

Islam is not the issue, Muslims are

By Hasan Suroor

HO-10
19/12
SO MUCH has been written and talked about Muslims and Islam after the September 11 outrage that anything more might sound like flogging a dead horse. But much of the debate has been marked by so much self-righteous indignation on the part of Muslims, and aggressive Muslim/Islam-bashing on the other side that it has been pretty much a dialogue of the deaf. The emotional pitch, despite liberalist interventions, has been simply too high to permit a dispassionate argument. What we have been presented with in the past three months is a black-and-white portrait in which all Muslims are the world's black sheep — intolerant, extremists and disloyal — and non-Muslims a huge international conspiracy to undermine Islam and its followers. There have been too many generalisations, too much stereotyping, a lot of deliberate fudge, a great deal of misinterpretation of Islam and competitive blame-game. It has been more a point-scoring slanging match than a cool debate.

Muslim sensitivities have become so strained that any disagreement with the so-called "Muslim viewpoint" is seen as necessarily hostile, much like the American cowboy's logic that either-you-are-with-us-or-with-the-enemy. It is the reflex action of a people who see themselves under siege thanks to widespread Islamophobia. In Britain, for instance, the anti-Muslim sentiment is so palpable that one does not have to be a Muslim to get a feel of it. There is a whiff of it everywhere — on television, in newspapers, private conversations, political debates and on the streets, all of it, of course, dressed up as debate. Having said that, the challenge for Muslims is to ask themselves why so much of the world is ranged against them even if it is for all the wrong reasons. It is a question which Muslims alone can answer. There has been the standard argument that it is all because of media stereotyping, the historical tensions between Christianity and Islam, and the hostility and prejudices bred by the wave of Muslim conquests. All of this is true but the sums, as any good economist would tell you, do

For far too long Islam has been allowed to become a licence for any Muslim to do whatever he pleases in its name.

not add up, just as they do not add up when Mr. George W. Bush says those who hate America do it because they do not like "our freedoms" and "values".

Nor would protestations on behalf of Islam do because the issue — no matter what Salman Rushdie or V.S. Naipaul might say — is not Islam, just as the issue was not Hinduism when hordes of Hindu fanatics brought down the Babri Masjid, and just as, despite its overtly denominational character, Christianity is not the issue in Northern Ireland. In the same way that the problem in 1992 was a certain section of Hindus who invoked their faith to justify their act of hooliganism, the problem now is a certain section of Muslims who are invoking religion to justify their actions. There is, though, a crucial difference, but we would come to that later. Claims that Islam is a peaceful religion which does not preach violence may be intended to counter the anti-Islam rhetoric, of which there has been no dearth in recent weeks, but every time a Muslim sings the virtues of Islam he inadvertently suggests that these qualities are unique to his faith; and as though other religions, in fact, preach hate and violence. This then is seized by critics of Islam to reel off examples of "Islamic" violence and prompts Salman Rushdie to agonise over the "nature" of Islam in weekend supplements while Naipaul gets another chance to deliver himself of some more steam against the "tyranny" of Islam and its assorted excesses.

Muslims resent, and legitimately, the fact that acts of violence by Muslims alone are invariably labelled as Islamic terrorism whereas similar acts by people of other faiths are not defined in religious terms. The Sikhs are the only other exception. But it is never Hindu terrorism, Christian terrorism or Jewish terrorism. Muslims can protest till they are blue in the face, but can they deny that it is their own black sheep who are respon-

sible for this? More Muslims than any other people do in the name of religion things that have nothing to do with it. Irish terrorists, whether Protestants or Catholics, do not claim that their "struggle" is in defence of Christianity even though it is very much rooted in religious divide; nor do Israelis, for all their Jewish paranoia, call their daily acts of violence a religious war, emphasising instead the territorial aspect of the conflict — and the same is true of the Tamil militants in Sri Lanka. Even the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and Bajrang Dal hoth-heads talked in terms of "sentiment" and "faith" when they brought down the Babri Masjid making sure that Hinduism remained untainted by their ugly actions. But every time a Muslim or a group of Muslims does something abominable they always choose to call it a "holy" war, and urge other Muslims to join it, whether it is in Chechnya, or Kosovo or Kashmir.

Interestingly, Palestinians seldom call their struggle a holy Islamic war whereas self-styled non-Palestinian Muslim fanatics, many of whom have nothing to do with the Palestinian issue, insist on giving it a religious twist to make it fit their own agenda.

In a situation where Muslims themselves have no compunction about exploiting the name of Islam by describing every injustice and every grievance as an attack on Islam, can they really blame others who might decide to take them at face value and call them Islamic terrorists? For far too long Islam has been allowed to become a licence for any Muslim to do whatever he pleases in its name, and the venerable "mullahs" and "ayatollahs" simply look on while Islam is hijacked for plainly un-Islamic causes.

Why has it not occurred to any appropriate Islamic authority to issue a fatwa against those who camouflage their obvious anti-Islamic activities in the garb

of jihad? Why not prove by action that Islam does not tolerate violence in its name? These are questions which one has put to Muslims again and again, but all one hears is mumbling. They agree that what is so often done in the name of Islam is not Islamic, but fudge the issue when it comes to nailing the lie of self-styled Islamists. Splitting hairs over the definition of jihad — whether it means violent fisticuffa with the infidels or peaceful inner struggle — and throwing the book at critics is not likely to convince anyone so long as the term continues to be used to inflict violence. If the latest Osama bin Laden videotape is authentic, then it is the most shaming example of Muslims debasing Islam. Every sentence of Osama and his comrades as they praise the September 11 terrorist attacks is prefaced or followed by reference to "Allah", and more than once the name of Prophet Mohammed is dragged in to "bless" the atrocity.

What is a non-Muslim, particularly in the prevailing climate, to make of these utterances? Here are self-proclaimed religious and "pious" Muslims defending the killings of thousands of innocent people in the name of "Allah", and there has not been a word of condemnation from quarters who, in the past, have dealt so ruthlessly with lesser mortals — the types of Rushdie and Tasleema Nasreen — for lesser sins. As a Muslim, one is more ashamed and embarrassed by what Osama and his gang have done in the name of Islam than those silly passages in "Satanic Verses" and "Lajja". This is the occasion, if ever there was one, for appropriate Islamic authorities to ponder and act.

It is distressing that the Muslim condemnation of what happened on September 11 has tended to echo the Hindu right-wing condemnation of what happened in Ayodhya on December 6, 1992. "Yes, we condemn it but..." The "ifs" and "buts" that sounded like a rationalisation of the incident, when mouthed by Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee and Mr. L.K. Advani, have the same unhappy effect when mouthed by a lot of Muslims in relation to September 11. Will someone save Islam from these Muslims?

THE HINDU

19/12



IN INDIA: A Ramzan prayer in the Jama Masjid of Srinagar

Why does the West see a wrong Islam?

BY PERVEZ HOODBHOY

Karachi: America has exacted blood revenge for the Twin Towers. A million Afghans have fled US bombs into the cold wastelands and face starvation. B-52s have blown the Taliban to bits and changed Mullah Omar's roar of defiance into a pitiful squeak for surrender. Osama bin Laden is on the run. But even as the champagne pops in the White House, America remains fearful — for good reason.

Subsequent to September 11 we have all begun to live in a different, more dangerous world. Now is the time to ask why. Like clinical pathologists, we need to scientifically examine the sickness of human behaviour impelling terrorists to fly airliners filled with passengers into skyscrapers. We also need to understand why millions celebrate as others die. In the absence of such an understanding there remains only the medieval therapy of exorcism; for the strong to literally beat the devil out of the weak. Indeed, the Grand Exorcist — disdainful of international law and the growing nervousness of even its close allies — prepares a new hit list of other Muslim countries needing therapy: Iraq, Somalia, and Libya. We shall kill at will, is the message.

This will not work. Terrorism does not have a military solution. Soon — I fear perhaps very soon — there will be still stronger, more dramatic proof. In the modern age, technological possibilities to wreak enormous destruction are limitless. Anger, when intense enough, makes small stateless groups, and even individuals, extremely dangerous.

Anger is ubiquitous in the Islamic world today. Allow me to share a small personal experience. On September 12 I had a seminar scheduled at the department of physics in my university in Islamabad, part of a weekly seminar for physics students on topics outside physics. Though traumatised by events, I could not cancel the seminar because 60 people had already arrived, so I said, "We will have our seminar today on a new subject: on yesterday's terrorist attacks".

