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Nido Tania: Was Killing Of Student In Delhi A Hate Crime?

By Palash Ghosh @Gooch700

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Nido Tania (Photo: Facebook)

The murder of a young man in New Delhi has apparently exposed the bigotry, intolerance and prejudice that many North Indians harbor toward their countrymen from other regions of the huge, sprawling subcontinent. On Jan. 30, a 19-year-old first-year student named Nido Tania from the northeastern state of Arunachal Pradesh died from injuries he suffered from a beating allegedly administered to him by shopkeepers at a South Delhi market who had earlier mocked him for his longish, stylized, dyed hair, effeminate clothing and East Asian physical features (by reportedly calling him 'chinki'). An autopsy report indicated the victim was beaten with a blunt object. According to reports in India media, Tania studied at Lovely Professional University in Jalandhar in Punjab and was only visiting Delhi.

Delhi Police said they have six suspects in custody and are searching for at least three others.

Tania's killing triggered a round protests in Delhi by students from northeastern India who demanded political intervention. The Indo-Asian News Service reported that the students have called for the government to enact an "anti-racism" law – asserting that the attack on Tania was motivated by racial and ethnic hatred. The protesters held up placards which read "Why are we treated like outsiders?" and "We are Indians, too."

A group of parliamentarians from the northeastern India also met with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Rahul Gandhi, vice-president of the Congress Party, to press for such an anti-racism law. Gandhi said what befell Nido was "totally unacceptable" and that "there is only one India.... We are going to ensure you get respect in this country." The country's major opposition party, Bharatiya Janata Party – which is expected to win national elections in the spring – also vowed to raise the matter in parliament. Delhi's new chief minister, Arvind Kejriwal, also spoke to the protesters and has called for the police and courts in the city to aggressively pursue the case. "Nido's fight isn't a northeastern issue. It's a national issue," Kejriwal told the crowd.

As an expression of solidarity with the protesters, MPs from the Northeast -- including Agatha Sangma of Tura (Meghalaya); C.L. Ruala of Mizoram; Thangso Baite and Thokchom Meinya of Manipur; and Birendra Prasad Baishya of Assam – joined the the march. "We have been given enough assurances [from politicians], but hardly any strong [legal] action has been taken in the entire matter," a protester said, according to IANS. Minister of State for Minority Affairs Ninong Ering – who also hails from Arunachal Pradesh – told the student demonstrators: "There is racism in India. I am one of you. I feel your sentiments. We have had several discussions with MPs and ministers over the issue of racism." With respect to an anti-racism law, Ering added: "We have suggested that representatives from [the] students' union and NGOs should also be a part of the committee which is going to submit its report in two months."

The protesters, who have risked arrest to highlight their cause, said they want the government and broader public to become more aware of the discrimination that northeasterners face on a daily basis in Delhi. Tania's parents have also said they will fight to end discrimination on behalf of their martyred son. "Our son [will] never come back again from his heavenly abode, but his sacrifice should never go in vain," Nido Pavitra and his wife Marina Nido told reporters. "We'll be going to Delhi soon along with a team of lawmakers led by Chief Minister Nabam Tuki to press for enactment of an anti-racial law, installing his statue in the national capital as a symbol of anti-racism and initiating all possible measures to prevent recurrence of such incident in any part of the country." Tania's father, Nido Pavitra, happens to be the parliamentary secretary for health and family welfare for the state of Arunachal Pradesh.

But given confusion over details of the incident – and conflicting testimony from witnesses – there's some doubt if Tania was a victim of a hate crime. "The details of the incident were sketchy, and based on what one heard from eyewitnesses, the story looks like a street fight which turned ugly," said Kishalay Bhattacharjee, an author has written about Manipur, a state in northeastern India. Nonetheless, there is no doubt that the people of Northeast India – tens of thousands of whom have recently migrated to Delhi and others parts of India to study and work – feel isolated from the rest of the nation.

The seven northeastern states – located east of Bangladesh and bordering Myanmar (Burma), Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan and China – have few ethnic and linguistic ties with the majority of Indians. In fact, China has long claimed Arunachal Pradesh as a part of its Tibetan territory. Many of the natives of Arunachal Pradesh belong to the Tibeto-Burman and Mongolian races, rather than the Aryans and

Dravidians who predominate in India. “The northeast is not included in the history curriculum of India, the media ignores stories from the northeast unless they are of violence and unrest, and the politicians show stepmotherly treatment towards the region,” Binalakshmi Nepram, an activist from Manipur, told Indian

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But Bhattacharjee adds that racism and prejudice goes both ways. “While racist discrimination in this case should be protested, racism in the northeast against people from other parts of the country should also be protested,” he added.

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