

Modi government shields instigators of Delhi anti-Muslim violence

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The response of India's Narendra Modi-led Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government to the Hindu communalist violence that convulsed much of northeast Delhi for three days late last month (February 24-26) underscores its fascistic and criminal character.

At least 53 people were killed and some 300 injured in what was the worst outbreak of communal violence in India's capital and largest city in almost four decades.

The Delhi violence was the outcome of a campaign of incitement led by Modi and his chief henchman, Home Minister Amit Shah, against opponents of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA)—a discriminatory anti-Muslim law the BJP pushed through parliament last December and the latest in a series of provocative government actions aimed at asserting that India is a Hindu *Rashtra* or Hindu state.

Faced with mounting social opposition amid a deepening economic crisis, Modi and his BJP are stoking Hindu communalism with the aim of mobilizing their right-wing base and confusing and dividing the working class.

They were pushed on to the back-foot by the sudden eruption of mass opposition to the CAA across India last December. Delhi is a centre of the opposition movement which has united students, workers and professionals across religious, ethnic and caste lines.

In response the BJP unleashed lethal state violence—more than 20 people were killed in Uttar Pradesh in December—and mounted a counter-campaign that depicts the anti-CAA agitation as “violent,” “anti-national” and even treasonous.

The anti-Muslim violence that erupted in northeast Delhi was triggered by a speech from BJP leader Kapil Mishra threatening violence against anti-CAA protesters. Subsequently Hindu communalist mobs took the offensive, attacking Muslims and torching and looting Muslim homes and businesses. Meanwhile, the police, in the region of India where there is the densest concentration of security forces outside of disputed Jammu and Kashmir, conspicuously stood down.

With their culpability so evident, Modi and the BJP have

taken refuge in the Big Lie. In a speech to parliament yesterday, Home Minister Shah regurgitated the BJP's claims, charging that the opposition parties were responsible for the violence because they had criticized the CAA and been compelled to associate with the mass anti-CAA movement, and that the violence in northeast Delhi was the outcome of an opposition “conspiracy.”

He also lavished praise on the police, commanding them for “controlling the Delhi riots within 36 hours.”

The Delhi police, which is under the direct control of the BJP-led central government's Home Ministry, stood by while Hindu communalist thugs mounted brutal attacks on Muslims, and in some cases even joined in the violence.

Harjit Singh Bhatti, the ex-president of the Resident Doctors' Association of the prestigious All India Institute of Medical Sciences and part of the first team of volunteer doctors to reach riot-hit northeast Delhi, explained to the *Hindu* how police deliberately obstructed their efforts to tend to the wounded.

Speaking about a patient with a deep gunshot wound in the stomach who was carried in an ambulance to GTB Hospital, Dr. Bhatti said, “They were stopped four times by the police. They [police] inspected the patient by opening his bandages. That was the level of inhumanity on display.”

An investigation by the Delhi Minorities Commission (DMC) found the violence was “one-sided and well planned” with “maximum damage... inflicted on Muslim houses and shops with local support.”

A government agency set up under the 1999 Delhi Minorities Commission Act, the DMC reported that thousands of Muslims have fled to remote villages in Utter Pradesh and Haryana or have found refuge living with relatives elsewhere in Delhi. Others are living in relief camps, some run by Muslim charities and others by the Delhi government.

Conditions for the more than five thousand people now living in the makeshift relief camps are miserable. Residents lack proper shelter, regular meals, clean clothes and toilets among other essentials.

The *Hindustan Times* described the horrific conditions at a flood-hit relief camp in northeast Delhi's Mustafabad neighbourhood after thundershowers lashed Delhi for 24 hours on March 6.

Under conditions where the coronavirus is rapidly spreading across India, including in Delhi, the *Times* reported, "The wet mattresses, moist clothes and the damp surroundings are conducive to flu, infections and other health hazards—especially [as the camp is housed] in an 800-odd square meter prayer ground, fenced with brick walls on all four sides."

People in the relief camps are also confronting police harassment and repression. At the Mustafabad relief camp, police have arrested a number of Muslim men and youth on phoney charges of rioting.

A woman named Fathima told online newsite *ThePrint* that her 17-year old son and husband were picked up by police on false charges of engaging in violence. "My husband and son put up a fruit stall at the Shiv Vihar puliya every day," said Fathima. "They had put one up on 25th February as well. But police caught hold of them saying they saw my son rioting in video footage."

According to the BJP government, Delhi police have arrested more than 2,600 people, including four dozen for Arms Act violations. However, everything suggests that the Delhi police, in line with their actions during last month's riots and the ruling BJP's communal policies, are mostly targeting Muslims, the riot's principal victims, rather than the true perpetrators and instigators.

Among those the police have arrested for "rioting" is 45 year-old Usman Saifi. He was part of a group of Muslims who had organized to guard a Hindu temple in a predominantly Muslim neighbourhood in Mustafabad because they feared an attack on the temple would be used as a pretext for a Hindu communal attack on their neighbourhood.

While Muslims are being persecuted, the BJP government and the police are shielding thuggish BJP leaders like Kapil Mishra who openly instigated violence against Muslims.

The communal violence in northeast Delhi was triggered by Mishra's declaration before hundreds of his supporters that they would clear the city's streets of anti-CAA protesters if police did not do so forthwith. Yet no legal action has been taken against him or other BJP leaders who in the weeks prior to the eruption of communal violence in northeast Delhi led crowds of BJP supporters in chanting for lethal violence ("shoot them down") against anti-CAA protesters.

Within hours of a Delhi High Court judge admonishing the police and government on February 27 for failing to initiate investigations (First Information Reports) of BJP leaders

at who had made anti-Muslim hate speeches, he was transferred out of Delhi.

Delhi police have arrested Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) councillor Tahir Hussain and three of his aides, accusing them of rioting and murdering Intelligence Bureau staffer Ankit Sharma during the Delhi violence.

Hussain has vehemently denied the charges and said that he and his family were themselves the targets of a Hindu communal mob. BJP leaders, aided and abetted by much of the corporate media, are trumpeting Hussain's alleged involvement in violence to cover up their own crimes.

In a transparent provocation manifestly aimed at inciting communal violence, Utter Pradesh's BJP state government has put up giant posters at all the major intersections of the state capital, Lucknow, bearing the photos, names and addresses of 57 people it claims were involved in violence during anti-CAA protests last December.

The 57, who include well-known BJP opponents, have not been found guilty of any crime. Yet the government has arbitrarily demanded that they pay "compensation" for property destroyed when state security forces ran amok while suppressing anti-CAA protests, and has vowed that if they fail to do so it will seize their property.

In a rare Sunday sitting, the Allahabad High Court ordered March 8 that the "name and shame" posters be taken down by next Monday, declaring that they constituted an "unwarranted interference" in people's privacy.

However, BJP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, who is himself under criminal indictment for inciting communal violence, has refused to heed the court order. Yesterday, the UP government went before India's Supreme Court to challenge that High Court order.



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