The response was negative, some were mindlessly rejoicing the attacks. One student said, "You can't call this terrorism." Another said, "Are you only worried because it is Americans who have died?" It took two hours of sustained, impassioned, argumentation to convince the students that the brutal killing of ordinary people, who had nothing to do with the policies of the United States, was an atrocity. I suppose that millions of Muslim students the world over felt as mine did, but probably heard no counter-arguments.

If the world is to be spared what future historians may call the "Century of Terror", we will have to chart the perilous course between the Scylla of American

imperial arrogance and the Charybdis of Islamic religious fanaticism. Through these waters, we must steer by a distant star towards a careful, reasoned, democratic, humanistic, and secular future. Else, shipwreck is certain.

'Why do they hate us?", asks George W. Bush. This rhetorical question betrays the pathetic ignorance of most Americans about the world around them. Moreover, its claim to an injured innocence cannot withstand even the most cursory examination of US history. For almost forty years, this "naïvete and self-righteousness" has been challenged most determinedly by Noam Chomsky. As early as 1967, he pointed that the idea that "our" motives are pure and "our" actions benign is "nothing new in American intellectual history — or, for that matter, in the general history of imperialist apologia".

Muslim leaders have mirrored America's claim and have asked the same question of the West. They have had little to say about September 11 that makes sense to people outside their communities. Although they speak endlessly on rules of personal hygiene and "halal"

Islam is an abstraction. Moulana Abdus Sattar Edhi and Mullah Omar are both followers of Islam, but the former is overdue for a Nobel Peace Prize while the other is a medieval, ignorant, cruel fiend. Edward Said has pointed out Islam carries very different meaning to different people. It is as heterogeneous as those who believe and practise it. There is no 'true Islam'



IN PAKISTAN: A march in support of Osama bin Laden

or "haram", they cannot even tell us whether or not the suicide bombers violated Islamic laws. According to the Virginia-based (and largely Saudi-funded) Fiqh Council's chairman, Dr Taha Jabir Alalwani, "this kind of question needs a lot of research and we don't have that in our budget."

Fearful of backlash, most leaders of Muslim communities in the US, Canada, and Europe have responded in predictable ways to the Twin Towers atrocity. This has essentially two parts: first, that Islam is a religion of peace; and second, that Islam was hijacked by fanatics on September 11, 2001. They are wrong on both counts.

First, Islam — like Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, or any other religion — is not about peace. Nor is it about war. Every religion is about absolute belief in its own superiority and the divine right to impose itself upon others. In medieval times, both the Crusades and the Jihads were soaked in blood. Today, Christian fundamentalists attack abortion clinics in the US and kill doctors; Muslim fundamentalists wage their sectarian wars against each other; Jewish settlers holding the Old Testament in one hand, and Uzis in the other, burn olive orchards and drive Palestinians off their ancestral land; Hindus in India demolish ancient mosques and burn down churches; Sri Lankan Buddhists slaughter Tamil separatists.

The second assertion is even further off the mark. Even if Islam had, in some metaphorical sense, been hijacked, that event did not occur on September 11, 2001. It happened around the 13th century. A quick look around us readily shows Islam has yet to recover from the trauma of those times.

Where do Muslims stand today? Note that I do not ask about Islam; Islam is an abstraction. Moulana Abdus Sattar Edhi and Mullah Omar are both followers of Islam, but the former is overdue for a Nobel Peace Prize while the other is a medieval, ignorant, cruel fiend. Edward Said, among others, has insistently pointed out, Islam carries very different meaning to different people. It is as heterogeneous as those who believe and practise it. There is no "true Islam". Therefore it only makes sense to speak of people who claim that faith.

Today Muslims number one billion, spread over 48 Muslim countries. None of these has yet evolved a stable democratic political system. In fact, all Muslim countries are dominated by self-serving corrupt elites who cynically advance their personal interests and steal resources from their people. No Muslim country has a viable educational system or a university of international stature.

Reason too has been waylaid. To take some examples from my own experience. You will seldom encounter a Muslim name as you flip through scientific journals, and if you do the chances are that this person lives in the West. There are a few exceptions: Abdus Salam, together with Steven Weinberg and Sheldon Glashow, won the Nobel Prize for Physics in 1979 for the unification of the weak and electromagnetic forces.

I got to know Salam reasonably well — we even wrote a book preface together. He was a remarkable man, terribly in love with his country and his religion. And yet he died deeply unhappy, scorned by his country and excommunicated from Islam by an act of the Pakistani Parliament in 1974. Today the Ahmadi sect, to which Salam belonged, is considered heretical and harshly persecuted. (My next-door neighbour, an Ahmadi, was shot in the neck and hurt and died in my car as I drove him to the hospital. His only fault was to have been born in the wrong sect.)

Today's sorry situation contrasts starkly with the Islam of yesterday. Between the 9th and the 13th centuries — the Golden Age of Islam — the only people doing decent science, philosophy, or medicine were Muslims. For five straight centuries they alone kept the light of learning ablaze. Muslims not only preserved ancient learning, they also made substantial innovations and extensions. The loss of this tradition has proved tragic for Muslim peoples.

Science flourished in the Golden Age of Islam because there was within Islam a strong rationalist tradition, carried on by a group of Muslim thinkers known as the Mutazilites. This tradition stressed human free will, strongly opposing the predestinarians who taught that everything was foreordained and that humans have no option but surrender everything to Allah. While the Mutazilites held political power, knowledge grew.

But in the 12th century Muslim orthodoxy reawakened, spearheaded by the cleric Imam Al-Ghazali. Al-Ghazali championed revelation over reason, predestination over free will. He refuted the possibility of relating cause to effect, teaching that man cannot know or predict what will happen; God alone can. He damned mathematics as against Islam, an intoxicant of the mind that weakened faith.

Held in the vice-like grip of orthodoxy, Islam choked. No longer, as during the reign of the dynamic caliph Al-Mamun and the great Haroon Al-Rashid, would Muslim, Christian, and Jewish scholars gather and work together in the royal courts. It was the end of tolerance, intellect, and science in the Muslim world. The last great Muslim thinker, Abd-al Rahman ibn Khaldun, belonged to the 14th century.

Meanwhile, the rest of the world moved on. The Renaissance brought an explosion of scientific inquiry in the West. This owed much to Arab translations and other Muslim contributions, but it was to matter little. Mercantile capitalism and technological progress drove western countries to rapidly colonise the Muslim world from Indonesia to Morocco. Always brutal, at times genocidal, it changed the shape of the world. It soon became clear, at least to a part of the Muslim elites, that they were paying a heavy price for not possessing the analytical tools of modern science and the social and political values of modern culture — the real source of power of their colonisers.

■ TO BE CONCLUDED TOMORROW
By arrangement with Dawn

Lashkar, Jaish banned

Washington, November 3

9/11
A/11

FULFILLING INDIA'S long-standing demand, the US has banned the Lashkar-e-Tayyeba and the Jaish-e-Mohammad by designating them as 'Foreign Terrorist Organisations'. The LTTE is also included in the list of 66 groups and individuals blacklisted by the US.

"This is an ongoing process. We expect there will be future additions in the days and months to come," said Undersecretary of US Treasury for Enforcement Jimmy Gurule.

Indian Ambassador to the US, Lalit Mansingh, welcomed the decision of Secretary of State Colin Powell to accept the recommendation by Attorney General John Ashcroft to designate 46 groups as terrorists. The US doesn't employ the term 'ban' but the action carries the same legal consequences.

"You would expect that freedom fighters to be sons of the soil, not imported mercenaries. Seventy per cent of the terrorists we apprehend are people who come from outside. They are Pakistanis, Afghans, Arabs and others," said Mansingh.

The branding of Lashkar and Jaish as terrorist organisations comes as a stinging rebuttal of Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf's stand that terrorists in Kashmir are "indigenous freedom fighters". Harkat-ul-Mujahideen had already been banned by the US in its first list of rogue organisations.

