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Bengal labourer burnt alive in Rajasthan

Mamata condemns killing, terms incident 'inhuman'

JAIPUR, DEC 7 /--/ In a shocking incident, a labourer was burnt alive and a video of the gruesome incident was uploaded on social media in Rajasthan's Rajsamand district, police said.

The slain labourer, who hailed from West Bengal, was identified as Mohammad Afrazul. The accused who allegedly committed the crime yesterday in Raj Nagar has been arrested, SP Rajsamand Manoj Kumar told newsmen. He said that the accused Shabbu Lal, a resident of Raj Nagar, was being interrogated. State home minister Gulabchand Kataria condemned the incident and said that the case has been handed over to SIT for further investigations. In the video, the labourer was hacked and burnt to death. "The labourer died on the spot," police said. According to the IG Udaipur Anand Srivastava, the accused was also seen shouting at the victim in the video. Condemning the incident, West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee today termed the incident "inhuman".

We strongly condemn the heinous killing of a labourer from Bengal in Rajasthan. How can people be so inhuman. Sad," she said in a tweet. The family of the labourer today demanded strict action against the killer who allegedly also uploaded a video of the gruesome crime on social media. The video, which has gone viral on the internet, shows a man raving about "love jihad", a term used by sections of Hindu activists to describe marriages



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between Hindu women and Muslim men, who are accused of seeking to propagate Islam. "We want a thorough investigation to be conducted into the incident and the culprit to be punished," a relative of Afrazul told newsmen in Malda. "We don't know the real reason behind his killing. He was the sole bread winner of the family. We came to know that the person who killed him had called him on the pretext of giving him work," a relative said.



(Left to right) A collage of video grabs of the incident. Afrazul's mother grieving his death

Family members seek culprit's punishment, Afrazul's neighbours rule out 'affair' angle

SOUMYA DE SARKAR

SAYEDPUR (MALDA), DEC 7 /--/ One single phone call from Rajasthan has not only shattered Gulbahar Bibi in her mid thirties and Hamidabanu Khatun (14) but has also kept families of other migrated labourers from the same village under mute worry.

However, since Wednesday afternoon when the phone call ascertained gruesome death of Afrazul Khan (50) at Kankrali village of Rajsamand district in Rajasthan, the neighbours have been trying their best to console the widow and her minor daughter living in a brick-built hut at Sayedpur of Jalalpur gram panchayat under Kaliachak police station approximately 24 km from English Bazaar, the district headquarter. Nurul Huda, a relative of deceased Afrazul was the first to know about the killing. He had no idea even then that Afrazul was burnt alive after being beaten black and blue. But even after watching video of Afrazul's family members and neighbours just cannot believe that a human being can be put to death in such spine-chilling fashion. "He has been working as a migrated labourer for last 20 years.

He worked mostly in Rajasthan. Since his health was falling as he grew older, Afrazul used to take lesser works and worked as manager too at construction sites. His prolonged experience as a migrated labourer in Rajasthan made him familiar with many construction sites in the state. He engaged other youths from Jalalpur too as construction labourers at different areas in Rajasthan," Huda said. The neighbours informed that Khan left home for his work-site two months ago. "Afrazul used to visit his family members at intervals to hand them over his earnings. He has three daughters - Jyotsna, Rezina and Hamidabanu. Jyotsna and Rezina are married already. Hamidabanu is now a student of class IX at Jalalpur high school. The family was solely dependent on Afrazul's income," informed a neighbour. The locals also certified Afrazul's character. "He was a complete family-man. It is hard to believe that he had an affair with other woman at his workplace. Even if it had so happened, we would have come to know about that earlier as others from this village were with him. Such an affair would not have escaped their notice," said Yeasin Sheikh, a resident of Jalalpur. While the locals and neighbours are standing by Afrazul, the deceased's family was not in a position to react even. Gulbahar Bibi, Afrazul's wife was seen losing consciousness every now and then while weeping profusely. Between her sobs she could only mutter, "Allah! Don't spare those who killed my man." Families of other migrated labourers were seen quite worried. "I have already spoken to my husband. He has assured me that he is safe. But no assurance can relieve my anxiety now," said Razia Bibi, wife of another migrated labourer in Rajasthan now. "I have asked my husband to come back at the earliest," the anxious wife said. Kaushik Bhattacharya, DM, Malda said: "We are trying to know the complete status of Afrazul Khan's family. The BDO of Kaliachak I has been asked to meet the relatives of the deceased and send a report." Police have also taken steps so that no tension is generated over the incident. Situation is control as has been learnt from police officials.



