

Biden hails Modi, the butcher of Gujarat, for India's COVID policy of mass death

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29 May 2022

A revealing exchange took place between US President Joe Biden and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi during a closed-door session of the “Quad Summit” of the US, Australia, India and Japan held last week.

According to a report published by the Press Trust of India (PTI), Biden “praised” Modi “for handling the Covid pandemic ‘successfully’ and contrasted India’s success with China’s ‘failure’ in dealing with coronavirus, according to a senior Indian official.”

The PTI added that “Biden said Modi’s success has shown the world that democracies can deliver, and busted the myth that ‘autocracies’ like China and Russia can handle the rapidly changing world better...”

By what metric he was measuring the “success” of India or, for that matter, its “democratic” character, Biden did not say. But let us review the facts.

India officially reports more than 525,000 deaths from COVID-19, out of 43.2 million cases. These figures—a staggering loss of life in and of themselves—are universally acknowledged, except by the Indian government of course, to be a massive undercount.

In its report on “excess deaths” released earlier this month, the World Health Organization (WHO) estimated that the real figure is between 3.3 million and 6.5 million, with a mean estimate of 4.7 million dead in India in 2020 and 2021. Indeed, of the total estimated global excess deaths from COVID-19 (14.9 million), India accounts for nearly *one-third*.

An earlier report from the British medical journal *Lancet* estimated India’s total excess deaths in 2020 and 2021 at more than 4 million.

Thus, according to Biden, the “success” of the Modi government consists in having overseen the *most COVID-19 deaths of any country on the planet*.

India’s performance in this regard was significantly higher, in absolute terms, than the United States, which “succeeded” in killing only 1.13 million of its citizens, coming in second place, according to *Lancet*. As a percentage of the population, however, the death rate is approximately equal.

The real success, for Biden and the financial oligarchy that he represents, is that India was able to keep production running throughout the pandemic, not least of all at the major production facilities of transnational corporations, including US auto manufacturers. There have been a series of strikes by autoworkers in India, including in June, following Modi’s declaration that he would “save the country from lockdown.”

As a result of Modi’s policy, the virus was allowed to spread without restraint, and funeral pyres were lit throughout the country.

And what of the “failure” of China? *Lancet* estimates that total excess deaths in 2020 and 2021 amounted to 17,900, while the WHO concluded that *68,000 fewer* people died in the country during the two years of the pandemic than would have been anticipated based on national averages.

As Biden noted in his remarks to Modi, the populations of China (1.4 billion) and India (1.38 billion) are comparable in size. India’s death toll, however, is 223 times higher than China, based on the *Lancet* figures. The United States, with a far lower population (329 million), had a death toll 63 times higher than China.

China’s ability to contain the pandemic, save lives and ensure a relatively normal life for its population for most of the past two years was due to its implementation of a Zero-COVID policy. The continuation of this policy, in the face of ferocious

opposition from finance capital, has succeeded in bringing the most recent outbreak of the Omicron variant in Shanghai under control, with the city due to partially open up on June 1.

Let us turn to the “democracy” of the government of Narendra Modi and his ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). It is a fact, now universally ignored in the capitalist media, that Modi cut his teeth politically by overseeing an anti-Muslim massacre in the northeastern state of Gujarat in 2002, when he was chief minister.

Modi ascended to his post as chief minister in 2001 after serving as general secretary of the fascistic Rashtriya Swayamesvak Sangh (RSS), a Hindu-nationalist organization founded in 1925 by admirers of Hitler and Mussolini. The BJP, in which Modi was installed in 1985, is effectively the political arm of the RSS.

The Gujarat massacre was one of the most horrific incidents of communal violence in India since the partition of 1947. It began in late February 2002 after a fire in a train coach carrying Hindu pilgrims. Modi, without a shred of evidence, blamed Pakistan and Muslim “terrorists” in India. He then called for a strike in Gujarat, which was used as the cover for the massacre.

As Modi’s police stood by, Hindu extremists, utilizing lists of the names and addresses of Muslims prepared in advance, launched a campaign of rape and murder that resulted in as many as 2,000 deaths, with 100,000 rendered homeless from wholesale arson and destruction.

Testimony before the Concerned Citizens Tribunal noted, “A chilling technique, absent in pogroms unleashed hitherto but very much in evidence this time in a large number of cases, was the deliberate destruction of evidence. Barring a few, in most instances of sexual violence, the women victims were stripped and paraded naked, then gang-raped, and thereafter quartered and burnt beyond recognition.”

A report by Human Rights Watch in 2013 concluded that, in the aftermath of the pogrom, the Modi government “created a climate of impunity, where perpetrators of the riots and those who took part in the violence feel they can threaten activists and witnesses to discourage them from pursuing justice, without response from state authorities.”

So much for Indian “democracy”... Indeed, Modi’s

direct role in the atrocity was so egregious that the US State Department in 2005, under the administration of George W. Bush, denied him a visa to travel to the United States, invoking a 1998 law that bars foreign officials who are responsible for “severe violations of religious freedom.”

The US travel ban was only lifted in 2014, when Modi was elected prime minister of India. On the part of the American ruling class, the inconvenience of his role in mass murder was swept aside, and Modi was welcomed with open arms by the Obama administration.

For the last eight years, Modi has enforced the policy of the Indian corporate elite, while serving as a key geostrategic ally of American imperialism, particularly in its conflict with China.

The latter was at the center of Biden’s discussions with Modi, and the entire “Quad Summit.” As part of its war preparations in Asia, the Biden administration speaks of “genocide” in China, while it promotes the fascistic butcher of Gujarat. At the same time, as the American financial oligarchy demands a COVID policy of endless mass infection and death, it hails the “success” of India as a model.

In the end, Biden’s comments to Modi serve as a self-condemnation of everything that is hypocritical, criminal and homicidal in the American ruling class itself.



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