US, said Mansingh, has been talking about draining the swamp. "But the problem cannot be solved if you just clean up the swamp in Afghanistan. You cannot leave the swamp in Pakistan intact because Pakistan has terrorist camps and madrasas which are training young terror-

US HELICOPTER CRASHES

A US helicopter, on a Special Forces mission in Afghanistan, crashed in bad weather on Friday, injuring four crew members. The crew were rescued and evacuated from the country, Pentagon said. A Taliban diplomat, however, said the militia had shot down two US helicopters in Ghazni in southern Afghanistan.

The Taliban reportedly lost a key district, Aq-Kupruq, near Mazar-e-Sharif to the Northern Alliance in a battle that killed 30 of the militia's fighters.

Agencies

ists. Once this war against terrorism has been started, it should be finished".

He held that it wouldn't be necessary for AB Vajpayee to tell President Bush that India rejected Musharraf's designation of terrorists in Kashmir as "freedom fighters" because Bush and Powell in their statements have accepted the fact that there was no distinction between terrorism in Kashmir and global terrorism that the US is fighting against.

The White House is reportedly expected to announce next week another list of individuals and groups whose assets are subject to seizure in the US war on terrorism. "The President, I think, has made it clear that al-Qaeda is the first organisation we are going after, but it is not the only terrorist organisation," said State Department spokesman Richard Boucher.

Lashkar and Jaish refused to comment on the ban, saying they had not yet received or seen the official communication from the Bush administration. Pakistan Foreign Office spokesman Aziz

Khaliq maintained a similar posture. When the US had frozen Jaish accounts last month, its leader Maulana Masood Azhar had said America was acting at the behest of India and the mujahideen would deliver a "smashing blow" to reassert their authority in Kashmir.

On the name change by Jaish to dodge the US ban, Gurule said it would be investigated. On whether the threat of sanctions against countries that fail to act against terrorist organisations has been invoked so far, he said the question was raised at the US Financial Action Task Force (FATF) plenary session this week.

"If countries are not in compliance with these new international guidelines, it is envisioned that these recommendations that have been embraced by FATF will be extended with respect to countries," he said. The action plan and compliance will be taken up by the FATF at its June plenary session and then it will be decided when countries will be put on the 'shame list'.

Britain continued its crack-down on terrorist funding, giving financial institutions a wide-ranging new list of terrorist organisations whose assets it wants frozen. Working in tandem with American authorities, it had previously released two lists of groups believed to be connected to Osama bin Laden and of individuals in Britain thought to have ties to al-Qaida.

The new list of 25 groups includes Babbar Khalsa, International Sikh Youth Federation, Lashkar, LTTE and Japanese cult Aum Shinrikyo. "The ready supply of finance is the lifeblood of modern terrorism," said Treasury Chief Gordon Brown.

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Osama hunt narrows to Paktia caves

HTC and Agencies
Washington/Islamabad, Nov 3

THE PENTAGON has said that it was "tightening the noose" around bin Laden. Rear Admiral John Stufflebeem said in Washington "it's a matter of time" before the US finds him. "The noose is tightening, the country is getting smaller."

The New York Post says, quoting US military and intelligence officials, Washington has focussed on two parts of Afghanistan where it believes Bin Laden is hiding out.

The first is a set of five Al Qaeda cave complexes in Paktia province, which borders Pakistan. The US had received Russian and Pakistani reports that Laden had reinforced ancient irrigation tunnels in these areas when fighting Soviet troops in the 1980s. The Washington Times says Bin Laden may have an underground bunker in central Afghanistan. Washington has placed the area under 24-hour surveillance using spy satellites, U-2 planes and Predator drones.

The second area is in Uruzgan province, near Kandahar. Taliban supreme commander Mullah Mohammad Omar and the 30-man governing council are suspected to be hiding there. Uruzgan is Omar's home province.

The Pakistan Observer on Saturday reported that bin Laden had been sighted in Kandahar. The newspaper said he was there to "boost the morale" of residents.

Rushdie pronounces fatwa against 'paranoid Islam'

Times News Network

LONDON: In a controversial outpouring set to enrage the very section of Muslim opinion that condemned him to long years as a fugitive with a price on his head, Salman Rushdie has issued his own fatwa against "Islamism" and a "paranoid Islam." He has challenged U.S. President George Bush and British premier Tony Blair's "virtuous" mantra that the ongoing conflict is not a war on Islam.



Salman Rushdie

"Let's start calling a spade a spade," Rushdie said bluntly in his column in Saturday's *Guardian* newspaper, "Of course this is about Islam", pointing to "worldwide Muslim demonstrations in support of Osama bin Laden," the fact that "10,000 men (had) massed on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, answering some mullahs' call to *jihad*, and that "the war's first British casualties (are) three Muslim men who died fighting on the Taliban side."

Rushdie also questioned the motives of the

increasingly-vocal Pakistani cricketer-turned-politician Imran Khan, who he says continued to demand "evidence of Al Qaida's guilt while turning a deaf ear to the self-incriminating statements of Al Qaida's own spokesmen."

The writer's passionate 1,000-word denunciation of the "mulch of belief" and "jumbled, half-examined" prejudices that push "believing Muslim men" into a pathological hatred and fear of "west-oxication", argued that "paranoid Islam" is the fastest-growing form of the religion in the world today.

In a searing critique of what he felt Islam had become to a "vast number of believing Muslims," Rushdie said it "stands not only for the fear of God — the fear more than the love, one suspects — but also for a cluster of customs, opinions and prejudices that include their dietary practices, the sequestration or near-sequestration of their women, the sermons delivered by their mullah of choice, a loathing of modern society in general, riddled as it is with music, godlessness and sex..."

► Rushdie's remarks could start a fire, Page 12

THE TIMES OF INDIA

4 NOV 2001

... MINISTER WIM KOK (left) and Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf at a joint press conference in Islamabad.

Pak tribals troop to Taliban help

FROM TAHIR IKRAM

Islamabad, Oct. 27 (Reuters): Several thousand armed Pakistani tribesmen set out to cross into Afghanistan today to help the Taliban militia which is under US attack, Islamic Party officials said.

Witnesses said buses, wagons, pick-up trucks and vehicles with Muslim activists armed with Kalashnikov rifles and rocket launchers left for Afghanistan's eastern Kunar province. Party officials said the group was led by firebrand Islamic Party head Sufi Mohammad who has called for jihad, or a holy struggle, against the US.

A Pakistani security official said from the Bajuar area bordering Afghanistan that the group of about 4,500 men had not crossed into Afghanistan yet, but had set up a camp for the night in a village 12 km (eight miles) short of the border.

The official, who asked not to be identified, said the group planned to head toward the border on Sunday. The government may

try to stop them.

"I don't have any other details. They may break up and go in smaller batches, but right now they are staying in a village where there are no telephones," he said, declining to specify what government action might be taken against them.

Qazi Ehsanullah, spokesman for the Tehrik Nifaze Shariat Mohammadi (TNSM) movement, said by telephone from the village of Maidan in Malakand district that Sufi Mohammad led the first convoy of mujahideen.

"There were a lot of them who passed from here," said Hussain Ahmed, a resident of Timargarh, a village two hours drive from the border.

Ahmed did not see any anti-aircraft guns but said people were armed with the popular Kalashnikov rifles.

Residents in the tribal border areas normally carry weapons and frequently travel between the two countries through mountain paths and dirt roads.

The Islamabad government

has only limited control of the tribal areas, established under British colonial rule.

Pakistan's interior minister, Moinuddin Haider, said in an interview on Thursday that the government would arrest any armed person trying to get into Afghanistan, but acknowledged the entire 2,500-km border could not be monitored.

Sufi Mohammad, head of TNSM, a movement that wants to impose Islamic Shariah law, gave the call for jihad after US-led strikes against the Taliban started on October 7. The attacks enraged Muslim sympathisers in Pakistan.

Hundreds of armed tribesmen blocked the Karakorum highway leading to China, part of the fabled Silk road, for a second day today.

"The road is still closed and police will not dare engage them here," said a resident of Besham, halfway between Islamabad and the northern town of Gilgit.

Witnesses said heavily armed members of various pro-Taliban

religious parties had set up road blocks.

Pak closedown threat

The leader of a coalition of hard-line Islamic groups today vowed to launch a national strike and civil disobedience movement unless Pakistan withdrew support for US military strikes on Afghanistan.

Maulana Sami-ul Haq, chairman of the Pakistan-Afghanistan defence council, a coalition of 35 groups, gave military ruler General Pervez Musharraf until November 7 to stop intelligence, over-fly rights and logistical support to the US.

