

# West Bengal's BJP government seeks to stamp Hindu-supremacist rule on India's fourth largest state

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29 May 2026

West Bengal's newly elected Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) state government is moving aggressively to stamp its Hindu supremacist imprimatur on India's fourth most populous state.

At its direction, police intervened in predominantly Muslim neighbourhoods of Kolkata on May 15 to try to prevent Muslims from holding traditional roadside Friday-prayer gatherings as they have done for decades.

Two days later, police viciously attacked protesters who had gathered at the Park Circus Seven-Point Crossing to oppose the new police restrictions on public prayers and a related government campaign to bulldoze "unauthorized" structures in the name of "urban renewal." These structures are, in reality, the makeshift dwellings and food and other business stalls that poor people have had to erect because of a lack of state support, and urban infrastructure and planning.

The police mounted repeated lathi charges, and detained and charged at least 46 people.

These events are part of a broader campaign of Hindu communalist incitement and provocation being mounted by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's far-right, BJP-led national government. This campaign is aimed at dividing the working class, mobilizing the BJP's far-right activist cadre and legitimizing state repression.

The BJP's communal offensive has sharply intensified as India confronts the economic consequences of the expanding US-Israeli war against Iran, a war with which New Delhi is fully complicit through its strategic partnerships with Washington and Israel.

Earlier this month, Modi demanded that India's workers and rural toilers make "sacrifices" to absorb the economic shocks created by the war. Speaking in Gujarat, he urged the population to cut fuel and fertilizer consumption, reduce imports, postpone travel and accept austerity measures in the name of "national responsibility."

Modi's appeal was aimed at preparing a massive transfer of the burden of the economic crisis onto workers, farmers and the poor, while protecting corporate profits and the wealth of India's financial elite.

The BJP is aware that these attacks on living standards will

provoke explosive opposition from workers and youth. In April, tens of thousands of workers joined a wave of spontaneous strikes and protests against poverty wages and sweat shop working conditions that erupted in the industrial belt that surrounds Delhi, India's capital and largest urban agglomeration.

The response of the Modi regime to mounting working class opposition is state repression—hundreds of workers who participated in the protests in Noida (Uttar Pradesh) and Manesar (Haryana) have been jailed on trumped-up charges—and intensified communal incitement.

That is what is being demonstrated in West Bengal.

Immediately after assuming power for the first time in the state, the BJP government launched demolition drives, communal provocations and police repression. Bulldozers were deployed in Kolkata, including around Tiljala, Sealdah and Howrah station areas, targeting roadside structures, hawkers and poor settlements.

These attacks are officially presented as "anti-encroachment" drives. In reality, they constitute a war on the poor. The demolitions threaten the livelihoods of tens of thousands of hawkers, daily wage earners, small traders and informal workers—Hindu and Muslim alike.

Opposition politicians, including the state's recently defeated Chief Minister, Trinamool Congress leader Mamata Banerjee, have denounced the BJP's "bulldozer culture," warning that "bulldozers cannot become the language of governance."

Reports from Kolkata indicate that more than 100,000 hawkers and small roadside traders could ultimately face eviction as part of the BJP government's urban "cleanup" operations concentrated around transport hubs and working class neighbourhoods. The brunt of these attacks falls on the poorest layers of the population irrespective of religion or ethnicity.

However, while the BJP's repressive measures hit broad sections of workers, the government deliberately frames many of its actions in communal terms to inflame Hindu-supremacist sentiment.

This follows the pattern established in Uttar Pradesh under

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, where “bulldozer justice” has become synonymous with collective punishment against Muslims. Similar methods have also been employed in Indian-administered Kashmir. After the Modi government orchestrated a constitutional coup in August 2019 to strip the predominantly Muslim Jammu and Kashmir of its special constitutional status, demolitions, mass detentions and militarised repression were used to crush opposition.

The BJP has long whipped up Hindu communal campaigns around cow slaughter and temple politics to promote communal polarization and fan Hindu chauvinism.

In Gujarat, cow protection vigilante groups linked to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and Bajrang Dal have repeatedly targeted Muslims and Dalits accused of transporting cattle or consuming beef.

The recent communal mobilisation around the Somnath temple area in Gujarat again demonstrated how “anti-encroachment” drives and demolition campaigns are used to inflame anti-Muslim sentiment. Reports described large-scale bulldozer operations around religious structures and surrounding settlements amid communal agitation.

Not coincidentally, on the same day that Modi delivered his speech imploring Indians to endure economic “sacrifices” in the name of “national unity,” he visited the Somnath temple. Modi heads the committee charged with overseeing the refurbishing of the temple, and he and his government are actively promoting it as a Hindu nationalist shrine, second only to the temple that now sits atop the razed Babri Masjid mosque in Ayodhya.

The same political methods—including anti-cow slaughter agitations by Bajrang Dal activists and a state government vow that it will enforce a reactionary 1950 law effectively banning all cow-slaughter in the state—are now being utilized in West Bengal.

The BJP is aggressively promoting anti-Bangladeshi chauvinism in the state, branding poor migrants as “infiltrators” supposedly responsible for unemployment and social problems. This poisonous campaign seeks to divert anger away from capitalism and pit impoverished workers against one another.

The communal attacks in Kolkata were accompanied by attacks on meat shops and Muslim-owned businesses after the election victory of the BJP.

At the same time, workers across West Bengal confront worsening unemployment, inflation, privatisation and attacks on labour rights. The BJP government is moving to aggressively implement the anti-worker labour codes introduced by Modi’s central government, which dismantle legal protections governing wages, job security and working conditions.

The explosive social tensions developing in West Bengal are part of a broader crisis confronting Indian capitalism.

India’s economy is under growing strain from rising fuel prices, fertiliser shortages and global instability linked to the

US-Israeli war on Iran. Modi’s government has already increased fuel prices and is preparing broader austerity measures.

The BJP fears an eruption of working class opposition. Its response is communal incitement, nationalism and state repression.

But no progressive alternative is offered by the opposition parties.

The Trinamool Congress, despite now criticising the BJP’s “bulldozer culture,” is itself a bourgeois regionalist party that promoted Bengali regionalism and communal patronage politics while in office. It attempted to cultivate electoral support among Muslims through measures such as stipends for imams and reservations, while vehemently defending capitalist rule and suppressing independent struggles of workers and peasants.

The Congress Party and the Stalinist Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPM also bear immense responsibility for creating the conditions for the BJP’s rise.

For decades, the Stalinists subordinated the working class to alliances with Congress and other capitalist parties while administering pro-investor Left Front governments in West Bengal that imposed privatisation, austerity and other attacks on workers and farmers.

In shackling workers to alliances with the “secular” Congress Party, the big business party that spearheaded India’s turn to neo-liberal, pro-market policies and forged India’s anti-China “global strategic partnership” with US imperialism, the Stalinists paved the way for the BJP’s rise.

The developments in West Bengal demonstrate that the struggle against communalism cannot be separated from the struggle against capitalism, austerity and imperialist war.

The BJP’s communal attacks are aimed at preparing the conditions for imposing the burden of economic crisis and war onto the backs of workers and the rural poor. The essential political task is the building of an independent socialist movement uniting workers—Hindu, Muslim and all others—against communalism, capitalist exploitation and imperialist war.



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