

Indian government backs mob lynchings targeting Muslims and minorities

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The Indian media is full of horrifying reports of lynch gang murders. According to police and government officials, at least eight people were killed by mobs across India in less than a week. *India Today* said 16 lynchings have been reported since May 10, resulting in the deaths of 22 people.

The victims were allegedly connected to child kidnapping, thievery, sexual harassment of women, or cow smuggling or slaughter. News items said the attacks were provoked by rumours spread via social media—Whatsapp in particular. In most cases, the victims were beaten or stabbed to death and sometimes their bodies were hung by mobs. At times the victims survived severe injuries, but were left unattended.

The majority of the victims have been Muslims or members of minority ethnic groups. An *India Spend* investigative article revealed that 86 percent of those killed in cow-related lynching were Muslims, and 8 percent low-caste Dalits. A recent outbreak of mob killings on rumours of child kidnapping targeted “strangers”—migrant workers and mentally disturbed people.

These attacks have created fear and intimidation among the targeted communities. Videos have been posted on social media, many by the attackers themselves, to arouse hatred against the victims.

Despite large sections of the public facing life-threatening conditions, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Bharatiya Janatha Party (BJP) have kept almost total silence, just as they have done in past when the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS) and the BJP’s other Hindu supremacists allies have whipped up communal violence under the pretext of preventing cow slaughter.

While Modi has occasionally issued brief statements, claiming that horrific killings were “isolated or

spontaneous” incidents, his senior ministers and parliamentary representatives have frequently openly defended the attackers, accusing the victims of provoking the attacks.

Far from these gruesome attacks being “spontaneous,” they are the result of provocations by Hindu extremist groups, backed by the BJP government. The government came to power in 2014, promoting Hindu chauvinism and right-wing groups. Their role is to aggressively suppress Muslims and other minorities on the pretext of “protecting Hindu values.”

Organisations like “Gau Raksha Dal,” which was formed to protect cows, a Hindu sacred symbol, provoked gangs to launch attacks on Muslim beef sellers and cattle traders last year. Modi who was forced to make a statement after 20 people were murdered, merely said: “Killing people in the name of Gau Bhakti (cow worship) is not acceptable.”

Last year, the *Hindustan Times* reported that 97 percent of the cow-related violence from 2010 to 2017 was reported after Modi’s government took office and 86 percent of the victims were Muslims.

These attacks are not isolated, but the result of systematic incitement by the government-backed communal groups, which use social media to spread communal hysteria.

The government has backed the murders by honouring convicted killers, especially when the victims are Muslims. Civil Aviation Minister Jayant Sinha garlanded eight men convicted for lynching Alimuddin Ansari, a Muslim beef trader, last year.

Last week, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Minister Giriraj Singh met jailed leaders of Vishwa Hindu Parishad and Bajrang Dal, two Hindu extremist organisations, who were convicted of communal

violence last year. The minister claimed: “These leaders and functionaries have been arrested and jailed on the basis of false allegations. This is a very unfortunate situation.”

Although the police have made a few arrests, the police commonly give the mobs enough time to unleash their attacks, confident of protection by the BJP government.

In one typical incident on May 9, Rukmini, a 65-year-old woman, was killed by a mob of 200 in Athimoor village, Tamil Nadu. Police squads took 30 minutes to arrive from the police station that was just three kilometres away.

In another case, the police arrested two youth, Sanjay Sobor and his colleague, who belonged to a minor tribal community and worked as migrant labourers in Arunachal Pradesh. When the news of their arrest spread, a mob barged into the police station, dragged the prisoners to the main road and lynched them in the presence of police. The mob then disappeared without anyone being apprehended by the police.

The police invariably label those who are killed as cow thieves or cow smugglers, abductors of children or other criminals, echoing government representatives, even when the allegations against the victims have not been proved.

Numerous protests have erupted in major cities against this violence. Demonstrators have carried placards with slogans like “protests against holy mob lynching!” and “Not the Hindus vs. Muslims but the Brahmin (high caste Hindus) against the Indian minorities!”

Last week the Delhi Supreme Court recommended that parliament create a new penal provision to punish the offenders, but the media reported a senior BJP member stating: “There is already a law and no such requirement for a separate law.”

The government and its allies have sought to turn the popular outcry against the lynchings back on the Congress Party, which formed the previous government. Home Minister Rajnath Singh told parliament: “It’s not that lynching hasn’t happened in the past.” He recalled the 1984 mob killings of Sikhs after Congress Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards.

While justifying the brutal attacks on minorities, Modi’s BJP government is strengthening an oppressive

state machine against the working people as a whole. Communalism is being heightened and lynch mobs set in motion to divide and intimidate the working class.



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