

Yogi government's crackdown on criminals: Is it actually a crackdown on 'criminals'?

Pratiksha

Major areas of Prayagraj (once known as Allahabad) scream of destruction and wreckage. Lying in the middle of house settlements, rest dust laden roads beside the ruins with an odd sense of eeriness. This is what is being termed as the ultimate crackdown of the Yogi Adityanath government on the prominent mafias and gangsters of the area.

Yogi Adityanath, the present Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, sworn into power in 2017. He is known for his hard-hitting stance on the prevalence of 'gunda-raj'. He even publicly spoke about his future plans regarding this just after coming to power. While inaugurating the Arogya Mela in Farukhabad on January 10, he stated, "UP has no place for fear and terrorism. Earlier our daughters used to feel scared while stepping out of their homes. Today, those who used to spread fear among people are visiting police stations with placards around their necks and begging for mercy while bulldozers raze down the properties of the mafias and their aides."

What is happening in Prayagraj?

Prayagraj was once the dominating bastion of five times Member of Legislative Assembly from Allahabad West and one time parliamentarian, Atique Ahmad. Ahmad has cases of murder, abductions, illegal mining, extortion, intimidation and fraud leveled against him. The once dreaded 'Bahubali' was arrested on 11 February, 2017 in connection with an attack on employees of a state university. He is currently lodged in Ahmedabad's Sabarmati jail.



Atique Ahmed's demolished house in Kasari Masari

After Ahmad's arrest, from 5 September 2020, the Prayagraj Development Authority (PDA) has been pulling down his properties in almost every part of the district.

Anil Kumar Pandey, a PDA official, stated that Atique's property of around 300-350 crore has been demolished till now.

After pulling down Ahmad's personal properties, the PDA has now started ravaging the properties of his associates and aides, citing illegal construction and lack of paperwork. Keenly following his 'zero-tolerance' policy towards mafias, the Adityanath-led government has been on a crackdown spree in breaking the mafia-network ever since. Properties of his relatives and aides in areas like Kasari Masari, Khuldabad and Civil Lines have been razed rapidly.

"All the properties that have been demolished till now were illegal. It has always been in Yogi government's priority list to break the entire mafia ecosystem, said Mithilesh Singh, a member of BJP and Councilor of Ward No.45.

"Any mafia can be demolished if its economic backbone is broken. The reason behind demolishing their houses in particular is to tackle the problem at its very root. These mafias had a huge network; just sending them to jail won't solve the problem. By attacking their properties, the government wants to eradicate their fear from the public, said Akhilesh Singh, a BJP leader and Deputy President of Nagar Nigam, Prayagraj.

The one without a home

While the state is busy bulldozing properties of people involved in the mafia network giving illegality in the construction of these houses as the reason, the ground reality gives a different picture. Properties worth crores have been already demolished in Rajrooppur, Kalindipuram, Kasari Masari, Khuldabad, Dhoomanganj and Civil Lines.

On January 30, the PDA authorities pulled down houses of criminals named, Nata and Sabu in the Kasari Masari area. Their houses were situated amidst five houses.

Raees Ahmed, a resident of one of those houses said, "They came to demolish the criminal's house but ravaged ours too. We were told that our house is on an illegal land without proper official map work. The house is registered on my name; still they went on with the destruction. We weren't even given any notice in advance. They just came and destroyed everything."

According to the locals, the members of the mafia families have absconded from the area. The houses that have been destroyed citing unavailability of map work stand reduced to debris today. They stay as a reminder of the state's clampdown in the lives of these families.



The debris of the houses that were destroyed in Kasari Masari on January 30

The problems continue

On February 23, around 69 house owners staying in Kalindipuram and Rajrooppur area of Prayagraj received illegal property notices. The notice by the PDA states that owners have to submit map and other property related documents of their houses before the deadline of March 10. It also warns that if the required documents are not provided before the deadline, their houses will be demolished.

“The land on which our house stands today was sold to our ancestors 20-25 years ago by the mafias after they acquired these lands completely. We have the house registered on our name but now they are saying that the property is illegal. We don’t have the map work of the land passed by the authorities; does that mean it’s not our house? In those times, no one used to care about map or other paper works.” said Dhunnu Pal, whose house was almost bulldozed by the PDA authorities after he received the notice. Living with a family of 7 members, he is struggling to collect the required documents.

Similar is the case of Ashok Kumar Sahu, a resident of Rajrooppur. Sahu’s family is running from pillar to post since the notice came to them.

“What’s happening is wrong. The PDA is at fault here. They should’ve taken cognizance of the matter 20-30 years back. These are innocent people. We are talking to the PDA in this regard, the matter will be resolved and there will be a stay on the order for sure,” said Councilor Mithilesh Singh, whose ward includes areas of Kalindipuram and Rajrooppur.

The crackdown of the Yogi government on criminals in Prayagraj has come with a cost. While some question the rationale behind economically targeting the criminal's families, some question the order's manner of implementation. Either ways, there lies a question on the government's way of tackling crime effectively.