

Facing an international outcry, India's Hindu supremacist government cynically distances itself from top BJP officials' anti-Muslim incitement

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Facing an international diplomatic outcry, India's Narendra Modi-led Hindu supremacist Baratiya Janata Party (BJP) government has cynically tried to distance itself from hateful comments denigrating the Prophet Mohammad made by two top BJP officials.

The BJP is engaged in continual anti-Muslim incitement and provocations. This has been true ever since it came to power with Modi at its head in 2014. However, the communal incitement has reached a qualitatively new level since the BJP won a second majority in May 2019, and under conditions where India has been ravaged by the COVID-19 pandemic and roiled by its economic fallout and that of the US/NATO-instigated war with Russia over Ukraine.

If in this case the Modi government has made a show of disciplining BJP officials who deliberately sought to stoke anti-Muslim sentiment, it is only because their remarks attracted the attention and condemnation of more than a dozen Muslim states, including Indonesia, Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

During a television debate on May 27, BJP national spokesperson Nupur Sharma denigrated the Prophet Mohammad, including by suggesting he was a pedophile. The BJP's Delhi media cell head, Naveen Kumar Jindal, hastened to promote Sharma's remarks on Twitter, while adding further derogatory comments.

As intended, the remarks sparked angry protests by Muslims in many parts of India. The BJP then responded with threats and thuggery.

When Muslims held a protest in Kanpur, a major industrial city in north India, after Friday prayers June 3, the Uttar Pradesh BJP state government led by Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath came down heavily on the participants, arresting dozens and lodging complaints against hundreds more. Adityanath, a *mahant* or Hindu high priest, is under criminal indictment for inciting violent attacks on Muslims prior to Modi anointing him the chief minister of India's most populous state.

Two days later, on June 5, when some Muslims in Kanpur called for a *bandh* (or general shutdown) on a day that Modi was to visit the city, they were set upon by Hindu extremist thugs mobilized by the BJP and its Hindu supremacist allies. Communal clashes ensued in which more than 30 people, including some police personnel, were injured. "Nobody could identify" those who initiated the violence, Hayat Zafar Hashmi, a local Muslim leader who previously led protests against the Modi government's anti-Muslim Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) told the *Hindu*. "It seems," he added, "they were outsiders who were called in to create trouble."

Police arrested dozens of people, all or almost all of them Muslims, during and after the communal violence, including Hashmi. A senior police official, no doubt on the orders of Chief Minister Adityanath,

vowed to bulldoze buildings from which police attacking Muslim protesters had been pelted with stones.

While greenlighting the state and goon violence targeting Muslims in Uttar Pradesh, the Modi government felt compelled to engage in some damage control to staunch the international outcry over the BJP officials' communalist slurs that had triggered the Kanpur protests.

More than a dozen Muslim countries have publicly condemned the remarks, with many also summoning the local Indian ambassador to receive a more extended rebuke.

Especially concerning to New Delhi was the response of the Arab Gulf states. Saudi Arabia and the UAE are major suppliers of oil to India, which depends on imports for more than 80 percent of its oil. Qatar, which was the first state to condemn the BJP officials' comments, provides 40 percent of India's LNG (liquefied natural gas) imports. India also receives billions annually in remittances from Indian migrant workers in the Gulf States. Finally, in keeping with New Delhi's ever expanding strategic alliance with Washington, the Gulf states are increasingly important Indian military-security partners.

Thus, some nine days after Sharma had slurred the Prophet Mohammad and Jindal had promoted her comments, the BJP took action against them. Sharma, till now a rising star in the BJP whose tweets were followed by Modi and other top cabinet ministers, was suspended from BJP membership "pending further inquiry." Jindal was expelled.

The disciplinary action was announced shortly after BJP General Secretary Arun Singh had issued a phony exculpatory statement. It scrupulously avoided any mention of the BJP officials' slurs against the founder of the Muslim faith and the controversy they have provoked, but did assert the BJP "respects all religions" and "strongly denounces insult of any religious personalities of any religion." The statement went on to invoke the Indian constitution's guarantee of the right of all Indians to practice the religion of their choice, adding the BJP is committed "to making India a great country where all are equal and everyone lives with dignity."

The hypocrisy and cynicism of the Modi and his BJP have no limits.

The BJP has been associated with communalist agitation and violence against Christians, Dalits and especially Muslims throughout its entire history. It is the political arm of the shadowy Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a self-professed organization of Hindu cultural revival, assertion and "self-defense." Many BJP leaders and cadres, including Modi, are lifelong RSS members, and the BJP leadership regularly confers with the RSS high command about government policies and the allocation of cabinet portfolios.

The BJP espouses Hindutva, the Hindu nationalist doctrine developed

and propounded by V.D. Savarkar, who as head of the All-India Hindu Mahasabha in the late 1930s publicly commended Hitler's persecution of the Jews as a model the "Hindu nation" should follow in dealing with the "anti-national" Muslim minority.

