

One dead, two injured in anti-immigrant shooting in Kansas

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A shooting in an Olathe, Kansas bar on Wednesday night killed one man and left two others injured. According to witnesses, the shooter harassed two Indian men with racial slurs, shouting, “Get out of my country!” before killing 32-year-old Srinivas Kuchibhotla and injuring 32-year-old Alok Madasani. Also injured was 24-year-old Ian Grillot, who had attempted to intervene in defense of the two men.

Adam Purinton, a 51 year old Navy veteran, was arrested and charged with first degree murder in the case. Witnesses say he fled the bar on foot as police arrived. A bartender in Clinton, Missouri reported that Purinton told him that he had killed two Middle Eastern men.

The FBI is investigating whether the shooting was racially motivated. The FBI found that hate crimes escalated sharply in 2016. According to other sources, including the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), they have spiked even more since Trump was elected, with crimes against immigrants outnumbering other bias-motivated crimes.

Madasani and Kuchibhotla worked together at Garmin as engineers; both had emigrated over ten years ago from India. Kuchibhotla’s wife, Damala, told reporters that she had feared that such a thing would occur, and that she had asked her husband many times in the year prior to his murder to consider leaving the United States.

The shooting has not taken place in isolation. Hours after Trump issued an Executive Order banning travelers from seven Muslim-majority countries, a mosque in Victoria, Texas was torched.

On February 18, a Birmingham, Alabama mosque received an email declaring that “Muslims, Mexicans, and Blacks” would be driven out of the country, or else hunted down and killed. Ashfaq Taufique, the President

of the Birmingham Islamic Society (BIS), told the WSWS that, while the mosque has received hateful emails in the past, this one stood out for the explicitness of the threats.

“Plan to run or die,” the email said, “This is a kindness that we give you warning, take it and go.” Taufique says that, while the community has received messages of hate against Islam in the past, “This one contained words like “die,” “death,” so it’s a little more alarming.” The BIS notified the FBI, the Department of Justice, and the local police of the threat. Mosques in Huntsville, Alabama and Atlanta, Georgia received similar threats on the same day.

Taufique said that many members of the BIS have had individual encounters with anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant bias. He recounted how, earlier this year, a local high school girl, who was waiting for her mother after school was dismissed, heard a young man shout, “Be careful, they have bombs!” The girl confronted the young man and requested that he be made to do community service at the BIS in lieu of detention.

In a separate incident, a young Muslim woman reported that while walking to class at the University of Alabama in Birmingham she was stopped by a driver as she attempted to cross the street and asked if she was carrying a bomb along with her books. Taufique pointed out the almost casual nature of such confrontations; to him it bespeaks that a segment of the population is much more comfortable with harassing Muslims.

“Recently we have seen a lot of people reporting hate incidents,” Khaula Hadeed, Executive Director of Council for American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) of Alabama told the WSWS. She says that while these incidents occurred more frequently over the past year, since Trump’s travel ban, “there has been a steady

incoming of hate incidents.” Hadeed remarks that there is “unrest in this society, in our communities, that wasn’t there before.”

Like Taufique, she reported incidents where Muslim women—distinguished by their hijabs, or headscarves—have been singled out in public places and told to “go home” or “leave the country.” These incidents, along with the travel ban, have made the Muslim community apprehensive. She felt that there were many more incidents that people do not report. She said that most of the time, people do not report xenophobic encounters because they fear retaliation or increased hostility in their neighborhoods or workplaces.

“My assessment is that it has steadily grown and it does not seem to be going down,” Hadeed said of anti-Muslim and attacks.

Other sources bear her assessment out. The SPLC reported over 1000 different hate-related crimes, most of them targeting Muslims and immigrants, in the month following Trump’s election. Mosques throughout the United States have been the target of threatening emails and phone calls. On Friday, February 24, two days after Adam Purinton killed Srinivas Kuchibhotla, a Tampa mosque was set afire by arsonists.

Sean Spicer, the White House spokesperson, has stated that it was “too early” to assign a reason to the Olathe shooting, and that it was “absurd” to link it to Trump’s position on immigration. Trump is well known for tweeting emphatically after terror attacks, both real and imagined; yet in this incident, which, by all accounts was driven by anti-Arab, anti-immigrant bias, he has said nothing.

The SPLC reports that, alongside the increases in anti-Muslim, anti-immigrant attacks, there has been a proportional uptick in membership in white nationalist movements.

Trump has surrounded himself with high-profile figures linked to white nationalists. Steve Bannon, former editor of alt-right rag Breitbart, not only acts as Trump’s chief strategist, but sits on the National Security Council as well. Michael Anton, director of strategic communications for the National Security Council, has written, behind the safety of a pseudonym, reactionary, anti-immigrant screeds in which he portrays Trump as the last hope for “traditional”

American values and “my people,” shorthand for white Americans.

“Trump’s executive order was for 7 countries,” said CAIR’s Hadeed, “but it affects the entire Muslim community.” She mentioned that there have been other instances like the Olathe shooting, in which non-Muslims have been targeted by Islamophobes.

Trump’s policy, Hadeed said, “somehow is translated that if you are perceived to be a Muslim, if your skin color is brown, you are told you don’t belong. We think it has a direct correlation between our national policies that are anti-Muslim.” These policies, Hadeed said, are “dehumanizing and demonizing a section in our society.” On its face, it appears that the shooting in Olathe amounts to more evidence of this dehumanization.



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