Hate Crimes against Muslims

Mumbai Collective strongly condemns the brutal murder of Mohammad Akhlaq, a migrant worker from West Bengal, in Rajsamand district of Rajasthan. Far from being an isolated crime, there is enough to indicate that it was a hate crime instigated by the ongoing communal and anti-Muslim, anti-minority rhetoric propelled into everyday discourses by the ruling regime under the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Akhlaq’s murder is one in a string of several hate crimes that have taken place in the current political regime against ordinary Muslims, since the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) has found prominence, political legitimacy and the connivance and support of state power in many parts of the country. Whether on the ground of cow slaughter, beef possession or “love jihad,” the country has seen a spate of brutal murders as in the case of Mohammad Akhlaq, Pehlu Khan, Junaid Khan and others, and vilification of and assaults on Muslims and Dalits. Akhlaq is not just another statistic in the increasing hate crimes against Muslims and Dalits, but a symbol of the shocking extent to which such barbarity can go.

Love jihad, it is well known, is a hoax circulated by right-wing communal forces to vilify male members of the Muslim community. What is worrying is that once limited to the realm of the fringe, the bogey of love jihad, in itself a highly deplorable, sinister and misogynistic conspiracy to target minorities and curb the personal life choices of Hindu women, is yet to be determinedly put down either by the government or the judiciary. Indeed, the BJP government through its spokespeople and legal representatives in courts has been promoting this absurd notion. In Rajasthan itself, from mid-November 2017, a pamphlet on the so-called love jihad was being distributed in Jaipur but law enforcement agencies failed to halt its circulation. Closer to this hate crime, on 1 December 2017, an RSS-linked group announced the “beti bachao, bahu lao” campaign as an extension to love jihad, committing to determinedly put down such barbarity.

The Mumbai Collective, being a group of concerned citizens committed to the ideals of freedom, secularism, pluralism and tolerance, strongly condemns the growing sentiment of hate and increasing hate crimes against minorities and the attempts to justify them under the present political regime. We demand that the government immediately cease its campaign on love jihad promoted by its ministers, spokespersons and leaders, to take strict action under the law against the perpetrators of Hindutva terror, and follow the norms and duties enjoined by the Constitution. We call upon all citizens to determine work to defend the secular, pluralist and tolerant ethos enshrined in our Constitution. We call upon all democratically minded citizens, to expose such communal conspiracy theories and oppose them actively. We call upon all citizens to mobilise actively against hate politics and anti-minority, anti-Dalit propaganda in all its various forms.

Mumbai Collective

Exposing Shell Companies

On 12 September 2017, the Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA) publicly disclosed a list of 1,06,578 disqualified directors with associations to “shell or on-paper companies.” The individuals named in the list have been barred from further appointment as directors of other companies for a period of five years, that is, until 2021. It is estimated that the final count of those disqualified may go up to 4.5 lakh. The MCA circular cites the reason for the same: “disclosed a list of 1,06,578 disqualified directors with associations to “shell or on-paper companies.” The individuals named in the list have been barred from further appointment as directors of other companies for a period of five years, that is, until 2021. It is estimated that the final count of those disqualified may go up to 4.5 lakh. The MCA circular cites the reason for the same: “
for disqualification as companies having failed to file their annual financial returns, in violation of Section 164(2)(a) of the Companies Act, 2013. Additionally, in August 2017 the Securities and Exchange Board of India (sebi) targeted 331 listed entities suspected of being shell companies and in violation of listing agreements, by limiting their trading activities.

Shell or on-paper companies are legal entities with no real economic operations, typically used for the purposes of tax dodging, or to launder funds. While owning shell companies is not illegal, these companies offer a secure blanket to individuals or groups of individuals acting through a legal arrangement, or accruing gains from the transactions made under the use of legal arrangements, or accuring gains from the transactions made under that entity. A public beneficial ownership register containing information on ownership structures and arrangements on all beneficial owners accountable. The accountability of the activities of any corporate vehicle being used for tax avoidance-related practices should rest with the true owner of that entity.

A well-rounded definition of beneficial owner is a human owner, a living person, who exercises economic control over an entity either directly, or indirectly through the use of legal arrangements, or accrues gains from the transactions made under that entity. A public beneficial ownership register containing information on ownership structures and arrangements on all legal entities (companies, trusts, foundations, limited liability partnerships, associations and cooperative societies) is, therefore, a key reform in the fight against tax avoidance and financial secrecy. It offers a robust system of checks and balances by targeting the source of these dubious activities. Guidelines on identifying individuals with significant influence should be translated into enforceable measures. Several developing countries such as Afghanistan, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Indonesia and Ukraine have committed to come up with public beneficial ownership registries. India too must join consensus with such countries, and create a public beneficial ownership register of all legal entities in an open data format to ensure the highest standards on financial transparency.

Sakshi Rai
NEW DELHI

Errata
In the article “Kayasthas of Bengal: Legends, Genealogies, and Genetics” by Luca Pagani et al (25 November 2017), Figures 1, 4, 5 and 6 (pp 45, 50, 51) have been replaced with corrected figures.

In the article “The Courage to Challenge the Nuclear World Order” by M V Ramana and Zia Mian (2 December 2017), a part of the concluding paragraph (p 24) that was inadvertently omitted has been added to the article.

In the article “Aadhaar and Food Security in Jharkhand: Pain without Gain?” by Jean Drèze et al published in this issue, the figure “5%” (p 54, first paragraph) should have read as “4%.”

All errors have been corrected on the website.

The errors are regretted. — Ed
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