THE GULF WAR
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Its Impact on Hindus

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Anti-Arab Hostility Hits Some, Economic Crisis In India, Hindu-Muslim Relations to Change

HINDUISM TODAY requested its correspondents and friends in ten countries to report the effect of the Gulf War in their area, including comments from individuals and suggestions on solving the crisis. Their reports follow:

India

This correspondent interviewed several leaders including Muni Sushil Jain, Dr. Lokesh Chandra, a renowned scholar of Hindu thought, Swami Balakrishna Dharmalankar, convener of an international conference on Sanatana Dharma scheduled for March, Swami Ganeshanand, President of the Bharat Sadhu Samaj, and D.N. Sinha, president of the Indian branch of the Organization of Industrial, Spiritual and Cultural Advancement.

Muni Sushil Jain was of the view that if Saddam Hussein suffered a defeat in the war, it would discourage the Muslim fundamentalists here from depending on the support from Arab countries for keeping their confrontation with the Hindu leaders on. They would find it difficult to get money and moral support from those Arab countries whose rulers are interested in fishing in the troubled waters of India.

Dr. Lokesh Chandra thinks that the Gulf War would soon turn into a confrontation between Islam and Christianity giving an opportunity to Hinduism and Buddhism to become a third powerful force to provide a new social and moral order to the world. Swami Dharmalankar was confident that in the days to come the forces of Sanatana Dharma would gain considerable extent to offer solutions to the problems humanity faces. D.N. Sinha held the view that the war would give its strength to the Hindus to make positive gains in their efforts to organize themselves. Swami Ganeshanand thought good days would arrive for the Hindus after the war, as Hinduism would surely he looked upon as the only philosophy to guide the world.

Muslims in India are mostly lending moral support to President Saddam Hussein of Iraq. For them Saddam is fighting a grim battle not only against the forces of imperialism but also in defense of Islam.

The war has already made a serious impact on the economy here in India. The price of petrol has gone up by 25% because of the gulf crisis. The government has been facing high budgetary deficits. The war - with its resulting yearly loss to India of US$ 2 billion in badly needed foreign exchange - has made this problem acute. The black marketers and hoarders are taking full advantage of the war. Necessary articles of daily use like vegetables and wheat have become costly, though the war has nothing to do with them.

There is considerable worry among the people about the environmental pollution the war is going to cause to India, particularly from the burning of huge quantities of oil in Kuwait. It is possible that the soot from these fires will alter the seasonal monsoons in India, with disastrous effects on crops.

Australia

War is wrong, but a bad dictator heavily equipped by the West due to poor insight needs to be corrected by well-intentioned force. Some times you have to fight for a "good" or just cause such as Hindus demanding fairness and equality in their country, India. If America lost the war, arrogant fundamentalism may spread its effect all over the world to shatter the growing spirit of peaceful coexistence and interfaith harmony. Arabs in Australia are under close police scrutiny, especially

following an attempted hijacking.

South Africa

Fortunately, thus far the war has not adversely affected the good relationship between Muslims and Hindus. What has been planned by the Muslims in South Africa is to muster 10,000 Muslims to assist Iraq in the present war against the Allied forces. As regards to solutions, Hinduism advocates peaceful settlement of disputes. The sympathies of the Hindus in South Africa lie with the unfortunate civilians who are being killed or hurt and with the many people rendered homeless by the bombing and deprived of food and other basic needs. Some Hindus support the action taken by Iraq, but the vast majority of the people here blame Iraq for its deficient attitude and therefore align themselves with the Allied forces. (This report reflects the author's view as well as those of S. Padmanathan, S.L. Sewgolam and P.D. Persad.)

Canada

McGill University Professor Arvind Sharma said some Canadian Hindus "See the USA as a big bully pushing a small country like Iraq around. Now they find that Muslims in Iraq are the underdogs and feel sympathy towards them. If one looks at the objective facts concerning the way in which the Hindus were treated in Kuwait on religious grounds, then one has very little reason to sympathize with Kuwait." With regard to a solution, Sharma said, "The basic Hindu attitude is to press for reconciliation over conflict. However, the buildup toward the war highly personalized the conflict between Bush and Hussein, not leaving room for negotiation or face saving."

