Indian minister condemned for urging probe into killing of police chief during Mumbai

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A call by India's minister for minority affairs, Abdul Rahman Antulay, for an investigation into the killing of the chief of the Maharashtra-state Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) during last month's three-day terrorist attack on Mumbai has sparked a political furor. The Hindu-supremacist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), its right-wing allies, and many within the leadership of the Congress Party, the dominant partner in India's coalition government, are pressing for Antulay's resignation.

Hemant Karkare, the head of the Maharashtra ATS, and five other police personnel, including two other senior officers, were killed just a few hours after the attack on Mumbai commenced on November 26.

In the weeks prior to his killing, Karkare had been leading a high-profile investigation into a Hindu-supremacist terrorist network that had mounted bomb attacks with the aim of killing Muslims and stoking communal strife. Karkare had ordered the arrests of 11 Hindu extremists who police allege were responsible for a serial bomb attack in Malegaon (Maharathtra) and Madosa (Gujarat) on September 29. They may also have been the authors of other bombing attacks, including the Samjhuata train bombing, which killed 68 people in 2006.

The leaders of the Hindu terror network are persons with close ties to the "official" Hindu-supremacist right—the official opposition BJP, the RSS, and the VHP—and include both serving and retired Indian military officers. (See: India: Hindu supremacist terror network had ties to military.)

The BJP and its allies had bitterly denounced the investigation into the Hindu terrorist network. Karkare was accused of mounting an "anti-Hindu" witch hunt. Top BJP leaders, including party president RajnathSingh and the BJP prime ministerial candidate, L.K. Advani, publicly questioned Karkare's integrity and even called for the dismissal of his investigative team.

Almost a month after Karkare's death, the circumstances under which he died remain unclear and, as Antulay's remarks reveal, highly contentious.

The corporate press has given at least two different versions of the circumstances surrounding his death, raising serious questions as to how he was killed.

What is notable is that Karkare was reportedly ambushed at Mumbai's Cama hospital, a site far from the main centres of attack, the Taj Mahal and Oberoi-Trident hotels. Some reports have suggested he went to the hospital from the Chhatrapati Shivaji railway station (site of many of the fatalities) to visit a wounded colleague at the hospital.

But the hospital had itself come under attack, and why would Karkare be rushing to the bedside of a wounded colleague, rather than marshalling his forces to suppress the commando-style attack in the center of Mumbai?

Karkare's death is only one of a whole series of unanswered questions concerning the Mumbai attack. In the coming days, the *World Socialist Web Site* will return to some of these questions, including why Indian authorities were unable to thwart the attack despite repeated warnings from domestic and international sources that Mumbai was being targeted.

From what has come to light so far, one can only conclude that there was either a massive and total security breakdown—as India's Home Minister Chidambaram has himself said—or that elements within Indian's security establishment deliberately "stood down" for ulterior political motives.

In a series of media interviews last week, Antulay, who is a long-standing and senior member of the Congress Party,

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raised important questions regarding Karkare's death and in particular why he went to the Cama hospital.

He told the *Indian Express*: "Somebody who knew both the ends sent him [Karkare] in the wrong direction otherwise why should he have gone to Cama hospital?

"He should have gone to Taj, Oberoi or Nariman House. He went to such a place where there was nothing compared to what was happening in these three places. He went to the Cama hospital on the basis of a phone call. Who is that person who made the phone call? This should be probed."

Antulay continued: "Karkare found that there are non-Muslims involved in acts of terrorism…. Any person going to the roots of terror has always been the target.… Superficially speaking, they [the terrorists] had no reason to kill Karkare. Whether he [Karkare] was a victim of terrorism or terrorism plus something, I do not know."

Antulay's suggestion that Karkare was potentially a victim of "terrorism plus something"—i.e., that forces opposed to his exposure of the Hindu terror network might have exploited the chaos surrounding the Mumbai terrorist attack to assassinate him—provoked an immediate and visceral retort from the BJP, the Shiv Sena, and their right-wing allies. They accused Antulay of undermining India's campaign against Pakistan, which New Delhi has charged is responsible for allowing terrorists to use its soil, and demanded he immediately resign and, failing that, that he be fired.

The Congress Party leadership did quickly disassociate itself from Karkare's remarks. "We don't accept the inference and the innuendo that underline the statement [of Antulay]," declared a Congress spokesman. "We don't agree with bringing this case [Karkare's killing] under a cloud."

Antulay, while refusing to retract his remarks, has reportedly offered to resign. His resignation, at least as of yet, has not been accepted.

Speaking on the weekend, Congress Party General Secretary Digvijay Singh noted that Antulay has merely insisted that Karkare's murder be properly investigated. "Antulay has been misreported," said Singh. "What he has asked for is a probe which is already on. What is objectionable in his statement?"

Indeed, to any objective observer, Antulay's questions and his call for a probe into the death of Karkare are entirely legitimate.

What then explains the vitriolic response of the BJP and a section of the Congress leadership to Antulay's call for a probe into the death of Karkare—who, to reiterate, was killed in unexplained circumstances and whilst leading a politically explosive investigation into Hindu terrorism?

First, Antulay's remarks cut across the attempts of the entire Indian political establishment to exploit the Mumbai atrocity: to ratchet up pressure on India's historic rival Pakistan and, in particular, to demand it halt all political and logistical support for the anti-Indian insurgency in Jammu and Kashmir; and, secondly, to push through a draconian new anti-terrorism law that overturns fundamental democratic judicial principles and contains a definition of terrorism so sweeping that it could easily be invoked against working class opposition, in addition to numerous ethnic-separatist organisations.

Second, Antulay's remarks uncomfortably reopen the explosive issue of Hindu-extremist terrorism, including the extent to which India's military and security establishments have themselves become communalised.

Regardless of who killed Karkare, it is incontrovertible that the entire Indian establishment was complicit in using the Mumbai atrocity to effectively push the question of the Hindu terrorist network off the public agenda.

From the outset, the Hindu-supremacist right opposed and feared the exposure of the Hindu terrorist network. As for the Congress Party, and the Indian elite more generally, it viewed the Hindu terrorist investigation as an obstacle to their attempt to exploit the Mumbai attack to shift India's foreign and domestic policy far to the right.

In the name of "national unity" against "foreign" terror, the Congress leadership quickly made common cause with the BJP, blithely ignoring not only the BJP's apologetics for the Hindu terrorists in the weeks preceding the Mumbai attack, but, even more fundamentally, the Hindu right's decades-long record of inciting violence, including outright pogroms, against Muslims and other religious minorities

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