

Following April terrorist attack in India's Kashmir

Modi government accelerates violent expulsion of impoverished Muslim refugees

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23 June 2025

India's Hindu-supremacist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government has expelled thousands of impoverished Muslim refugees from Bangladesh and Myanmar in recent weeks, many of them at gun point.

This mass deportation campaign is an integral part of the bellicose and communalist rampage that the BJP government has gone on in the aftermath of the April terrorist attack in Pahalgam, in Indian-held Kashmir. It includes India's illegal "Operation Sindhoor" attack on Pakistan, which brought South Asia's rival nuclear-armed states to the brink of war, and an ongoing barrage of provocative actions and threats, such as New Delhi's vow—made by Home Minister Amit Shah in an interview last Saturday—that it will never return to the Indus Water Treaty.

Those targeted for expulsion include Rohingya refugees and recent impoverished migrants from Bangladesh, as well as many poverty-stricken Muslims who have been living in India for generations, but are classified as "foreigners" because they cannot produce the "birth" and "nationality" documents demanded by the authorities.

In its anti-Muslim, anti-refugee witch hunt, the BJP government, led by the would-be Hindu strongman Narendra Modi, is using gangster methods akin to those that the Trump administration is employing against immigrants to the US.

The most egregious atrocity to date was the authorities' throwing of a group of brutalized Rohingya refugees, whom they had previously rounded up in India's capital city, into the sea off the coast of Myanmar.

The Rohingya are an historically persecuted minority. In 2017-18, close to a million Rohingya men, women and children were driven from their homes by Myanmar's military regime in a brutal ethnic-cleansing campaign. Instead of welcoming the persecuted, the Modi government has subjected these "illegal migrants" to indignities, imprisonment and expulsions.

At around midnight on May 8, the personnel of an Indian naval vessel ordered 38 Rohingya refugees, seized in Delhi two days prior, to put on life-preservers, then jump overboard into the dark sea.

This hapless group of people included women, children and the elderly. Many could not swim and/or were suffering from serious medical conditions including cancer. According to Dilwar Hussein, a legal officer at the Socio Legal Information Center who commented to *The Wire* website, these people had also been "beaten black and blue" while being transported on the naval vessel.

The 38, who lived in makeshift shacks and tents in Delhi, were part of a group of Rohingya rounded up on May 6 by over 50 policemen

who came in vans. The refugees were told that they had to go with them for "biometric verification." This was a trap as scores of those who did so were detained and imprisoned.

The 38 were flown "blindfolded" and with "their hands and legs tied" to Port Blair, the capital of the Andamans Islands, and a site notorious for its use by British colonial authorities as a brutal penal colony reserved for political prisoners active in the anti-colonial movement.

Subsequently, the Rohingya refugees were herded like cattle into an Indian navy ship, transported to the Andaman Sea near the southern coast of Myanmar, and dumped into the dark sea in the middle of the night.

Nye Nge Soe, a 22-year-old fisherman who was an eyewitness to this atrocity, told *The Strait Times*: "It was almost 1 am. From my boat, I saw a ship dropping many people into the sea. I could hear them shouting.

"They had life jackets, but the water is 2 meters deep there. There were old people and women who could not swim. A ship crew (from our village) threw them a long rope. I watched the people swim to the shore holding this rope."

The villagers provided the rescued refugees with food, water and dry clothes. The Rohingyas told the villagers that they had been forcibly expelled without any due legal process.

Tom Andrews, the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Myanmar, has condemned Indian authorities for their "blatant disregard for the lives and safety of those who require international protection."

Without mincing words, he continued: "Such cruel actions would be an affront to human decency and represent a serious violation of the principle of non-refoulment, a fundamental tenet of international law that prohibits states from returning individuals to a territory where they face threats to their lives or freedom."

Andrews has now opened an investigation into the "unconscionable, unacceptable acts" by the Indian government.

The government's brazenly criminal and unconstitutional treatment of the Rohingya refugees has since been endorsed by India's Supreme Court. The latter has repeatedly sanctioned the crimes of the BJP government and the Hindu supremacist far-right, including "ordering" the Modi government to build a Hindu nationalist shrine on the site of the Babri Masjid, which was razed in 1992 by fundamentalists organized and incited by the BJP and its RSS mentor in express defiance of the orders of India's highest court.

On May 16, the Supreme Court dismissed with contempt a petition

brought by relatives of the forcibly expelled Rohingya refugees seeking an urgent halt to such inhumane deportations. In a ruling issued May 16, the judges severely reprimanded the petitioning attorney, declaring: “When the country is passing through a difficult time (referring to India’s attack on Pakistan on May 7), you come out with such fanciful ideas.”