Pakistan's largest Islamic party on Friday called for the army to topple General Pervez Musharraf for backing US-led military strikes on Afghanistan.

"God willing, we will remove Musharraf from power and drag him on to the streets," the deputy head of Jamaat-i-Islami, Liaquat Baluch, told thousands of people at a rally in support of Afghanistan's Taliban rulers.

THE TELEGRAPH

28 OCT 2001

THE TELEGRAPH

Islamic nations' protest against US muted

Doha, October 10

THE WORLD'S Islamic nations opposed on Wednesday the spread of the US-led onslaught on the Taliban regime to any other Arab or Islamic country and called for innocent lives to be spared.

The foreign ministers of the 57-member Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) said in a joint statement they "rejected that any Islamic or Arab country is attacked under the pretext of the fight against terrorism".

The OIC did not condemn the US-led strikes on Afghanistan, but instead expressed "concern

that they could cause victims among innocent civilians."

It also demanded that the "territorial integrity and Islamic identity of Afghanistan be guaranteed".

Washington warned the UN on Monday that its war on terrorism might extend beyond the borders of Afghanistan.

"The military operations must be limited to the authors of the attacks and no one else, so that the innocent do not have to pay the price," warned Qatar's emir, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, the current OIC chairman.

Sheikh Hamad underlined the "need to provide concrete proof

of the blame of perpetrators".

Iraq has been suggested as a potential target for more US-led strikes. Many OIC members states, however, are reluctant to sanction strikes on fellow Muslim or Arab countries.

In a meeting in Doha on Tuesday night, Arab foreign ministers voiced support for the international fight against terrorism, but gave a muted response to the US-led military reprisals.

The OIC said in a statement that any participation in the fight against terrorism must come under the banner of the UN, and urged that a UN-sponsored conference on terrorism be held.

"The OIC confirms the readiness of member states to take an active part in the fight against terrorism in the framework of collective UN-supervised international efforts to unequivocally define terrorism, attack its origins and pull up its roots."

The September 11 terror attacks in New York and Washington were "savage" and "contrary to religious precepts", OIC ministers said, calling for the "tracking down of the perpetrators and bringing them to justice".

They also blasted "any attempt to link Islam and terrorism", as well as any confusion between terrorism and the right of peoples, including the Palestinians and the Lebanese, to self-defence and resistance against Israeli occupation.

The ministers slammed Israel's "state terrorism" against the Palestinian people, calling

for the UN Security Council to ensure "international protection for the Palestinians and to put an end to the occupation of Arab territories seized in 1967".

"An international action to install security and peace in a world rid of terrorism and injustice must re-establish justice for the Palestinian people through the creation of their own independent state with Jerusalem as its capital," the organisation's final communique said.

While praising US President George W Bush's implicit support for a Palestinian states, the Islamic world's leaders called on Washington to "act quickly to

realise this strategic objective of reestablishing a fair and comprehensive peace favouring all states in the region".

Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, "strongly condemned the criminal acts that killed innocent people in Washington and New York", expressing "his sincere solidarity with Bush and the American people."

The OIC also announced the setting up of an aid fund for the Afghan people with a first cash injection of \$14 million, 10 million of which will come from Qatar, three from the UAE and one million from Oman.

AFP



THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

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Don't blame Islam for terrorism, says Blair

By Hasan Suroor

120-12 2001
LONDON, SEPT. 29. Clearly embarrassed by the anti-Muslim backlash at a time when Britain is trying to get Muslim countries on board the U.S.-led coalition against Osama bin Laden and his hosts, the Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair has spoken out strongly against attempts to turn the campaign against terrorism into a fight between the Christian West and Islamic East.

His views were echoed by senior European leaders who repudiated the idea of a "civilisational clash" and warned against "hate and confrontation", as the European Commission president, Mr. Romano Prodi put it. Mr. Blair, who has started reading the Quran lately, hailed Islam as a "peaceful" religion and said the events of September 11 were contrary to its tenets. Denouncing as "despicable" the attacks on Muslims following the terrorist atrocities in the U.S., he said on Thursday that there was no place for "such acts and attitudes" in a multiracial society like Britain.

"What happened in America was not the work of Islamic terrorists, it was not the work of Muslim terrorists. It was the work of terrorists, pure and simple," he declared at press conference flanked by a group of high-profile Muslim representatives whom he met at Downing Street in the wake of a wave of attacks on ethnic groups, particularly Muslims and Sikhs.

Mr. Blair's statement came amid a blazing controversy over the Italian Prime Minister, Mr. Silvio Berlusconi's remarks asserting the "superiority" of Western civilisation and values. While he avoided a direct comment on Mr. Berlusconi's widely-condemned remarks saying he had not seen the full text, he stressed that there was a common heritage in many of the faiths. He repeatedly distinguished Islam and Muslims from the terrorists behind the American nightmare, and reminded his audience that among those killed by terrorists around the world were many Muslims.

At the same time, he sounded impatient with those who tried to link anti-U.S. terrorism to Washington's policies in West Asia. He made clear that there could be no justification whatever for the attacks in America. Let there be "no measure of ambiguity" on that, he said with a touch of irritation but agreed that it was important to "re-invigorate" the peace process in West Asia. He faced a volley of questions echoing the view that the U.S. foreign policy towards the Muslim world has a great deal to answer for the widespread anti-U.S. sentiment.

Mr. Blair's meeting with the Muslim group, mostly Labour supporters, was seen as an elaborate public relations exercise. In an unusual move, he led his guests to the press conference where the group leader, Mr. Yousuf Bhailok of the Muslim Council of Britain praised the Prime Minister saying he had been "most reassuring in quite clearly distinguishing between Islam and the terrorists". Later, TV cameras were allowed to linger on as Mr. Blair chatted with the group on the doorsteps of No. 10 — an unusually long chat telecast "live" on major channels.

In another public gesture to mollify Muslim opinion, Prince Charles visited a mosque in east London. He told worshipers at the Suleymaniye mosque — the largest in Western Europe — that he wanted to show how much he "minded about and cared about the Islamic community."

Meanwhile, Mr. Berlusconi's remarks for which he has since apologised provoked an outrage across Europe with Mr. Prodi saying that "we will not fall in any way or under any circumstances into a war of civilisations". "We are building a Europe that is humane and open to all traditions and religions. We cannot give into hate and confrontation," he said. The Belgian Prime Minister, Mr. Guy Verhofstadt said: "I can hardly believe that Mr. Berlusconi made such remarks because the E.U. is based on values such as multiculturalism and the meeting of different civilisations." In Britain, the Foreign Office Minister, Mr. Peter Hain debunked the talk of the superiority of Western "supremacy" saying Europe had produced Hitler, Mussolini and Stalin, while the Home Secretary, Mr. David Blunkett called them "offensive".

30 SEP 2001

HEZBOLLAH

- Leader: Sayed Nasrallah
- Description: Strongly anti-West and anti-Israel. It is often directed by Iran. Is suspected of involvement in the bombings of the US Embassy and Marine barracks in Beirut in 1983, and the kidnappings of Americans in Lebanon
- Strength: A few hundred operatives and several thousand supporters
- Base: Primarily in Lebanon
- External aid: Iran and Syria

HAMAS

- Leader: Mahmoud al-Zahar
- Description: Aims for an Islamic Palestinian state. Has staged large-scale suicide bombings against Israeli targets
- Strength: Unknown
- Base: Israel and occupied territories
- External aid: Palestinian expats; Iran; private benefactors in Saudi Arabia

PALESTINE ISLAMIC JIHAD

- Description: Committed to the creation of an Islamic Palestinian state, it conducts suicide bombings against Israel
- Strength: Unknown
- Base: Iraq
- External aid: Iraq; Libya in the past

POPULAR FRONT FOR LIBERATION OF PALESTINE GENERAL COMMAND (PFLP-GC)

- Description: Split from the PFLP and violently opposed to Arafat's PLO
- Strength: Several hundred
- Base: Headquarters in Syria; bases in Lebanon
- External aid: Syria and Iran

POPULAR FRONT FOR LIBERATION OF PALESTINE

- Leader: Abu Ali Mustafa (assassinated)
- Description: Estranged from the PLO because of its opposition to negotiations with Israel, it conducted international terrorist attacks during the 1970s, and since 1978 has staged attacks against Israeli or moderate Arab targets
- Strength: About 800
- Base: Syria, Lebanon, Israel and the occupied territories
- External aid: Syria