Modi himself first came to national prominence for his role in instigating and facilitating the 2002 anti-Muslim pogrom in Gujarat, which left some 2,000 people, the vast majority of them poor Muslims, dead and rendered hundreds of thousands homeless.

The communalist provocations carried out by the BJP national and state governments or by their Hindu right allies, with either the ruling party's open or tacit support, during the eight years Modi has served as prime minister are far too numerous to detail here.

They include:

- *"anti-cow slaughter" laws that deprive poor Muslims and Dalits of a cheap source of protein and in some cases their livelihoods;

- *the encouragement of communalist vigilante attacks in the name of "cow protection" or countering "love jihad" (i.e. inter-faith relationships);

- *the discriminatory 2019 Citizenship Amendment Act;

- *and the stripping of Jammu and Kashmir, India's lone Muslim majority state, of its special autonomous status and its reduction to a mere Union territory, placing it under indefinite central government trusteeship.

Modi and his BJP have ratcheted up their communalist offensive as the social crisis has deepened and opposition among India's workers and rural toilers to mass joblessness and soaring prices, the government's ruinous response to the pandemic, and its "pro-investor" policies has swelled.

The BJP's transparent aim is to divert the mounting social anger, anxiety and frustration into communal strife and to mobilize its Hindu supremacist activist base as shock troops against the working class.

This is taking ever more ominous and lawless forms. Modi and his chief henchman, Home Minister Amit Shah, have not breathed a word in condemnation of recent speeches by Hindu sadhus (holy men) with well-documented ties to BJP leaders that have called for the "extermination" of Muslims. Meanwhile, BJP state and local governments are now making it standard practice to order the bulldozing of the homes and shop of Muslims—both those they accuse of participating in antigovernment protests and those they claim are "illegal immigrants."

In an editorial last week, the *Times of India* was forced to concede that the "relentless aggressiveness of the Hindu Right" is unprecedented and that the Modi government, when not itself leading the charge, is encouraging and emboldening fascistic forces:

Dangerously divisive rhetoric and state/police actions and responses that would have been rare even a few years ago have become so frequent as to almost lose their power to shock. Shrill identity politics of all varieties is not new in India. What is new is the relentless aggressiveness of the Hindu Right—and what has been absent is any critique from central BJP or government leadership, even when some of this aggression turned particularly nasty. ...

Bulldozing houses, slapping sedition charges on history professors and university students, evicting hawkers selling non-vegetarian food, creating controversies out of halal meat and namaz (Muslim prayer) venues, not to mention strange lower court receptions to these-mosque-is-a-temple petitions—all of these institutional responses have been encouraging signs for TV and Twitter right-wing loudmouths.

Times of India would not and ~~could~~ not say is ~~the~~ the en Indian ruling class, its parties, state institutions, and media are complicit in the rise of the Hindu supremacist right.

Modi and his BJP were propelled to power in 2014 by big business to accelerate the capitalist restructuring of India so as to increase worker exploitation and more aggressively assert its great-power aspirations on the world stage. Eight years on, they still see the would-be Hindu strongman Modi as their best bet to ruthlessly pursue their interests in the face of mounting popular opposition and global economic and geopolitical turbulence without precedent since the Great Depression and the Second World War.

The courts have repeatedly aided the BJP and the Hindu right in pursuing their communalist agenda. The most notorious example of this is the November 2019 Supreme Court judgment that "ordered" the Modi government to fulfill the longstanding demand of the Hindu right for the building of a temple to Lord Ram on the site of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya. The mosque was razed in December 1992 at the instigation of the top BJP and RSS leaders and in direct defiance of the Supreme Court's own orders.

The Congress Party, and the various other parties promoted by the Stalinist CPM and CPI as bulwarks of "secularism," all adapt to, and connive with, the Hindu right and/or counter it with another variant of casteist, ethno-nationalist or religious-based communalism. Currently the Congress Party, which even sections of the press criticize for embracing "Hindutva-lite," is a junior partner in a coalition government in India's second most populous state, Maharashtra, which is led by the BJP's erstwhile longtime political ally, the fascistic Shiv Sena.

On Friday, when protests over the BJP officials' communalist slurs again erupted in many parts of India, the Jharkhand government, in which the Congress is a coalition partner, ordered a brutal police crackdown which resulted in the deaths of two people, including a 15-year-old boy who was shot in the head.

Struggles across India against jobs cuts, privatization, contract labour, dilapidated public services and the lack of PPE amid the pandemic are demonstrating the objective unity of the working class across all communal, caste and ethnolinguistic divides. It is this force, armed with a socialist program, that can and must become the spearhead of the struggle to defend and secure the democratic and social rights of working people in opposition to the Modi government, the Hindu right, and all the decrepit, communally-infested institutions of the Indian bourgeoisie.



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