When the petitioners’ attorneys informed the court that many of the refugees had identity cards issued by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, they were curtly rebuffed:

“If they (the Rohingya) are all foreigners and if they are covered by the Foreigners’ Act, then they will have to be dealt with as per the Foreigners’ Act.” In other words, they do not have the right to asylum under the regime of international law that India purports to uphold, despite fleeing a globally recognized and condemned campaign of ethnic-cleansing; and, hence, can be mercilessly expelled.

The round-up, expulsion and literal dropping of Rohingya refugees into the sea occurred within the context of a vile campaign of anti-Muslim communalist incitement mounted by the Modi government following the terrorist atrocity in Kashmir in late April. In a supposed crackdown on terrorists, the Modi government and many BJP-ruled state governments rounded up and detained thousands of innocent Muslims. In Indian-held Jammu and Kashmir at least ten homes of the families of “suspected terrorists” were summarily demolished.

The Modi government has also intensified its campaign against “illegal” Bangladesh migrants. Thousands of people have been expelled, with those who resisted being threatened by Indian border police at gunpoint. Many of the deportees have lived in India for decades. Others are Indian-born and have spent their entire lives there.

The BBC spoke to 51-year-old Khairul Islam, a school teacher from Assam, who was forcibly expelled, with Indian authorities callously ignoring both due process and his claims to be an Indian citizen.

“I said I won’t go,” Islam told the BBC. “They beat me up, tied my hands and blindfolded me. They told me to keep quiet.”

Hazrun Khatun, a physically disabled 62-year-old woman, who has lived her entire life in India, was expelled from India at gun-point. She was then detained by Bangladeshi authorities and subsequently ordered to walk back to India, across a river and through jungle terrain.

Speaking of her ordeal at the hands of Indian border police, Khatun told the *Guardian*, “We protested that we are Indians, why should we enter Bangladesh? But they threatened us with guns and said, ‘We will shoot you if you don’t go to the other side.’ After we heard four gunshots from the Indian side, we got very scared and quickly walked across the border.”

Taskin Fahmina of the Bangladesh-based human rights organization Odhikar, told the *Guardian*, “Instead of following due legal procedure, India is pushing mainly Muslims and low-income communities from their own country to Bangladesh without any consent.”

Modi and his chief henchman, Home Minister Amit Shah, have a long and bloody record of criminality. Modi ruled the state of Gujarat as its Chief Minister from 2001-2014 and is known as the “Butcher of Gujarat” for orchestrating a pogrom in 2002 against Muslims that left 2,000 or more dead and hundreds of thousands homeless.

Amit Shah, who previously served as Modi’s dictatorial right-hand man in Gujarat, is a quintessential political thug. In 2011 he was indicted for heading a “police-criminal nexus” by India’s Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), India’s national police investigation

agency.

During the BJP’s 2019 Indian general election campaign, Shah delivered a communal rant in West Bengal in which he denounced Muslim “infiltrators,” a reference to refugees from Bangladesh and Myanmar: “Infiltrators are like termites in the soil of Bengal. A Bharatiya Janata Party government will pick up infiltrators one by one and throw them into the Bay of Bengal.”

All of this speaks to the communal-fascist ideology that animates the BJP/RSS and which has been increasingly embraced lock-stock-and-barrel by the Indian bourgeoisie. Bangladesh was an integral part of India until the reactionary 1947 communal partition of the subcontinent, and the people of Bangladesh and the Indian state of West Bengal share a common language, culture and history.

Similarly, the Rohingya share a long history of interaction with the Bengalis dating back to the 15th century. In the Partition imposed by South Asia’s departing British colonial overlords and the rival factions of the bourgeoisie represented by the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League that has created irrational, communally defined national boundaries that frustrate economic development, foster inter-state rivalry, and impose artificial barriers to the free migration of interconnected peoples.

The vilification and criminalization of refugees is a global phenomenon. European governments are guilty of letting over 32,000 desperate refugees from Africa perish in the Mediterranean over the past decade. The fascistic Trump administration is waging war on immigrants by kidnapping them like the Nazi Gestapo and deploying the military to the streets of Los Angeles.

The attack on refugees and immigrants is directed against the entire working class. It is used by capitalist governments around the world to promote communalist and chauvinist reaction, so as to divide the working class, and to justify the build-up of the repressive apparatus of the state.

The only answer to this barbarism is a revolutionary one. The defence of immigrants and their social and democratic rights is essential to the mobilization of the working class in India, as in every country, as an independent political force fighting for workers’ power and social equality.



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