ROGUES GALLERY

Some of the prominent Arab and Islamic terrorist organisations, and their leaders



AL-QAEDA

- Leader: Osama bin Laden
- Description: Formed by bin Laden in the late-1980s among Arabs who fought the Soviets in Afghanistan, it is the prime suspect in the World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks
- Strength: Several thousand
- Base: Training camps and base in Afghanistan
- External aid: Bin Laden inheritance; donations illicitly siphoned from Muslim charities

AL-JIHAD

- Leader: Ayman al Zawahiri
- Description: Close to bin Laden, its goal is to make Egypt an Islamic state. Responsible for assassinating Egyptian President Sadat in 1981, bombing the Egyptian embassy in Pakistan in 1995
- Base: Egypt, Yemen, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Sudan, Lebanon, UK

GAMA'A AL-ISLAMIYYA

- Leader: Ayman alZawahiri
- Description: Egypt's largest militant group, it staged the 1997 assault at Luxor that killed 58 tourists.
- Strength: Several thousand at one point
- Base: Egypt, with presence in Sudan, US, Afghanistan, Austria, Yemen
- External aid: Egypt believes Iran, bin Laden and militant Afghan groups support it

ARMED ISLAMIC GROUP

- Leader: Anyar Zouabri
- Description: Radicalised when the Algiers govt voided the 1992 election of an Islamic opposition party, it began a campaign of bombings, assassinations and kidnappings against foreigners in Algeria
- Strength: Thousand operatives
- External aid: Algerians in western Europe; perhaps Iran, Sudan

Source: The Wall Street Journal
IE Graphics/B.K. SHARMA

'SIMI has extensive pan-Islamic links'

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, SEPT. 27. Formed in 1977 in Aligarh, the Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) has always adopted a hard-line, militant posture on various issues of concern to the Muslim community. Highly-placed sources in the Government said that the SIMI has developed fairly extensive pan-Islamic contacts.

It is learnt that the issue of imposing the ban on the SIMI figured during the meeting of the Union Cabinet last evening and the decision was also taken but kept under wraps as State Governments, particularly Uttar Pradesh, could not have ordered arrests of SIMI activists.

The SIMI was said to be closely associated with the Riyadh-based World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY) and the International Islamic Federation of Students Organisation in Kuwait. It also has links with the students's wings of Jamaat-e-Islami units in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal.

Several militant and fundamentalist bodies in India are controlled by former SIMI activists. Prominent among them are the National Democratic Front and Islamic Youth Centre (IYC), both Kerala-based, and the TMMK in Tamil Nadu.

Sources said that SIMI activists and sympathisers were involved in several explosions between February and August this year in trains and several parts in Uttar Pradesh. Their interrogation revealed SIMI's links with the Kashmiri militant group, Hizb-ul-Mujahideen. This was also corroborated following the recent arrest of many SIMI activists of Jalgaon involved in the planting of explosives outside the RSS headquarters in Nagpur. They also admitted to being trained by the Hizb in handling of arms and explosives.

According to sources, in 1993, following the arrest of a Sikh terrorist, it became known that SIMI cadres, Sikh terrorists and Kashmiri militants had been brought together by the Pakistan's ISI through the Jamaat-e-Islami in Pakistan in furtherance of its disruptive game plan in India. Intelligence inputs suggested that SIMI cadres were also imparted ideological and weapons training in Pakistan.

Abdul Rehman, a Chinese-Muslim militant fugitive from Xinjiang province and his escort, Nazrul Islam, a SIMI activist of West Bengal, were apprehended at Indo-Bangladesh border in January last year. His interrogation revealed that he was in contact with a number of senior SIMI functionaries.

The arrest in September last of SIMI activists — Maroof Ahmed and Abdul Mobin, a student of AMU, by U.P. police, had led to detection of six cases of explosions in different districts of the State during March-August last year. The explosion on August 14 last year in Sabarmati Express in Barabanki district which resulted in death of nine persons was also the handiwork of SIMI activists, sources said. More recently, the SIMI's involvement was also suspected in Kanpur riots in April this year.

According to the SIMI, the Saudi fugitive, Osama bin Laden, is an outstanding example of a true "Mujahid." The founder of Hamas, Sheikh Mohammad Yasin, is a frequent invitee to important SIMI functions.

As part of international ramifications of Islamic "jihad", the sufferings of Muslims in Bosnia, Kosovo, Palestine and Chechnya, are highlighted by the SIMI in its conclaves. All these elements of the SIMI's ideology are reflected in articles published in its organs, particularly the *Islamic Movement*. The SIMI, celebrating silver jubilee of its existence, describes itself as the first all India students organisation, the vanguard of Millat-e-Islamia and the harbinger of Islamic revolution.

TERROR IS NOT A PART OF ISLAM

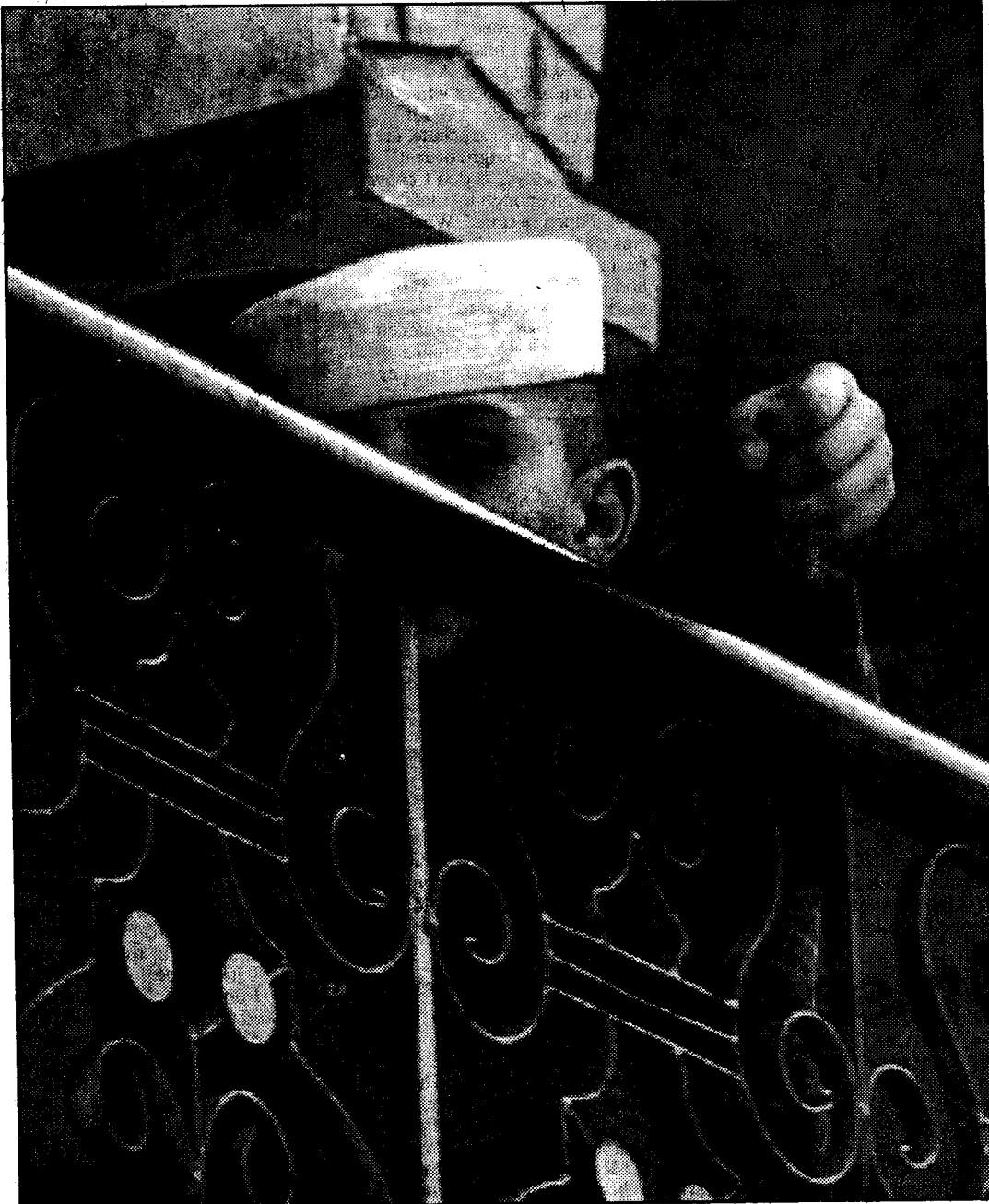
9/11/01 AA-7 24/9

BY DR RAFIQ ZAKARIA

If those who planned, prepared and executed the most horrendous and barbaric attack on the World Trade buildings in New York and the Pentagon in Washington on Black Tuesday, September 11, 2001, are proved to be a band of misguided, fanatic Muslims, then they have done the greatest harm to Islam itself; in the long run its sufferers will be one billion simple, ordinary Muslims. The culprits thought they would show they could humble even the mightiest power in the world. For such senseless bravado, they sent thousands of innocent Americans to death. As a backlash they have generated waves of hatred against their co-religionists in every part of the world.

