

# Spate of vigilante and police killings highlights fascistic character of BJP's rule over India's most populous state

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A spate of Hindu communalist-vigilante and police extra-judicial killings in the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh (UP) in recent days has again highlighted the murderous rule of the state's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government led by the violent Hindu-supremacist Chief Minister, Yogi Adityanath.

Adityanath who openly proclaims his anti-Muslim hatred has been ruling the state since March 2017. While allowing his Hindu supremacist followers free rein to intimidate and attack Muslims in the name of "cow protection" and combating "love jihad," he has used the state apparatus, including the police, judiciary and the legislature, to create an atmosphere of terror against those he terms as criminals—with Muslims prominently in his crosshairs.

Last Saturday, Atiq Ahmed, a wealthy well-connected businessman and former member of the Lok Sabha, India's lower house of parliament, and his brother Ashraf Ahmed (also known as Khalid Azim) were shot dead by three vigilantes. This occurred while the two brothers, who were prison convicts, were being escorted by a huge contingent of UP police for court-mandated medical checkups.

The three assailants, lumpen youth between the ages of 18 and 23, fired 20 bullets at Atiq and Ashraf Ahmed from point blank range while the police stood passively by. The killers, who posed as journalists to get close to their victims, had the hallmarks of hired assassins, including an abundant supply of money and weapons. They shouted "Jai Sri Ram" (hail Lord Ram), a prominent slogan of Hindu-extremists.

The Chief Minister, who dons the saffron-coloured clothes of a Hindu high priest and revels in extra-judicial killings by police, hailed these latest killings. He proclaimed, "Now mafias cannot threaten anyone in the state," adding that "those who were a threat to UP earlier...now UP is a threat to them."

His finance minister, Suresh Khanna, claimed the killings were "divine justice" telling the media, "The State Government is trying to maintain law and order and believes

in zero tolerance for crime."

These comments and the fact that Atiq and Ashraf Ahmed were murdered in the midst of a police security cordon strongly suggest these were state-sponsored vigilante executions.

Adityanath is close to India's autocratic BJP Prime Minister, Narendra Modi. Modi personally promoted Adityanath to the UP chief ministership and in 2021 hailed his rule by saying, "There was a time when only goons ruled the state. But now all extortionists, mafia leaders are behind the bars" and "today Yogi's government is invested in the state's development." ("Ji" is an honorific)

Atiq Ahmed was elected to the Indian parliament back in 2004 as a candidate of the Samajwadi Party, a regional caste-based bourgeois party that has long played a prominent role in UP politics. Prior to that he had been elected to the UP legislative Assembly for five consecutive terms beginning in 1989. His brother Ashraf Ahmed was also a former UP state legislator.

Two days before the vigilante assassinations of the two Ahmed brothers, the UP police murdered Atiq Ahmed's 19-year-old son, Asad, and his aide, Ghulam aged 40.

With their deaths, the UP police have now killed six of the ten people that they publicly accused on February 25 of being responsible for the killing of Umesh Pal, a lawyer and purportedly a witness to the murder of a Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) UP state legislator, Raju Pal, back in 2005.

Umesh Pal was killed near his home, the day before the police levelled their accusation—an accusation that in retrospect appears to have been a death sentence. The police have claimed the ten conspired to kill Umesh Pal to prevent his testifying to the court about Raju Pal's murder.

The reality is the UP police, at Adityanath's urging, are carrying out vigilante justice, targeting the corrupt business-gangster networks associated with rival parties, to the benefit of those associated with the BJP and the Hindu right.

Over the course of several decades, the UP police laid

more than 100 criminal charges against Atiq and Ashraf Ahmed. But only in late March were they convicted on a charge of kidnapping the now murdered Umesh Pal back in 2007. They were given life sentences, which in India can last from a minimum of 14 years to the rest of a person's life.

This kidnapping conviction is itself questionable. A senior officer of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI, India's equivalent of the US FBI), Amit Kumar, stated during lengthy court testimony for the defense that he found no evidence Umesh Pal was ever kidnapped. The CBI officer was the chief investigator from 2016 to 2019 of Raju Pal's murder, after the case was transferred to the CBI from the UP police.

Shortly prior to his murder, Atiq Ahmed approached India's Supreme Court (SC) pleading for it to protect him and his family after Yogi Adityanath and several of his ministers openly proclaimed that they would eliminate "mafia rule" in UP.

The SC refused to hear this plea and instead told him to approach the state high court, while declaring its confidence that the Adityanath government would ensure his safety. India's highest court has sanctioned numerous communalist provocations and authoritarian actions by the Modi government. Now, in an attempt to cover its tracks, it has decided to hear a petition calling for an independent probe into the murder of the two Ahmed brothers while they were supposedly under heavy police guard.

India's corporate media either praises Adityanath's actions, recycling his lying boasts about restoring "law and order" in UP, or covers over their fascist character. It uniformly demonized Atiq Ahmed as a "dreaded mobster" and "mafia don," so as to insinuate his vigilante murder was just desserts. In fact, Atiq Ahmed was nothing more than a particularly brazen practitioner of the corruption and gangsterism that is rife throughout India's political establishment.

A CBI report filed in 2010 noted that India's current Home Minister, Amit Shah—Modi's chief henchman and like him one of those responsible for inciting and facilitating the 2002 Gujarat anti-Muslim pogrom—ran an extortion racket along with police in the state of Gujarat for years.

In Adityanath-ruled BJP the use of police to gun down "criminals" without trial has become commonplace. On April 14, the chief minister boasted that the UP police have gunned down 183 accused in extra-judicial executions during the six years of his rule. He also claimed that 23,000 "criminals" have been arrested, many after being severely injured with gunshot wounds in "encounters" with police.

This fascist "law and order" campaign is meant to legitimize state criminality against political opponents of the BJP and the state's largely impoverished Muslim minority.

Borrowing from the Israeli Zionist regime, which routinely bulldozes homes of Palestinians, Adityanath, with the full backing of the Modi government, is bulldozing homes and shops of Muslims in UP.

The UP government, just like the Modi government nationally, has also been on a rampage against critical journalists. According to a report published by the Committee Against Assault on Journalists, between Adityanath's ascension to chief minister in 2017 and February 2022 there were 138 instances of journalists in UP being persecuted. 46 journalists have been assaulted, 66 booked for various offenses and 12 journalists killed.

Adityanath is notorious for making hate speeches against Muslims referring to them as terrorists. His lawless rule is being countenanced by India's courts.

This has allowed unstable and unhinged Hindu-vigilantes to routinely terrorize and beat up Muslims, especially when Hindu girls fall in love with Muslim men, which the Hindu Supremacists denounce as "love jihad."

UP, with a population of around 239 million, is one of the most poverty-stricken states in India. Its GDP, a mere \$260 billion, is equal to that of the US state of Connecticut. Muslims who comprise around 20 percent of the population are disproportionately poor, but for long have been a prominent minority immensely enriching the culture of the state.

According to the Indian government's own subsistence poverty line, close to 40 percent of the population is poor, which makes UP the third most impoverished state in India after Bihar and Jharkhand. Around 45 percent of the population is malnourished.

Despite all this, prominent Indian capitalists such as Ambani and Birla are flocking to the state to invest in its "development." Just as they have embraced Modi as their Prime Minister, they similarly admire Adityanath's despotic and violent rule as a guarantee for their profit interests.



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