USA

Swami Tejomayananda of the Chinmayananda Center in San Jose, California, noted, "When all the countries build up all the weapons, this is the natural outcome. [There] cannot be an immediate solution. When man changes from within, then only will there be a real solution. Now all the political leaders are bent

upon one particular standpoint of their own."

In Chicago, Captain Prem Kar, 33, of US Army reserves told HINDUISM TODAY that "I advised my family to be careful how they dress when they go out, to not to put on the traditional clothes they usually do, in case someone is ignorant enough to not know the difference [between Iraqis and Hindus]." As a reservist, the New Delhi-born Captain Kar can be called up at any time for service in the Middle East. Kar predicts clear victory for the Allied forces. "I have absolute faith in the US army. We are well trained and well equipped to defeat Saddam and his army."

Mukund Patel of the huge Cultural Festival of India scheduled for this summer in New York said they were "not sure how the war was going to affect the festival. Just hoping that everything will work out. We've not seen anything impacting Indians here. We hope a peaceful solution will come soon."

Trinidad

Pundit Ramesh Tiwari of the Edinburgh Hindu temple has led his congregation in reciting special prayers ever since the crisis erupted. "Let us all pray for peace that will help our leaders, particularly those involved in the Gulf crisis, to come to their senses and find a solution to this problem which is escalating into a world crisis. As Hindus, we have a strong responsibility to help create a world of peace and order," Pundit Tiwari said.

Holland

Ron Bijl, chairman of to Stichting Kriya Kundalini Siddha Yoga, said, "I do not wish to judge any of the participants in this war. I only wish that all people involved, especially those who give orders, soon realize that material causes are not worth fighting for. There should be love and understanding between all people of all races of all nations. Where there is love, there is no place for war."

Malaysia

G.S. Nijar, a lawyer and opposition leader, felt that the war may regress into a religious squabble. "When that happens, there will be more distinction in what the fight is all about. At the moment the Iraqis are retaliating against an unscrupulous American government which has bullishly undermined Iraqi sovereignty in the Middle East."

MCI youth chairman, K.S. Balakrishnan, voiced his fears that the war may accelerate and trigger off interracial riots all over the world. "As long as the fight remains purely on the basis of economic rights, then it is war between two nations. But once it erodes into war between two religions like Christianity and Islam or Hinduism and Islam like in India, then it stirs the baser instincts," he said.

Pathmarajah Nagalingam described the overall situation in Malaysia, "For the vast majority of the Muslim population their sentiments clearly lie with Iraq. The war is seen as Christians/Jews vs. Islam. The non-Muslim population are mostly pro-Kuwait or noncommittal. They have witnessed the Islamic ascendancy propelled by the oil price hikes of 1973/74 which financed the Arab states as well as their Muslim fundamentalism." With regard to the future, Nagalingam predicts, "With a war lost and a heavy reconstruction burden, and a slap in the face for all Muslim nations, with America present in the Gulf, with the Palestinian issue mostly settled and the war cry muzzled, all this would fizzle out the Muslim ascendancy throughout the world. Islam as a resurgent force would be finished."

The Middle East Gypsies

The Gypsies, or Romani, as they prefer, are Hindus who left India a thousand years ago and spread throughout the world. Dr. Ian Hancock, Romani representative to the UN, explained the impact on his people.

"There is a Gypsy population in the Middle East. Starting last April, we got reports that some who live on the West Bank were attacked. We're concerned because [Gypsy] populations there are fairly small and speak dialects which are in a

linguistic sense rare. If those people are destroyed, that way of life would be destroyed. Speaking for myself, and I think from Gypsy perspective, I'd say it is an Arab issue and should be left to Arabs to sort out for themselves. I don't think oil has much to do with it. It may be a continuation of the Muslim/Christian/Jewish conflict."

United Kingdom

Rakesh Mathur of London said Hindus were occasionally being accosted as "Iraqis" - a slight change from the previously derogatory "Pakis." Overall there was quite a fear of terrorist acts, he said. Vidya Anand, a prominent Indian politician in England and Europe, said many there felt that the Middle East countries, including Iraq and Kuwait, had "taken advantage of the poverty of the Third World countries" by bringing in expatriates to do so much of the work. As to solutions, Anand said, "What we Hindus have to offer is our universal idea of the family of man and our concept that all men should live in peace."

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