

Support the
Free Press

Introducing Scroll Exchange
Follow and debate the day's most significant

Get an
Ad-free Version

CORONAVIRUS CRISIS

The other virus: Hate crimes against India's Muslims are spreading with Covid-19

On April 7, rumours about Muslims intentionally spitting to spread the virus reportedly led to a riot-like situation in Jharkhand, leaving one person dead.

Arunabh Saikia

Apr 08, 2020 · 01:18 pm





A person who attended the Tablighi Jamat meeting in Delhi's Nizamuddin goes into quarantine.

Apr 08, 2020 · 01:18 pm

Arunabh Saikia



Share

Tweet

Email

Reddit

Print

2 Comments

On the evening of April 3, a school teacher in Amranga, a village in Assam's Kamrup district, called up the local police. He was anticipating trouble. The WhatsApp groups on his phone would not stop buzzing. A message was doing the rounds: two men from the adjacent village of Bholagaon, who had attended the religious convention organised by the Tablighi Jamaat, were hiding in the fields near Amranga. The convention, held in Delhi's Nizamuddin area, had turned out to be the source of a large cluster of Covid-19 patients.

Men in and around the area should step out of their homes to apprehend them, said messages on the WhatsApp groups. "As the rumour spread, men from all the Hindu villages in the area marched out," said the school teacher. "I also reached the spot along with everyone."

By around 9 pm, a crowd had assembled at a plot of land where a couple of daily wage-workers had been digging a pond to set up a fishery. "These labourers had been working there for the last nine months," said Hem Kanta Sarma, officer in charge of Palashbari police station, under whose jurisdiction Amranga falls. "There was no one who had gone to Nizamuddin."

When Kumud Das, who was overseeing the work on the plot, intervened on behalf of the labourers, a row broke out. As it got heated, someone from the mob hit Das on the head, according to eyewitnesses. But before more violence ensued, the police intervened and dispersed the mob. "It was a rumour and no one got hurt," said Partha Sarathi Mahanta, Kamrup district's police chief.

The communal virus

Ever since news broke that the convention held by the Tablighi Jamaat, a Muslim religious group, was a Covid-19 hotspot, rumours about the spread of the coronavirus have taken on a communal hue. Videos circulating on social media platforms appeared to show Muslim men spitting on food, licking plates and sneezing in unison to spread the virus – all of these have [been debunked as fake news](#). Even certain television channels and organisations like the Bharatiya Janata Party's IT Cell [blamed Muslims for the spread of the pandemic](#).

In several places, this has now translated into violence. On April 7, rumours about Muslim men intentionally spitting to spread the virus [reportedly led to group clashes](#) in Jharkhand's Gumla district. It began with an attack on a young man, who was seriously injured. Another [person died](#) in the ensuing clashes, according to media reports.

"Some people were beaten up in Gumla. A tribal youth died and two other people are injured," ML Meena, Jharkhand's additional director general of police (operations), told *Scroll.in* over the phone.

[The Indian Express](#) reported three separate incidents which took place in the National Capital Region on April 5, the same day that Prime Minister Narendra Modi asked every to light candles in the darkness for nine minutes to fight the coronavirus. A 22-year-old who had reportedly returned from a Tablighi Jamat congregation in Bhopal was assaulted in Harewali village. A Muslim family in Gurgaon was allegedly attacked for taking videos of a procession that took to the streets to carry out Modi's instructions. A mosque in Gurgaon was shot at and the men arrested for it told the police they had fired to "check if anyone infected with the coronavirus was hiding inside".

Over the last couple of days, instances of violence or hostility have emerged from at least four states.

'Why must you do this in a Hindu area?'

In Karnataka, Muslim volunteers trying to help slum-dwellers left without food because of the lockdown became the target of mob violence. It happened on the evening April 6, when social activist Zareen Taj, her son and four of his friends were distributing dry rations in North-East Bengaluru's Amruthalli area. along with other volunteers when her associates were allegedly roughed up by a group of around 10 men.

According to Taj, a group of 10 men attacked her son and his friends with a cricket bat. "They got down from the car and started hitting them," she said.

Taj claimed that earlier in the day, the men had warned them not to distribute rations. "Why must you do this in a Hindu area?" they had allegedly asked.





A man from Delhi's Nizamuddin awaiting to be taken to a quarantine centre. Credit: PTI

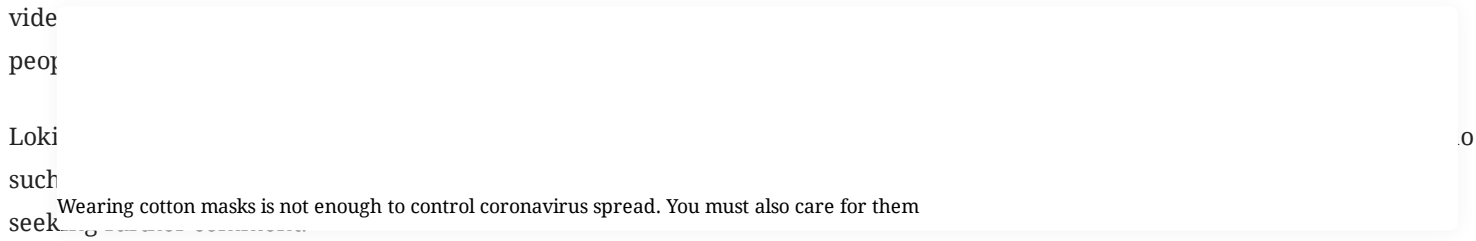
Earlier, on April 4, around 25 men identifying themselves as "leaders of the area" had stopped them from distributing relief packages to slum-dwellers in Amruthalli, according to Taj. "They said that we were Muslim terrorists who had come from Nizamuddin," she said. Back then, the police had stepped in and asked the men to leave Taj and her associates alone. But on April 6, Taj said, the men started beating them before she could call the police. Bheemashankar Guled, North East Bangalore's deputy commissioner of police, confirmed the incident to *Scroll.in*. Two men had been arrested for the violence, said Bheemashankar.

'Muslims not allowed'

In Delhi, which is still smarting from a bout of communal violence, it has given rise to vigilantism in gated colonies. Recently, a video which floated up on social showed a group of people at a meeting. They claim to be residents of North Delhi's Shastri Nagar area and can be heard saying they will not allow Muslims into their neighbourhood.

"We exhort others in the country to follow suit," the man shooting the video is heard saying. Towards the end of the video, the residents heckle two vegetable vendors, asking for their names. A dire warning follows: "Only come here with your Aadhaar card or we will chase you away with sticks."

Subash Chander Sharma, the general secretary of the resident welfare association of the L-Block of Shastri Nagar, where the



TRENDING

Tensions have also been reported in Uttar Pradesh, where several Muslim protestors were killed in police violence this

Decem
rumou
In Me
claimi
police
a comj
The FI

eda
e
ged

Major film festivals unite for free 10-day digital festival on YouTube



Up go

In Assa
tested p
Tabligh



report f Locusts are an excellent source of protein, but eating them is no longer a good idea

In man
commu
Muslim
for ther



Hibjur I
"Even s
Momid
residen

Golagh Pakistan's solution to the locust invasion? Turn the pests into chicken feed

such ne

Hafiz A
cows fr
closer,"

Ali said

Pradip
turning

Momid
will go



Rohit thinks wickets all the time, Dhoni never tells me what to do: Harbhajan on captaincy styles

Support


Covid-19



-
-
-
-
-





-  Watch: 'Locust biryani' and bizarre mock-fight star in TV channel's analysis of Pulwama incident