

India: Multiple bomb blasts at rally for BJP's Modi kill five

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28 October 2013

Five people were killed and more than 80 injured Sunday when a series of six low-intensity bombs exploded at a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) election rally in Patna, the capital of the eastern Indian state of Bihar.

India's Official Opposition, the Hindu supremacist BJP called Sunday's rally to "showcase" the party's candidate in next spring's national parliamentary elections—Narendra Modi, the Chief Minister of Gujarat.

A self-styled Hindu "strongman", Modi instigated the 2002 Gujarat anti-Muslim pogrom, in which well over a thousand Muslims were killed. With the support of powerful sections of Indian big business, he is campaigning for office on the pledge to spread Gujarat-style "development" across India. By providing massive tax and other concessions to big businesses, effectively outlawing strikes, and starving social and public services of government support, Modi has made Gujarat a magnet for domestic and international investment.

All of the blasts occurred on the periphery of the rally site, Patna's Gandhi Maidan (field), far removed from the stage from which Modi and other BJP leaders addressed the crowd.

A couple of hours before the mid-day rally began, a separate bomb blast occurred in a lavatory at the city's railway station seriously injuring one person. This earlier blast coincided with the arrival of thousands of persons who were being brought in by the BJP on specially organized trains to attend Sunday's rally.

According to police three people have been arrested and one has already "confessed" to planting the bombs. Bihar police, like all police forces in India, routinely use torture to extract confessions.

No group or organization has claimed responsibility

for Sunday's bomb blasts.

Whoever was the perpetrator, such terrorist acts can only serve the state and reaction. In India, as around the world, the ruling class has since the beginning of the century systematically exploited terrorist acts, many of them resulting from unexplained security lapses, to justify sweeping attacks on civil liberties and a vast expansion of security forces.

Despite the deaths and injuries from the various bomb blasts, the BJP campaign rally proceeded with Modi addressing a crowd that numbered in the hundreds of thousands.

India's Congress Party-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government immediately dispatched a team from the National Investigation Agency (NIA)—a new security agency created after the November 2008 Mumbai terrorist attack—to Bihar. A second team, comprised of explosives experts, was also sent to Patna to assist the investigation.

Nitish Kumar, the state's Chief Minister and a bitter rival of Modi, put off a trip to attend the national convention of the party he heads, the Janata Dal (United) or JD (U), so as to participate in an "emergency" meeting with security officials.

Kumar announced paltry compensation of 500,000 Rupees (about \$8,000) to the families of those killed and promised financial assistance to the injured.

In June this year, the JD (U) severed its 17-year-long political alliance with the BJP after the Hindu-supremacist party signaled its intention to name Modi as its prime ministerial candidate, thereby making him the de facto candidate of the BJP-led electoral bloc, the National Democratic Alliance or NDA.

Kumar harbors his own prime ministerial ambitions, but he also opposed Modi's candidacy for fear that it would alienate Bihar's large Muslim minority.

Since their falling out last June, relations between the JD (U) and the BJP have become particularly bitter and combative with each taking every opportunity to attack the other.

Hence, it was not surprising that Kumar and his government were immediately attacked by the BJP following Sunday's bomb blasts for providing lax security. "The Bihar Government," said a BJP spokesperson, "has failed completely, in providing a comprehensive security cover for the chief minister of Gujarat and the people who came for the rally."

Nitish Kumar brushed aside the BJP's claims, saying there was no prior warning of any attack either from the state's security agencies or from the central government. He told a press briefing, "There were no intelligence inputs either from the Centre or from the state. Whatever was possible to do for this kind of a program, the administration had done. Security was tightened keeping in mind the BJP rally. Senior police officials had personally monitored the security arrangements at Gandhi Maidan."

JD (U) leader Sabir Ali, for his part, noted that the bomb blasts helped the BJP. "We condemn the blasts and will not spare anyone behind the incidents. But who has benefited from the incident, who has benefited from its timing? ... The circumstances are speaking a lot of things."

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Congress President Sonia Gandhi, as would be expected, issued statements strongly condemning Sunday's bombings. Singh personally called Nitish Kumar to urge him to expedite the investigation and punish the guilty. Gandhi released a statement condemning the act as subversive of "our democracy" and extending her condolences to the killed and injured.

As these statements were being issued by the Congress Party's two most senior leaders, Congress General Secretary Digvijay Singh "tweeted" that the serial bomb blasts were "a perfect setting for Modi's launch in Bihar!" He urged Chief Minister Kumar to find the conspirators since otherwise Modi and the BJP will be the chief beneficiaries.

The BJP has a decades-long intimate partnership with a network of Hindu supremacist groups, mostly importantly the shadowy RSS, that have frequently instigated violence and developed ties with sections of retired and active military and security personnel.

The Patna rally was a major BJP event—the largest campaign rally for Modi to date. The BJP was anxious to put on a major show in Bihar, so as to challenge Nitish Kumar and his JD (U). Modi, who hails from a lower caste background, hopes to undercut the influence of the JD (U), a regionalist and caste-ist bourgeois party that postures as the spokesmen for what is known under India's reactionary state-backed system of caste designation as "Other Backward Classes."

In his speech at Sunday's rally, Modi did not accuse the Congress of "appeasing" Muslim or otherwise employ his habitual anti-Muslim rhetoric. Rather he sought to appeal to mass anger over rising prices and poverty, declaring that poverty is the primary problem of Hindus and Muslim alike. This posturing is in keeping with his efforts to rally big business by promising to make their demands for economic "reform"—privatization, the gutting of restrictions on layoffs and factory closures, and the balancing of the budget through massive social spending cuts—his foremost priority. One, moreover, that he will implement using his traditional "no nonsense," autocratic methods.

Large sections of corporate India are embracing Modi precisely because of his readiness to run roughshod over parliamentary and democratic norms. The *Economic Times*, one of India's leading business papers, recently ran an op-ed comment titled, "India needs Narendra Modi's iron fist for delivery and deliverance from UPA II." It read in part, "If Modi" came to power and imposed "on us a kind of benign dictatorship temporarily and awarded himself plenipotentiary powers, if only for an interim period—to state he means business in reforming the malaise—and ... it's not misused for vengeance or megalomania, so be it!"



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