The victim's driving licence

We have changed our IT policy to facilitate more investment: Mamata

KOLKATA, DEC 7 /--/ On the eve of the Bengal Global Business Summit (BGBS) scheduled for mid-January next year, chief minister Mamata Banerjee today once again exhorted industrialists to come and invest in the state, particularly in the IT sector as, she asserted, there was stability in the state in every area and the state government had changed its IT policy so that new investors got more incentives and exemptions. Mamata made this appeal during her speech at the IT conference Infocom-17 held in the city. "The previous government did not do anything precious in the improvement of IT sector. We have changed our IT policy and now we are ready for more investments in this sector. We are the pioneer in the field of digitisation which we started six years back. This sector is doing extremely well, in fact Bengal is doing well in so many other sectors silently," Mamata said. In fact during the last three-four months the chief minister has been trying vigorously to rope in more investment in the state. While she had road shows in Mumbai where she also met industrialist Mukesh Ambani and invited him to attend the BGBS, she used her visits to countries like Italy, Germany, England and Singapore to have interactions with industrialists there and invite them to BGBS. (EOIC)

AT A GLANCE

Classes resume at GD Birla school

KOLKATA: Classes resumed today after nearly a week at the G D Birla Centre for Education here after the school management and guardians reached a settlement over the demand for removal of the principal in the wake of the sexual assault of a minor girl. A school managing committee spokesman said classes of the senior section began this morning. "The classes of the junior section will resume from tomorrow," he said. (EOIC)

Centre moots border protection grid to check influx of Rohingyas, migrants

Home minister asks eastern states to be extra vigilant

KOLKATA, DEC 7 /--/ Union home minister Rajnath Singh today asked five eastern states sharing boundaries with Bangladesh to be extra vigilant against influx of Rohingyas and illegal immigrants through the porous Indo-Bangla border. At a meeting of chief ministers and home ministers of West Bengal, Assam, Mizoram, Meghalaya and Tripura here, Singh said a border protection grid on the lines of Unified Command set up in insurgency-hit states will soon come up in these states to check illegal infiltration.

"The state governments have to be extra vigilant against the Rohingyas and other illegal immigrants," he said, flagging the Centre's priority to check the illegal immigrants from Myanmar through Bangladesh. The home minister resolved to check illegal immigrants who have links with extremist groups for further anti-national activities with ulterior motive and posing threat to internal security. "Radical elements and terrorists can be checked only with joint action and active cooperation of central and state governments," he said. Influx of Rohingyas and Bangladeshis through the porous India-Bangladesh border has been a major concern for India. According to official estimates, around 36,000 Rohingyas are currently living in various parts of India. Director General of BSF

Bangladesh. He quoted latest estimates to say that 9-10 lakh Rohingya Muslims have migrated to Bangladesh from Myanmar and the possibility of a spillover to India cannot be ruled out.



Union home minister Rajnath Singh with chief minister Mamata Banerjee at the press conference — Arijit Ganguly

K K Sharma had last week said his troops apprehended 87 Rohingya Muslims along the India-Bangladesh border from the beginning of this year till October 31, and 76 were sent back to

"The grid will comprise various elements namely physical barriers, non-physical barriers, surveillance, system, intelligence agencies, state police, BSF and other state and Central agencies," he said in his opening remarks. Of the border with Bangladesh, 2,217 km falls in West Bengal, 262 km in Assam, 443 km in Meghalaya, 856 km in Tripura and 180 km in Mizoram. This is the fourth meeting of the chief ministers of states, which share international borders, called by the home minister. Assam Chief minister Sarbananda Sonowal sought a new law to check the cross border smuggling, including cattle, and effective steps to end illegal immigration. Sonowal said the Union government should set a deadline—possibly December 2018—to completely seal the international border with Bangladesh. West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee appreciated the Centre's initiative to hold this meeting of the chief ministers and offered full cooperation to any joint action.

Gujarati pride takes on Congress 'prejudice'; rainbow coalition attracts attention

TULSI DATTA

KOLKATA, DEC 7 /--/ It is pride versus prejudice, literally. People coming out for a latenight dinner on the side-ways at Manekchowk or elsewhere in the old part of the throbbing city of Ahmedabad, it was a taboo to discuss politics. If you just chirp in to say anything remotely connected with politics your Gujarati friends would invariably stop you. It was a kind of taxing one's brain — 'magajmari'. Like the Irani restaurants in Mumbai, almost all big restaurants here in Ahmedabad had a list of don'ts hung prominently on the wall. At the top of the list was this warning: No political discussion allowed. Their favourite banter was: 'politics ma maru su?' (what we are going to do with politics?) That's what almost every Gujarati earnestly believed.

