

Indian court accuses Haryana's BJP state government of “ethnic cleansing” after it targets Muslims in bulldozer rampage

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The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government in the north Indian state of Haryana went on a rampage from August 3 to 6, ordering the bulldozing of more than 1,200 Muslim homes and shops. While the demolitions occurred in many of the state's towns and villages, they were concentrated in the predominantly Muslim district of Nuh (formerly Mewat), which lies some 125 kilometers (78 miles) south of India's national capital, New Delhi.

So patently criminal and communally driven was the BJP's bulldozing campaign, the Punjab and Haryana High Court, the state's highest judicial body, felt compelled to intervene on August 7. In ordering a stop to the state government's bulldozing of Muslim properties without legal sanction or even any forewarning other than an immediate order to evacuate, the court observed:

“Apparently, without any demolition orders and notices, the law-and-order problem is being used as a ruse to bring down buildings without following the procedure established by law. The issue also arises whether ... **an exercise of ethnic cleansing is being conducted by the State.**” (Emphasis added)

Haryana's BJP government justified the initial demolitions as a form of communal—and, under Indian law, manifestly illegal—collective punishment. Acting as judge, jury and executioner, it claimed to be targeting structures, including a Muslim-owned hotel, from which it said Muslim youth had thrown stones at a Hindu-religious *yatra* (procession) in Nuh on July 31.

The *yatra* was itself a communal provocation, organized by violent Hindu-extremist organizations allied with the BJP, with the aim of intimidating the Muslim population and asserting Hindu supremacy.

Later, as the BJP government became even more emboldened and spread its bulldozing campaign across the state, the authorities, with only the most offhand attempt to cover up the wanton communal character of their actions, said they were targeting “illegally” built structures.

The bulldozing campaign was incited and directed by Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar. Even sections of the capitalist press have been forced to concede this.

A former fulltime cadre of the Hindu supremacist RSS, Khattar emphatically defended the *yatra* in Nuh, even though police said many of the participants brandished swords, tridents and other “illegal arms” in defiance of their orders.

In a clear case of incitement, Khattar blamed Muslims for the communal disturbances that erupted in Nuh on July 31 and then spread to other parts of the state including nearby Gurugram and Faridabad. Turning reality on its head, the Chief Minister claimed the attack on the Nuh *yatra* and subsequent communal clashes were “pre-planned” and part of a “larger conspiracy.”

Subsequently, Ashwani Kumar, the Sub Divisional Magistrate overseeing the demolition of a shantytown in Nuh, said he was acting at Khattar's behest: “This has been done on the direction of Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar. The encroachment was spread across 2.5 acres, ... All of it was illegal construction. It has been found that some of these people had involvement in the recent clashes...”

The Nuh *yatra* was organized by the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) and Bajrang Dal (BD), RSS offshoots that are closely allied with the national BJP government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Haryana state government.

Nuh was selected as a target because it is Muslim majority district, but also because relations between the district's Muslim and Hindu residents are especially amicable, with members of the two communities traditionally joining each other's festivals.

The Hindu communalists are intent on destroying this amity and artificially polarizing the district and all Haryana along communal lines. This is part of the ongoing efforts of the Modi government and its Hindu far-right allies to whip up communal tensions across India to divert mounting social anger over mass joblessness and poverty, and as part of their strategy for the 2024 national parliamentary elections.

The activists of the VHP and the BD are infamous for their violent attacks against Muslims. Yet the police made no effort to intervene when they marched through Nuh brandishing weapons.

Further adding to the charged situation was the online circulation of a video in which the notorious BD activist and

“cow-protection” vigilante Monu Manesar announced that he and his “whole team” would join the July 31 *yatra* in Nuh. Manesar is the principal accused in the murder of two innocent Muslim cow traders, Junaid and Nasir, who were kidnapped in Nur in February. Their charred bodies were later discovered in a burned-out SUV in the neighboring state of Rajasthan. Yet Manesar remains at liberty because he and the BD enjoy the support of the BJP state government.

