake of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the US and the December 2001 attack on the Indian parliament buildings.

The Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA) granted sweeping powers to the military and police to detain “terrorist suspects” for 30 days without producing them in courts, and for 90 days without formal charges.

Due to public opposition, the UPA government, which came to power in May 2004, was forced to replace it in September 2004 with another law, which retained many of the repressive and arbitrary powers of POTA, thus making its repeal largely cosmetic.

But the BJP has repeatedly demanded the restoration of POTA and clearly hopes to use the issue in next year’s general election as part of a double-pronged reactionary attack in which the Congress will be assailed for “coddling” Muslims and being soft on terrorism.

Demanding the UPA government revive POTA, BJP prime ministerial candidate L.K. Advani said: “It’s not about an anti-terror law alone. It reflects the attitude of the government and the people... It is about the ability of the state to pre-empt such strikes.”

The initial response of the UPA government of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to the Jaipur bombing was cautious. Singh made a statement condemning the attacks and asking the people to stay “calm” without blaming anyone.

Pointing the suspicious finger was left to the junior Home Minister Shriprakash Jaiswal, who declared, “the people responsible for these attacks have foreign connections.” But not only did Jaiswal fail to provide any evidence, he refused to specify what country he was referring to when he used the term “foreign.” When asked specifically at a news conference, Jaiswal said it could be any of the neighboring countries—Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal and Myanmar—that had been gripped by internal turmoil.

On May 18, further adapting to BJP’s barrage against his government, Prime Minister Singh called for the creation of a federal agency—an Indian FBI—to deal with “terrorist” crimes. On the same day, India’s chief justice K.G. Balakrishnan, addressing a seminar in New Delhi, demanded special new anti-terror laws.



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