But no longer. Gujaratis are now the prime movers of Indian politics with their 'aapno bhai' as Prime Minister. This pride Gujaratis never ever would like to trade for anything. Not even for politics, for sure. When my editor commissioned me to write a piece on the Gujarat Assembly elections the first phase of which takes place on Saturday, I decided to avoid political soothsaying and delve into the serenity of its people's mindset

and ultimately how and in what manner this might affect not only the destiny of the state's 182 candidates at the hustings, but also the fate of the first Bharatiya Janata Party Prime Minister from Gujarat. This happens to be the first Assembly elections in the state since Narendra Modi became the Prime Minister. This time the elections are being fought more than between two major political parties, this a clash between emotions — pride takes on prejudice. Of pride I have already outlined. But whose prejudice is this anyway? And how this prejudice comes in conflict with the sense of pride of the state of six crore of people which was created on May 1, 1960 out of the State of Bombay? Gujaratis still believe they have been betrayed by the rulers of the North since independence. More than Mahatma Gandhi they revere Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel who, they feel had been deliberately marginalised.

Gujaratis feel decades after decades of the Congress rule at the Centre was a continuous saga of apathy towards the state. It began, so they think, with the denial of the statehood and they were 'subjugated' then under the 'State of Bombay' for 13 years after independence. Congress took the Gujarat for granted. And this way of looking at them continued since. Subsequent Congress Prime Ministers had sub-



scribed to that preconceived notion of politically taming what is now considered a 'Vibrant Gujarat'. The face of the Congress in Gujarat, Rahul Gandhi is the son, grandson and great grandson of three Prime Ministers of the country. He has inherited a political legacy and a mindset that are known to prompt abhorrence and taken-for-granted perception. Can this prejudice unsettle Narendra Modi and the Bharatiya Janata Party?

While the country will get to know about the Gujarat voters' mandate on December 18, media has worked extra time creating the atmosphere of a battle royale. Courtesy journo, new

netas of different hues are shining bright. The Rainbow Coalition comprising Dalits, Patidars, OBCs and Muslims which constitutes a hefty chunk of the total electorate has already created ripple in the otherwise placid political scenario of Gujarat. The question now being asked is whether Rahul Gandhi will be able to make any dent in the Bharatiya Janata Party's hold in the Assembly. In the last elections the BJP had won 116 seats while the Congress 60. It was in 1980 that the BJP opened its account in the Assembly with nine seats. Till then the Congress had an invincible hold to call the shots in state politics. From 1995 Gujarat fell to the saf-

ron charm. To this was added the charisma of 'Aapno Modibhai'. The BJP's rathyatra is now unstoppable. The Modi-magic has instilled a sense of rebound pride in the minds of people. The common people here never spent time on politics which did not translate into progress. If progress was not the issue politics was always ignored. It's a kind of, if politics means material gains, they will cling to it. Now people are confronted with politics of two kinds. Politics of the BJP, which is weaving the dream of more progress. The Congress is not against progress either. The Gujaratis have been witness to spate of allegations and counter-allegations. Post-Godhra riots, post-Indira Gandhi assassination massacre. Draw 1-1. People not interested. The campaign caperings had erased from their mind. People are talking about the Narmada Dam. They are weighing the gains after the off-shore ferry service that was opened last October. The two important issues that had initially plagued the BJP campaign were demonetisation and Goods and Services Tax (GST). There have been rallies, bands in Ahmedabad and other parts of Gujarat. Business was seriously affected. Rahul and his campaign-mates thought they could hammer the rival down with this. But common

people had other idea. Modi again got the benefit of doubt. This clearly sums up the mood of the people of Gujarat in the run-up to the Assembly polls. They hated the GST to the core, they were hard-hit by demonetisation, the much hyped 'Gujarat model' failed to take off, the Dalits and Patidars are aggrieved for their sufferings didn't cease, farmers lost their crop because of the floods. These losses notwithstanding, the indomitable feel of being a Gujarati will stand the test of time. Modi's BJP stands to sail through. If what the common people think is any indication, then Modi will be able to improve his 2002 performance by at least 10 odd seats. Now, let us look at what the psephologists have up their sleeves for the two-phase election on December 9 and December 14. Just a week before the first phase of voting the Lokniti-CSDS pre-poll survey hints at the following possibilities: the BJP will get 91 to 99 seats against their assessment in August which gave the BJP 144 to 152 of the total 182 seats. The Congress tally would be 78 to 86. The August study had given the Congress 58 to 64 seats. That is, the Congress prospects have improved considerably. But the 'janta janardan' is keeping the fingers crossed. Pride and prejudice are at full play. Just watch on.