The incident has once again provoked some hostile elements to link terrorism with Islam; nothing however can be further from truth. As President Bush has rightly observed: "The face of terror is not the faith of Islam." It is the harbinger of peace, equality and inter-racial brotherhood. It spread all over the world in less than a hundred years because, as H.G. Wells has pointed out in his classical work *Outline of History*, "Islam prevailed because it was the best social and political order the times could offer. It prevailed because everywhere, it found politically apathetic peoples, robbed, oppressed, bullied, uneducated and unorganised and it found selfish and unsound governments out of touch with any people at all. It was the broadest, freshest and cleanest political idea that had come into actual activity in the world and it offered better terms than any other to the masses of mankind." The Quran has described the Prophet of Islam as "the mercy for all living creatures." It has reminded the faithful, by prefacing every chapter of it, except one, that Allah is "most benevolent and most merciful."

There are three basic elements of terrorism: (1) Killing of innocent human-beings. (2) Suicidal operation. (3) Wrong indoctrination by invoking the name of God. Now let us see what the Quran admonishes on all these three points. In surah al-Maida, verse 32, it says that whosoever kills an innocent human being it is as if he has killed the whole human race. As for those who indulged in suicidal operations, the Quran has told them in surah al-Baqra, verse 195: "And make not your own hands contribute to your own destruction." As regards wrong indoctrination, Quran tells the faithful in surah Baqra, verse 204: "Beware of the one who deludes you with his worldly talk and appeals and quotes God as witness to his sincerity; he is the most deviant of enemies." Neither Osama bin Laden nor Mullah Omar and the leaders of the Taliban are fully equipped, even theologically, to understand the teachings of the Quran; their learning has been superficial and, as it is said, half knowledge is always dangerous.



INNOCENCE: A boy at the Haqqania School at Akora Khattak, Pakistan shows his fist after exclaiming jihad against America on Saturday (AP)

As for the concept of Jihad, the Prophet had repeatedly made it clear that it has to be first resorted to for self-purification and then, if necessary, to defend one's faith, with the clear proviso

that Allah does not approve of aggressors. It is unfortunate that the other side of the so-called Jihadi coin rarely gets presented in the media. In the present context the Ulama from different parts of the world have denounced terrorism unequivocally and declared that it is negation of Islam. One of the most outstanding of them is the Pakistani scholar Dr Israr Ahmed who is highly respected among devout Muslims. He has deeply regretted the wrong methods — patently anti-Islamic — adopted by terrorists claiming to be jihadis and rebuked them of having posed the greatest danger to Islam and the Muslims.

As for the concept of Jihad, the Prophet had repeatedly made it clear that it has to be first resorted to for self-purification and then, if necessary, to defend one's faith, with the clear proviso that Allah does not approve of aggressors. It is unfortunate that the other side of the so-called Jihadi coin rarely gets presented in the media. In the present context the Ulama from different parts of the world have denounced terrorism unequivocally and declared that it is negation of Islam. One of the most outstanding of them is the Pakistani scholar Dr Israr Ahmed who is highly respected among devout Muslims. He has deeply regretted the wrong methods — patently anti-Islamic — adopted by terrorists claiming to be jihadis and rebuked them of having posed the greatest danger to Islam and the Muslims.

He met some young trainees who told him they had been assured by their mentors that through terrorist methods they would be able to obtain power and serve Islam, which otherwise through elections they could not. The fact however is that fundamentalists in Muslim lands have never obtained

parts of the world have denounced terrorism unequivocally and declared that it is negation of Islam. One of the most outstanding of them is the Pakistani scholar Dr Israr Ahmed

ing of the two buildings of the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon, every religious leader — from the Chief Mufti of Saudi Arabia and the Rector of Al-Azhar University of Cairo to the pontiffs of Malaysia and Indonesia — each one of them has denounced it. Even President Khatami of Iran has unequivocally condemned it. So has Goddafi, who told Mubarak of Egypt that Osama bin Laden is an enemy of Islam. The Saudis also hate him and regard him as a renegade of Islam. Except Iraq and Afghanistan, for reasons which can be well understood, all Muslim countries have assured America of their full and unqualified support in the fight against terrorism.

In the long history of Islam, there is only one instance of a sect among Muslims who resorted to acts of terrorism; it took place in the eleventh century

when the disciples of the notorious Hassan al-Sabah indulged in the murder of innocent persons. Their terror so shook the Muslim world that Imam Ghazali — one of the greatest among the Ulema and Sufis — who is hailed as the "Rejuvenator of Islam" wrote tomes against such crimes and warned the Muslims that if they did not destroy terrorism, terrorism would destroy Islam. He said this in deep anguish because he then asserted that Islam was indestructible.

However since the last decade, some fanatics who have strayed from the true path are seeking to justify terrorism in the name of Islam, in fact they have so besmirched its image that it is being looked upon by Muslims as a vehicle of violence. It has, in consequence, alienated the Muslims from non-Muslims; they are shunned, distrusted and looked upon with suspicion. Denied employment, their businesses are ruined, their children are mocked at and disliked both by their teachers and the taught. Their young boys and girls are taunted and tortured by their compatriots. In many places Muslims now live in constant fear; they are shown no sympathy or consideration and are treated as outcasts or untouchables. Every time as these peddlers of violence unleash their wrath, the bulk of the Muslims tremble with fear; they are gripped with panic and a sense of foreboding; they are terrified of the backlash and wonder what would happen to them and their families.

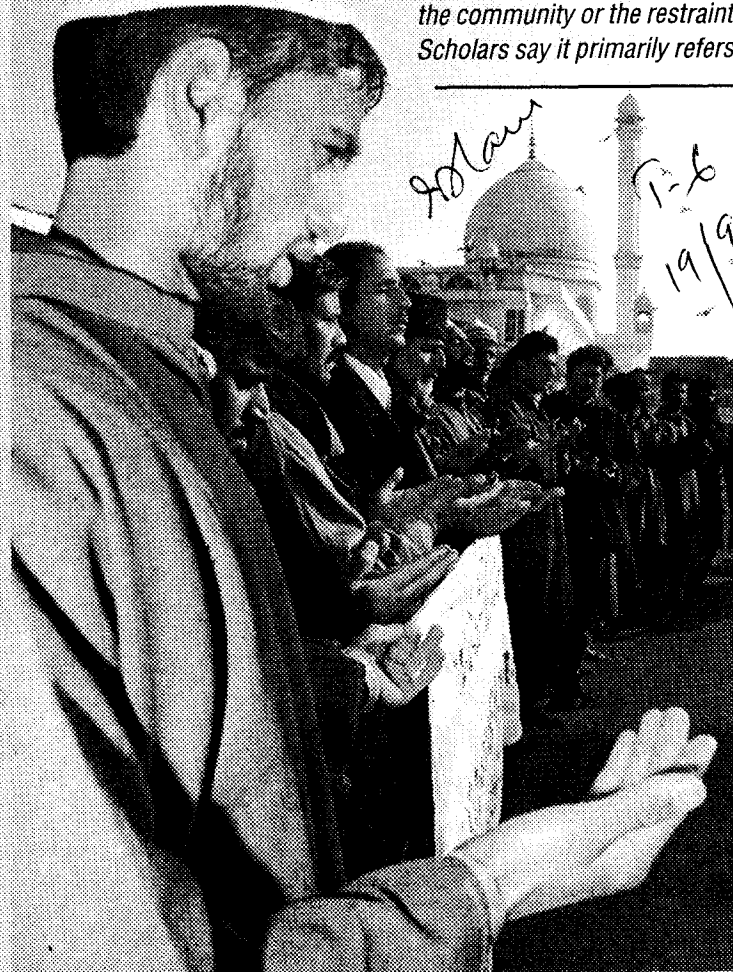
The ten thousand trainees of Al Quaida, the network of the modern Helaku, Osama bin Laden have made the lives of millions of ordinary Muslims a virtual hell. How long will the peace-loving Muslims remain helpless spectators to their own doom, suffering humiliation and deprivation? These so-called Jihadis whose minds have been poisoned and whose hearts are hardened as stone through indoctrination of distorted beliefs must be made to realise that the perilous path they have embarked upon in the hope of becoming *ghazi*, if they live, or *shaheed*, if they die are causing untold misery to their own co-religionists. As Thomas Lippman, former Middle East correspondence of *Washington Post* has observed: "The call of Jihad fosters the impression that Moslems — that is, those who practice the religion of Islam — are generally troublemaking fanatics whose penchant for working out religious conflict through violence is a menace to the rest of the world." It is only one element. It validates the belief that Islam promotes violence, which is at best the half-truth. And it belittles Africans, Arabs, and Asian by imputing to them primitive or irrational motivations that we may not ascribe to the participants in violent upheavals in non-Moslem countries."

