

# Motive unclear after arrest in killing of imam and assistant in New York

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18 August 2016

The New York City police announced late Monday that they had arrested and charged a Brooklyn man with second-degree murder (upgraded the next day to first-degree murder charges) in connection with the execution-style killings of an imam and his assistant in broad daylight near their mosque in Queens. The community of Bangladeshi immigrants in the Ozone Park area was plunged into mourning, and Muslims throughout the city of 8.5 million expressed alarm over the hostility being stoked by the endless war on terror, and the growing attacks on refugees and immigrants.

The victims, 55-year-old imam Alauddin Akonjee and his 64-year-old assistant, Thara Miah, were followed and shot in the back of the head at close range, as shown in video footage from nearby cameras. No words were exchanged and the victims never saw the shooter. The killings took place about 1:50 pm on Saturday, soon after they had left their nearby mosque. The imam, who came to the US in 2011, was among many Bangladeshi immigrants who have settled in the Ozone Park area.

As reported in local news sources, the police department said that the surveillance cameras showed the killer get into a Chevrolet sport utility vehicle and drive away. This same vehicle was involved in an incident at an intersection only a mile away, in the East New York neighborhood of Brooklyn. The car was tracked to the nearby apartment of Oscar Morel, 35. Morel was arrested on Sunday night, after first trying to escape by ramming the car of the detectives who had staked out his home.

A police search of Morel's home turned up a revolver and clothes that matched the video footage of the Saturday shooting, leading to the murder charges. The gun had been hidden inside a wall in the apartment. The suspect, who works as a janitor at The New School in

Manhattan, has no criminal record other than a misdemeanor charge for marijuana possession.

Funeral prayers for both murder victims were held on Monday, with many mourners expressing concern and worry over their own safety. According to a report in the *New York Times*, some held signs stating, "We Are Muslims, Not Terrorists," "We Want Peace," "We Want Justice," and "Muslim Lives Matter."

Several days after the arrest of Morel, police said they still had no motive in the shootings. Morel, of Hispanic background, has admitted he is in the video, but denies his guilt in the murders. According to the *New York Post*, the police were considering that Morel had been hired to carry out the killings.

The targeting of men in religious garb and the ruthlessness of the attack pointed to some planning. The shooter may have been suffering from mental illness, although Morel's family denied any signs of such problems.

"We want to know as victims why he killed my father," the oldest of the imam's seven children told the *Times*. "What was his motive behind killing my father? Whether he was hired or appointed by someone else to kill my father or did he himself plan and kill my father?"

Whatever the details in the case, it cannot be separated from the Islamophobia being whipped up, not only in the US but elsewhere as well, at least for the past 15 years, since the events of September 11, 2001. As one Muslim immigrant told the *Times*, "I don't feel safe anymore. All of this hatred being propagated, especially by Donald Trump, it puts us at risk. People sometimes pass me on the street and call me bin Laden. I just try to keep my head down and keep walking."

While Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump is in the forefront of this campaign, with his

calls for mass deportations and the building of a wall between the US and Mexico coupled with his increasingly bellicose pronouncements on the Middle East, responsibility is a bipartisan affair.

New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio spoke at the funeral prayers for the two murdered men, promising protection for the immigrant community. The Obama administration, however, has carried out a record number of deportations while waging endless war.

Beneath the hypocritical official veneer of multiculturalism, the ruling elite has worked, especially through the Democratic Party and in response to the growing anger and dissatisfaction throughout the working class, to divide the population along ethnic as well as racial and religious lines. The nonstop depiction of all issues within the prism of race and ethnicity encourages division, the scapegoating of minorities and the pitting of one section of workers against another, in the context of the daily struggle facing the vast majority of working people.



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