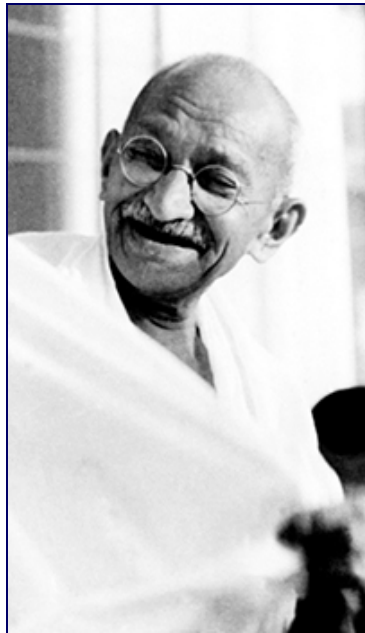


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By Gautaman Bhaskaran  
South Asia Editor



Mahatma Gandhi

India now stands shamed, truly shamed, with the United Nations asking New Delhi to help ensure justice to the African victims of the recent attacks in Noida. Part of the central Indian State of Uttar Pradesh – which is now ruled by the Hindu nationalist organisation, Bhartiya Janta Party – Noida is technically a suburb of New Delhi that saw a vicious attack on a small group of Africans some days ago.

The United Nations (UN) hoped in a statement that the “perpetrators of the recent attacks on Africans” would be punished. A UN spokesperson in New York told the media that the world body sought justice.

Samuel T Jack, president of the Association of African Students in India, said in a statement: “The Association of African students in India is completely in support of the moves by the Dean of Head of African Missions in India. We are totally in support in calling for an independent investigation, and also to take India to the U.N. Human Rights Council...In addition, we also call for a complete withdrawal of support from India by all the African countries in all international platforms”.

Such strong words are understandable, given what happened at Noida. It was horrifying to see that while the Africans were being beaten and bruised and humiliated and hounded out in a busy shopping mall by a violent group of Indians, no security guard, no shopkeeper and no bystander protested or came to the aid of these helpless foreign nationals – mostly students who have left their home and hearth to pursue arguably better education that Indian universities offer.

The immediate provocation for the Noida attack was the death of an Indian student, allegedly from drug overdose. And it is suspected that African nationals

have been selling these narcotics to Indians.

Although the police made some arrests in the wake of the video footage of the dastardly attack that went viral on the social media, the popular perception is that these detentions are but some kind of cursory efforts by the Uttar Pradesh administration to assuage ruffled feathers.

What is more disturbing is that the Noida attack is by no means an isolated incident, and such unruly Indian mob behaviour, which is clearly racial in nature, has been seen with increasing frequency in many parts of the country.

Last year, the murder of a Congolese student in New Delhi led to the heads of African missions in India threatening a boycott of Africa Day. Though this did not finally happen, the message was not lost on the international community – which has been watching with alarm the kind of atrocities being heaped on especially people of African origin. The issue is all the more serious because India is home to hundreds of professionals and students from Africa.

Apart from the Noida and New Delhi incidents, there have been other similar killings and attacks on Africans in cities like Bangalore, where one remembers a young black woman being molested after she was accused of running her car over a pedestrian.

A couple of years ago, Nigerians were targeted in Goa, which calls itself a tourists' paradise. The foreigners were at the receiving end after the local Indians went on a murdering and assaulting spree, charging the Nigerians with dealing in drugs.

Unfortunately, India despite calling itself the land of Mahatma Gandhi – who practised and preached tolerance and non-violence – has been guilty of brazen racial prejudice, which, though is not confined to people of other countries alone. There is an unbelievable addiction for white skin – which is touted most openly by those selling fairness creams. Even some of the well-known Bollywood actors have been caught advertising such creams.

And one has to merely open the matrimonial columns in leading Indian newspapers – where the call for fair brides is sickeningly common.

This conveys in no uncertain terms India's unhealthy obsession with colour, and while this nation of 1.3 billion people never tires of blaming countries like Australia and the US of racial attacks on Indians, New Delhi has not been firm enough to check such atrocities on blacks in its own backyard.

In a scenario where Africa is becoming increasingly

important to Indian trade, New Delhi can ill afford to let such blatant racial cruelty exist on its soil. But above all, New Delhi owes it to the 54 countries of the African Union to make sure that their citizens are safe in India.

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**Gautaman Bhaskaran** is a veteran film critic and writer who has covered Cannes and other major international festivals, like Venice, Berlin, Montreal, Melbourne, and Fukuoka over the past two decades. He has been to Cannes alone for 15 years. He has worked in two of India's leading English newspapers, The Hindu and The Statesman, and is now completing an authorized biography of India's auteur-director, Adoor Gopalakrishnan. Penguin International will publish the book, whose research was funded by Ford Foundation.



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