

Popular outcry against murder of Indian immigrant in US

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1 March 2017

There is growing popular anger in both India and America at last week's murder of an Indian immigrant in Olathe, Kansas and at US President Donald Trump's failure to condemn the xenophobic attack.

Srinivas Kuchibhotla, a 32-year-old software engineer, was shot dead and fellow Indian immigrant Alok Madasani wounded by a man who had hurled racial slurs at them, was asked to leave Austins Bar and Grill, then returned with a shotgun. Before opening fire, the shooter shouted, "Get out of my country!" and "Terrorist!" Also, injured in the attack was Ian Grillot, who tried to tackle the gunman.

Adam Purinton, a 51-year-old US Navy veteran, has been charged with one count of premeditated murder and two counts of attempted murder in the February 22 shooting.

Witnesses to the crime suggest that Purinton believed the men were Muslims and from Iran. Madasani, who worked with Kuchibhotla at the GPS manufacturer Garmin, told the *New York Times*, the shooter had asked them "what visa are we currently on and whether we are staying here illegally."

Last week's tragic events took place against the background of the virulent anti-immigrant campaign launched by Trump and his administration. This includes an executive order targeting immigrants and travelers from Iran and six other mainly Muslim countries, a vast expansion of the arbitrary powers of Immigration police to arrest and deport immigrants, a wave of raids targeting undocumented workers and their families, and preparations for mass deportations and internment camps.

The Trump administration has baldly denied any connection between its anti-immigrant witch hunt, the stoking of anti-Muslim and anti-Mexican sentiment and a sharp spike in hate crimes.

Speaking last week, White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer curtly dismissed a reporter's suggestion that the

"rhetoric" of Trump and his administration could have "contributed in any way" to the Kansas shooting and other violent attacks targeting Muslims, Jews, and immigrants. "To suggest there's any correlation," Spicer claimed, "...is a bit absurd."

But working people in both India and the US are increasingly drawing the connection, as well as noting Trump's conspicuous silence on the Kansas killing.

No less politically revealing is the failure of Trump's Indian counterpart, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, to condemn Kuchibhotla's murder.

Modi has frequently boasted of his close ties to the growing Indian immigrant population in America and casts himself as the fiercest opponent of "terrorism." Yet he has said nothing about the lethal attack targeting Indian immigrants in Olathe. India's Prime Minister has been similarly silent on Trump's discriminatory travel ban targeting Muslim countries, although India is home to some 175 million Muslims, making it the third-largest Muslim country in the world.

Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is notorious for its anti-Muslim Hindu chauvinism. However, the principal reason for Modi's silence on both Trump's Muslim ban and the Olathe attack is his determination not to do anything that might embarrass or antagonize the Trump administration. Under Modi, and with Indian big business's enthusiastic support, New Delhi has dramatically expanded its military-security partnership with Washington. In the hopes of boosting their own great-power ambitions, the Indian ruling elite is recklessly transforming India into a "frontline" state in Washington's military-strategic offensive against China. Last month, the Pentagon revealed that India is to become a service and repair hub for the US Seventh Fleet, the arm of the US Navy charged with spearheading military action against China.

Popular anger over the horrific events in Olathe and the

Trump administration's whipping up of animosity toward immigrants is, nevertheless, proving to be a political problem for India's government. As the outcry grew in India, Pratik Mathur, the press secretary at the Indian embassy in Washington, issued a statement expressing deep concern at Kuchibhotla's killing and calling on US authorities to conduct a "speedy investigation."

Yesterday, the Indian government hastened to deny media reports that New Delhi had issued a diplomatic demarche to the US over the lethal attack in Olathe. Indian External Affairs spokesperson Gopal Baglay claimed prompt action by US authorities had "obviated" the need for such action. "It is important to note," asserted Baglay, "that the US authorities are engaged with us on the larger concern regarding safety of Indians in the US, a matter which continues to receive the government's top priority."

In reality, the Trump administration fully intends to press forward with its anti-immigrant witch hunt, both so as to make immigrants scapegoats for the mass unemployment, falling living standards, and social deprivation produced by capitalism and to justify the buildup of the repressive apparatus of the state.

Indian immigrant workers are certain to be among the primary victims of the Trump administration's plans to dramatically curtail the H1B Visa program, under which US employers can temporarily employ high-skilled foreign workers.

The Indian government's indifference to Kuchibhotla's fate and eagerness to work with the Trump administration stands in marked contrast to the sentiments of working people in India and America. In both countries, there has been an outpouring of anger, much of it directed against Trump, and support for the victims and their families.

As of Monday, more than 8,000 people had contributed \$1.25 million to a GoFundMe campaign, launched by a former coworker of Kuchibhotla, to raise funds for the victims of the Olathe shooting. According to the *Kansas City Star*, hundreds participated in a peace march there Sunday to protest the anti-immigrant attack.

Protest rallies were also held in Andhra Pradesh, the southern Indian state where Kuchibhotla grew up and his family lives. His funeral, which was held in Hyderabad yesterday, was in part a political protest, with many of the participants chanting or holding up "Down with Trump" and "Down with Racism" signs.

Unlike the Modi government, some sections of the Indian press have pointed to the connection between the shooting in Olathe and the Trump administration's anti-

immigrant witch hunt. A February 27 *Indian Express* editorial, titled "The Cost of Hate," said, "President Donald Trump and his political allies, who fanned the red-hot coals of white nationalist tendencies in the United States through the course of their election campaign, must answer questions raised by [Kuchibhotla's] murder." The *Hindu* said the Olathe shooting "cannot but shine a spotlight on President Donald Trump's anti-immigrant actions," then rebuked Trump for failing to condemn it. A *Times of India* editorial, "Shot in Kansas: A Hyderabad engineer falls victim to festering socio-economic turmoil in America," noted that "Indians were blamed for 'stealing' jobs from Americans during the Obama administration as well."

The Indian media's comments are indicative of their concerns that the ultra-rightwing agenda of the Trump administration will incite popular opposition to the Indo-US military-strategic alliance and disrupt the operations of India's IT firms, whose US operations are India's largest source of export income.

India's principal Stalinist party, the Communist Party of India (Marxist), has issued a statement urging Modi to "take up" Kuchibhotla's killing with the Trump administration and "seek an assurance that such incidents will not recur." As the CPM has long been an integral part of the Indian bourgeois establishment, it is not surprising that it neither appeals for Indian and American workers to unite in the fight against the Trump administration and its fascistic policies, nor exposes why Modi, in pursuit of the Indian bourgeoisie's reactionary alliance with US imperialism, has remained conspicuously silent about a murderous, xenophobic attack on Indian immigrants.



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