

Consecrating an historic crime:

Indian PM Modi to lay cornerstone for Hindu temple at site of razed Ayodhya mosque

By Deepal Jayasekera
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In a nationally-televised event, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi is to lay the foundation stone today for a temple devoted to the mythical Hindu god Ram on the site of the former Babri Masjid (mosque) in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh.

The razing of the 475-year-old Babri Masjid on December 6, 1992 was an historic crime, perpetrated by Hindu fanatics incited and organised by Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP), and allied Hindu supremacist groups. It precipitated weeks of communal violence across much of northern and western India that resulted in the deaths of more than 2,000 people, most of them poor Muslims.

Today's ceremony has been timed to coincide with the first anniversary of another monstrous political crime. One year ago today, Modi and his chief henchman, Home Minister Amit Shah, working in close concert with the high command of the military-security apparatus, carried out a constitutional coup, illegally rewriting India's constitution by executive fiat to abrogate the semi-autonomous status of Jammu and Kashmir, India's only Muslim-majority state. They then divided Jammu and Kashmir into two Union territories, effectively placing the region under permanent central government control.

To suppress mass popular opposition to these dictatorial actions, the Modi government imposed a months-long state-of-siege on the Kashmir Valley, with blanket curfews, mass detentions without charge, and the suspension of cell phone and internet service. Fearing an explosion of popular anger, many of these measures have been re-imposed in the run-up to today's anniversary.

The building of a Ram temple on the site of the Babri Masjid and the assertion of unfettered Indian central government control over the disputed Kashmir region have been central to the communalist agenda of the BJP and its ideological mentor, the RSS, for decades. Modi intends to use the coincidence of the official inauguration of the Ram temple's construction and the anniversary of Jammu and Kashmir's "full integration" into the Indian Union to trumpet a supposed new era of Indian "assertion," and otherwise advance the BJP-RSS agenda to transform India into a Hindu state, where Muslims and other

minorities live in sufferance.

The Modi government is ratcheting up communalism in response to its apprehensions that its ruinous response to the COVID-19 pandemic is fueling mass anger and opposition among India's workers and toilers. The government's ill-conceived, hastily imposed ten-week COVID-19 lockdown and its subsequent back-to-work drive have produced a health and socio-economic disaster. Tens of millions have lost their jobs and hundreds of millions have seen their meagre incomes slashed.

Meanwhile, the pandemic is surging across India. When Modi's "unlockdown" officially began on June 8, India had just over 250,000 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 7,200 deaths. Today, less than two months later, the official cases have almost quadrupled to 1.85 million and the deaths have increased by more than five times to 38,938.

Facing popular anger over the spread of the pandemic and its attempts to "kick start" the economy by implementing a new wave of "pro-investor" measures and by forcing workers back on the job in unsafe conditions, the Modi government is doubling down on its Hindu supremacist agenda. Its aim is to confuse and split the working class, and mobilize its fascist base to intimidate and threaten its opponents.

Today's ceremony is the direct outcome of a ruling by India's Supreme Court last November that validated the Babri Masjid's destruction, rewarding those who had orchestrated it—in defiance of the Court's own express orders—with effective sole ownership of the disputed site. Indeed, the court, in what it provocatively proclaimed an act of "national reconciliation," officially "ordered" the BJP to oversee the construction of a Ram temple on the ruins of the Babri Masjid.

This shameful ruling underscores the extent to which all the institutions of the still nominally secular Indian state have become infused with Hindu communalism.

No less reactionary and revealing is the response of the BJP's ostensible establishment political opponents.

The Congress Party, the only all-India rival to the BJP and until 2014 the Indian bourgeoisie's preferred party of national government, has furiously attacked the Ram Mandir Trust, the

body officially charged with the temple's construction, for not inviting its party leadership for the temple's *bhoomi puja* (ground-breaking) program and turning it into an "exclusive BJP-RSS ceremony."