■ TO BE CONCLUDED TOMORROW

JIHAD: FACTS AND FICTION

WHAT JIHAD IS

The Arabic word jihad is often translated as "holy war", but a more accurate translation is "holy struggle". Islamic scholars say the term "holy war" was actually coined in Europe during the Crusades to mean a war against the Muslims. In a purely linguistic sense, the word jihad means struggling or striving. In a religious sense, as described by the Quran and teachings of the Prophet Mohammed, jihad means striving for the benefit of the community or the restraint of personal sins. It can refer to internal as well as external efforts to be a good Muslim, or believer. Scholars say it primarily refers to efforts to improve oneself.



DOES IT ALLOW USE OF FORCE?

- Jihad is a religious duty. If jihad is required to protect the faith against others, it can be performed using anything from legal, diplomatic and economic to political means.

If there is no peaceful alternative, Islam also allows the use of force, but there are strict rules of engagement. Innocents — such as women, children, or invalids — must never be harmed, and any peaceful overtures from the enemy must be accepted.

THE PROPHET'S CAUTION

- Military action is therefore only one means of jihad, and is very rare.

To highlight this point, the Prophet Mohammed told his followers returning from a military campaign: "This day we have returned from the minor jihad to the major jihad," which, he said, meant returning from armed battle to the peaceful battle for self-control and betterment.

WHO CAN ORDER JIHAD?

- In case military action appears necessary,

not everyone can declare jihad. The religious military campaign has to be declared by a proper authority, advised by scholars, who say the religion and people are under threat and violence is imperative to defend them. The concept of "just war" is very important.

IS IT BEING MISUSED?

- Many political and religious groups have hijacked the concept of jihad over the ages in a bid to justify various forms of violence. In most cases, Islamic splinter groups invoked jihad to fight against the established Islamic order. Scholars say this misuse of jihad contradicts Islam.

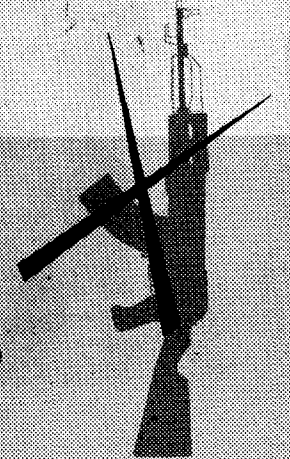
SANCTIONED JIHADS

- Examples of sanctioned military jihad include the Muslims' defensive battles against the Crusaders in medieval times, and before that some responses by Muslims against Byzantine and Persian attacks during the period of the early Islamic conquests.

WHAT JIHAD IS NOT

- Jihad is not a violent concept.
- Jihad is not a declaration of war against other religions. The Quran specifically refers to Jews and Christians as "people of the book" who should be protected and respected.
- All three faiths worship the same God. Allah is just the Arabic word for God, and is used by Christian Arabs as well as Muslims.

- Military action in the name of Islam has not been common in the history of Islam. Scholars say Islam does not sanction most calls for violent jihad.
- Warfare in the name of God is not unique to Islam. Other faiths throughout the world have waged wars with religious justifications.



Source: Reuters

Attacks are result of American atrocities, says Syrian exile

Times News Network

LONDON: In London, a disabled Muslim cleric with a passport revoked by the government, a following across continents and ambitions to convert the West to Islam, pronounces on the attacks in New York and Washington: "America had it coming."

Even as he faces the predictable rush of Western hostility and suspicion against a section of the Muslim community, Sheikh Omar Bakri Mohammed, founder and leader of the radical Al Muhajiroun group, told *The Times of India*, "Yes, it is Muslims who have done this. There is no one else who would feel that much anger against America."

Al Muhajiroun, which has offices here, in Pakistan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and Mauritius, is alleged to train "fighters" for Kashmir, the Palestinian territories and Chechnya. Sheikh Omar, who openly acknowledges that he shares ideas and information and has friends and acquaintances among some of the Muslim groups denounced as terrorist organisations worldwide, said in an exclusive interview that he had spoken to 68 groups since the attacks happened on Tuesday.

"I have spoken to everyone, jihadi groups, radical groups, people who offer support of all sorts. You name it: Algerias GIA, Hezbollah, Hamas, Lashkar-e-Toiba, Jaish-e-Mohammed, Tanzeem-ul-Jihad of Egypt none of them know who did it, none of them claim responsibility, but everyone is agreed that these are the consequences of American atrocities."

The Al-Muhajiroun leader, who is bitterly opposed to Britain's new anti-terrorism law, which, he says, makes it an offence even to carry a pamphlet supporting Lashkar-e-

Toiba, however, added that he had not spoken to those close to Osama bin Laden, the wealthy Saudi exile that America regards its enemy number one. "We don't agree with bin Laden's methodology," he said blandly.

In the hours since the attacks on American soil, the world media has been increasingly keen to hear the views of Sheikh Omar, a Syrian exile, who advocates pan-Islamic militancy against the West. Craftily denying that he had "arms training camps", Sheikh Omar only stated that several young Muslim men in his group "follow their religious obligation to keep fit and have physical training".

Sheikh Omar, a spokesman for the International Islamic Front, is seen to represent the growing radical Islamic threat across the Western world, not least in Britain, France and Germany with their huge Muslim populations running into several millions. Even as the British Prime Minister insisted on Wednesday that it was time for right-thinking Muslims to make clear that "acts of terrorism and savagery were wholly contrary to the Islamic faith", Sheikh Omar repeated that "Muslims believe that if they die for a just cause they go to paradise."

Commentators warn of the inherent potential for conflict, something West Asia expert Toby Dodge describes as "a very worrying climate for Muslims in Europe, especially with talk of a civilisational clash". But Sheikh Omar, for one, remains unconcerned and outspoken. "They rush to judge Muslim groups because they feel guilty that they have done something to us. The question is not who did it, but why America creates more enemies than friends."

Fear of anti-Muslim backlash in Britain

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, SEPT 14. Britain's Muslim community is bracing itself against a backlash after sporadic incidents of racial abuse and intimidation which, it believes, have been prompted by media reports linking Muslims with Tuesday's terrorist mayhem in America. Its fears were fuelled after newspapers this morning highlighted the activities of Muslim extremist groups clandestinely operating in Britain despite an official ban.

A siege mentality began to take shape following reports that mosques in some place had been defaced with anti-Islamic graffiti, and Muslim institutions were receiving threatening phonecalls. Three Islamia schools in London were closed down after their staff and students complained of harassment. Muslim girls, wearing headscarves, were reported to be particularly vulnerable to racist abuse. Suggestions that Arabs stop wearing their traditional dress to avoid identification have been condemned by some Muslim activists as cowardice.