Nuh residents had warned the authorities not to allow the *yatra* to proceed but this was ignored. According to the police, the *yatra* was stopped by a group of young Muslim men who subsequently threw stones at the procession’s participants. This reportedly set off a melee which resulted in police cars being damaged and other cars set alight.

As news spread, there were clashes in other Haryana localities. The state government responded by suspending mobile and internet services in Nuh and the neighboring Gurugram district; invoking Section 144 of the Criminal Code under which all gatherings of four or more people are illegal; and mobilizing thousands of police and para-military Central Armed Police Forces personnel.

Seven people were killed in the violence, including two security personnel and a Muslim imam. According to an eyewitness account provided to BBC, the latter was set upon in a mosque by a mob of Hindu extremists shouting, ‘Kill them, kill them.’

The Haryana BJP government’s wholesale destruction of “illegal buildings” is breathtaking in scope. Targets included houses, shops, hundreds of shanty dwellings, a hotel, and at least two dozen medical stores. Among those living in the shanties were impoverished and brutalized Rohingya refugees from Myanmar (formerly Burma) who eke out a living as rickshaw pullers, ragpickers, street vendors or other daily wage workers.

Neither the Congress Party nor any other of India’s main opposition parties has forthrightly and unequivocally condemned this lawless state violence and terror. The Stalinist Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPM sent a delegation to Nuh, which documented many of the horrors inflicted by the demolition. But its report did not even mention the role of the BJP, let alone point to Chief Minister Khattar as the main instigator of the bulldozer terror campaign.

The Congress Party—which, with the Stalinists’ enthusiastic support, claims to be leading efforts to stitch together a “democratic secular” electoral “alternative” to the BJP—has a long history of adapting to and conniving with the Hindu right. Nationally, it is allied with the fascistic, Hindutva-championing Shiv Sena, and in Madhya Pradesh, where state elections will be held later this year, it has merged with a Barjang Dal split-off, the Bajrang Sena.

So savage was the BJP’s demolition drive, residents and owners were not given time to grab any of their possessions. In so far as any demolition notices were issued, they were hastily

pasted on buildings minutes prior to their destruction.

The *Hindustan Times* in its report on the demolition provided this harrowing comment from one of the victims: “Munjila Khatun, from Bongaigaon in Assam, said that she was collecting plastic bottles when she received a call from her son, and rushed home. ‘Officials had started demolition without asking us to remove our things. They broke all of our kitchen utensils, threw our bedding and asked us to leave the town,’ she said.”

Such bulldozer demolitions, mimicking the brutal methods routinely employed by the Zionist Israeli regime against the Palestinians, has now become a routine instrument of terror of BJP state governments, particularly when victimizing Muslims.

This is especially true in India’s most populous state, Uttar Pradesh, where Yogi Adityanath, a violent Hindu extremist and close Modi ally, is the Chief Minister.

Despite bordering the highly industrialized Gurugram district and lying just two-and-a-half hours’ drive from Delhi, Nuh is among India’s most underdeveloped districts. Indeed in 2018 the central government’s own NITI Aayog (National Institution for Transforming India Commission) found Nuh to be the least developed of all India’s 739 districts. Muslims comprise close to 80 percent of the district’s inhabitants, while most of the remaining 20 percent are Hindus.

A 36-year old Hindu, Dharamveer Singh, who lives in a lane adjacent to a street in Nuh where Muslim homes and shops were demolished, expressed deep anguish at the suffering inflicted on his neighbours in an interview with the online publication *The Wire*. “There is such amity and brotherhood between Hindus and Muslims in Nuh,” said Singh, “that beyond a point, religion stops interfering in their daily lives.”

The BJP’s actions in Haryana are part of a relentless campaign to stoke communal animosity and strife so as to divide the working class and provide a pretext for further state repression. In the northeastern state of Manipur, the BJP-led government and its Chief Minister, Biren Singh, have stoked ethnic-communal conflict in which at least 150 people have been have killed and tens of thousands rendered homeless since early May. In his Aug. 15 “Independence Day” speech Modi promoted the Hindu communalist canard, derived from British imperialist historiography, that prior to British colonial rule the population was subject to a millennium of “enslavement” at the hands of “foreign” Muslim rulers.



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