One Congress leader after another has accused the BJP of stealing "credit" for the Ram temple, citing their own party's despicable record of conniving with the Hindu chauvinist campaign to raze the Babri Masjid. Most notoriously, in December 1992 the Narasimha Rao-led national Congress government stood by and allowed the historic Ayodhya mosque to be destroyed, although it was forewarned of the BJP-RSS conspiracy to raze it to the ground.

Senior Congress leader and former External Affairs Minister Salman Khurshid complained, "People from across the political spectrum should have been invited just as a courtesy to Lord Ram." For her part, Priyanka Gandhi, a senior Congress leader in her own right and the daughter, granddaughter and great granddaughter of Congress Prime Ministers Rajiv Gandhi, Indira Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, declared, "By Lord Ram's grace, let this ceremony promote national unity, brotherhood, and cultural confluence."

Kamal Nath, the former Congress Chief Minister in Madhya Pradesh, boosted the BJP-RSS claim that the campaign to build a Ram temple in Ayodhya enjoys mass support. "People of the country were expecting and wishing for this since long," said Kamal Nath. "The construction of the temple is being carried out with the consent of every Indian."

Congress veteran Digvijaya Singh was eager to tout Rajiv Gandhi's support for the Ram temple movement. He tweeted: "The centre of our faith is Lord Ram! . . . That's why we all wish that a grand temple should be built at the birthplace of Ram in Ayodhya. Rajiv Gandhi also wanted the same."

Continuing in this reactionary obscurantist vein, Singh went on to claim that the reason Home Minister Shah recently tested positive for COVID-19 is because BJP leaders have defied the warnings of a Hindu fundamentalist priest that August 5 is not an "auspicious day" to inaugurate the Ram temple.

The Congress' response to today's vile Hindu supremacist celebration flows from its decades of conniving with the Hindu right and instrumentalization of caste and communal divisions. Renouncing its own democratic program for a united secular India, the Congress of Nehru and M.K. Gandhi implemented, in collaboration with South Asia's departing British colonial overlords, the 1947 communal partition of the subcontinent into a Hindu-dominated India and a Muslim Pakistan.

Despite this record, the twin Stalinist parties—the Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPM and the Communist Party of India (CPI)—have long promoted the big business Congress Party as a "secular bulwark" against the BJP.

In response to today's inaugural ceremony, the CPM Politburo has issued a statement reiterating its support for the Supreme Court's reactionary verdict of last November in what it calls the "Ayodhya dispute." It then goes on to echo the

Congress' complaint that *pujan* the Ayodhya has been taken over by the BJP, thus implying that if Modi and Shah were not trying to take sole "credit" for the successful campaign to build a Ram temple, there would be nothing objectionable in consecrating and completing the communalist crime of Dec. 6, 1992.

The Stalinists bear central political responsibility for the rise of the BJP and the Hindu right. For decades, they have justified their systematic subordination of the working class to the Congress Party, various reactionary caste-based regional bourgeois parties, and the putrefied state institutions of the "democratic" Indian Republic in the name of "blocking the fascist BJP" from power. From 1989 through 2008, the Stalinists played a pivotal role in the formation of a succession of governments, most of them Congress Party led, that implemented the Indian ruling elite's neo-liberal "reform" agenda and pursued closer ties with US imperialism. Moreover, in those states where they have formed the government the CPM and CPI have similarly pursued pro-investor policies. This opened the door for the BJP to cynically exploit growing popular anger over mass poverty, ever widening social inequality, and endemic corruption.

There is mass opposition to Modi and the BJP government and to the Indian ruling elite's class war agenda and incendiary strategic partnership with US imperialism. But this opposition must find a new political road. This requires the mobilization of the working class as an independent political force, in opposition to all the parties of the capitalist establishment, including the Stalinist CPM and CPI, and the fight to rally the rural toilers and all sections of the oppressed behind it in the struggle for a workers and peasant's government and international socialism.

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