As fears of a backlash heightened, representatives of Muslim organisations demanded police protection for mosques and other Islamic institutions. They also called upon the media to exercise "restraint" and not to play up the denominational identity of those behind the terrorist attacks in U.S. There was widespread resentment over what Muslims regarded as attempts to "pillory"



Men pray at the Rashediya Grand Mosque in Dubai on Friday. The prayer leader, Fathi Abdul Manem al-Helwani, not in the picture, did not directly address the terrorist attacks three days ago in the United States, but spoke on the "understanding of good and evil". In a more direct reference to the attacks, he said, "We as Muslims, respect all humans and all innocent people." — AP

the entire community as terrorists.

Dr. Syed Aziz Pasha, general secretary of the Union of Muslim Organisations of UK and Ireland, told the *The Hindu* that the "anti-Islamic slant" in sections of the media was being exploited by racists to whip up Islamophobia. "We have suggested to the authorities that they issue an advice to the media to be more restrained," he said.

His organisation, he pointed out, had condemned the U.S. events in the strongest terms possible and stated that there was no justification for Tuesday's car-

nage. "Islam is a religion of peace and does not permit killing innocent people," he said disagreeing sharply with some Muslim activists who have qualified their condemnation of what happened in America with a criticism of American foreign policy. He said fears of a backlash were genuine and he and other community leaders had conveyed their concerns to the police.

A spokesman of the Muslim Council of Britain which claims to be the most representative of Muslims here said that the community was living in "fear" and blamed the media for portraying

all Muslims as "black sheep". "Unfortunately the word Muslim has been made out such that the Muslim community in its entirety is held responsible, which is not right," said Mr. Yousuf Bhailok, general secretary of MCB.

An official of the trust which runs Islamia schools said: "We had a number of abusive calls saying: you scum, we'll get you for this." 180-15

The growing Muslim fears came even as the Government tried to emphasise that it was wrong to stigmatise any faith for the events in America. "This is terrorism against the world, and that includes the Muslim faith," the Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair's official spokesman said. On Wednesday, Mr. Blair had welcomed the condemnation by the Muslim Council of Britain and said: "The vast majority of Muslims are decent, upright people who share our horror at what has happened." 159

Meanwhile, despite widespread unease that Britain should not blindly commit itself to any retaliatory action by Washington Mr. Blair today won cross-party endorsement for his offer of unqualified support to America.

The consensus during a special session of Parliament today was that the international community should unite to fight terrorism, and the strongest support came from the new leader of the Opposition, Mr. Ian Duncan Smith, who was elected leader of the Tory party on Thursday.

THE HINDU

15 SEP 2001

Muslim League youth issue burqa diktat

Mumbai, September 9

CLOSE ON the heels of the Mumbai Regional Muslim League declaring its resolve to field bomb blast accused as candidates for the forthcoming civic polls here, another controversy has erupted with its youth wing directing Muslim women to wear burqa.

President of the Muslim League's youth wing, Mohammed Aftab Alam, in a statement today, warned the Muslim women to follow his party's directive or face "concrete" action. He, however, did not elaborate on what "concrete action" would be.

According to Alam, "women are being used and victimised in the name of art, culture and modernisation. Vulgarities already exists in the society. Sacred relations are being reduced to mere materialistic symbols".

Meanwhile, Mumbai Regional Muslim League president Farooque Azam has sought police protection in view of threats received by him for announcing his decision to field bomb blast accused as candidates for the Mumbai civic polls, slated to be held early next year. He has lodged a complaint with the police in this regard but reiterated his resolve to field the blast accused in the civic polls.

Reacting to six blast accused spurning his offer of contesting civic polls, Azam said in a statement this would not deter his party from fielding such candidates. "We had identified 95 blast accused as candidates for civic polls but shortlisted ten of them. If some among them are not interested to contest the civic election, we may field others, he said.

The Shiv Sena has condemned the militants' diktat to non-Muslim women in Kashmir to wear bindis or saffron dupattas as a mark of identification.

Sena's North India chief jai Bhagwan Goyal said the party would oppose all such diktats.

'Burqa fatwa un-Islamic': With a day left for the deadline for implementation of the burqa fatwa of militants in Kashmir, Muslim organisations today denounced the use of "coercive tactics" to make women wear the veil, saying Islam did not permit the use of force to implement even good things.

Although supportive of the idea of women wearing a burqa, the Muslim organisations denounced "coercion" being employed by the Lashker-e-Jabbar, to implement it.

The Lashker-e-Jabbar has asked all Muslim women in Kashmir to wear a burqa after Monday. Its activists threw acid on the faces of three girls recently for failing to agree to its diktat.

The fatwa may have brought good business to tailors in Kashmir, but it has cut no ice within various sections of the society including Muslim organisations.

"The Shariat prescribes that all women wear a veil. But the method should be to convince and not throw acid," said Maulana Mahmood Madani, general secretary of Jamiat-Ulema Hind. Madani said Islam had prescribed modesty for both men and women. "Moving of Muslim women without a veil is 'haram' (prohibited). But throwing acid to enforce something is against humanity and Islam."

Maulana Ajaz Ahmad Aslam, assistant general secretary of Jamiat-e-Islami Hind, said the use of force by militants was "un-Islamic, anti-social and undemocratic". All-India Muslim Majlis-e-Mushawarat president Syed Shahabuddin said the tactic as an attempt to defame Islam.

PTI

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

10 SEP 2001

Mahathir cautions against Islamisation

By Amit Baruah

SINGAPORE, JULY 3. The Malaysian Prime Minister, Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, has said the Taliban was doing a disservice to Islam by preventing women from working — even as doctors to treat women patients.

Addressing a student symposium at the Universiti Malay in Kuala Lumpur yesterday, the Prime Minister, who is facing a growing political challenge from a hardline Islamic party, PAS, said: "Do we want to be like that (Taliban)? These are not our models..."

Asked by a student why the Government did not implement full Islamic law, Dr. Mahathir responded by saying that no country in the world practised total Islam. However, he claimed that many foreign leaders had pointed to Malaysia's status as a moderate Islamic State.

"We have tried our best to ensure that Muslims can practise their religion without being molested by anyone. That is the determinant whether a Government is Islamic or not," Dr. Mahathir was quoted as saying.

"What is it that we have not carried out that made us non-Islamic?

There is no country in the world that could carry out everything which is accepted by everyone as Islamic. There will always be someone who is not happy with the level of Islamic practices. This leads to non-stop polemics that cause disunity," he stated.

Dr. Mahathir's address to the student community comes at a time when there is a growing perception that PAS has developed strong links in this section of society and there is a need for the ruling coalition to address the issues raised by PAS.

In other remarks, the Prime Minister called upon students to keep away from politics and leave governance to the Government. "It's easy to hold a protest, even idiots can do that," Dr. Mahathir was quoted as telling the students.

"In our neighbouring country (a possible reference to Indonesia), students believed it was their responsibility to hold demonstrations all the time. Today, they find themselves unemployed because their country has become poor. Maybe, you are not happy with what is happening in the country — corruption, cronyism, misuse of funds, mega projects, and want all these to stop.

Islamic militancy on the rise in Bangladesh

By Haroon Habib

DHAKA, JUNE 19. The series of explosions that has rocked Bangladesh in the recent past has alarmed everyone about the future of democracy in the country.

The deaths of 22 political activists in a major bomb explosion at the ruling Awami League's office in Narayangonj near here on June 16 is not seen as an isolated event. The blast is the latest in a series that has claimed 144 lives over the last two and half years. As the country prepares for general elections, violent incidents have been on the increase. The alleged attack on the motorcade of the main Opposition leader and former Prime Minister, Begum Khaleda Zia, just a day after the Narayangonj carnage in which the ruling party M.P., Mr. Shamim Osman was also badly injured, appears to be a ominous portent of the days to come before the general election.

The Narayangonj M.P. was one of the outspoken young ruling party leaders who had earlier declared that he would not allow Begum Khaleda to visit the port town if she came with fundamentalist leaders like Prof. Golam Azam and Maulana Matiur Rahman Nizami, the two Pakistani collaborators during the War of Liberation who have now become Begum Khaleda's closest political allies for the coming crucial election. While Begum Khaleda has accused the Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina and

the Home Minister for the attack on her motorcade when she was on her way to Faridpur on Sunday, describing it as "a plot to kill me", the ruling party leaders brushed aside her claim, saying the incident was an "arranged game to sidetrack the Narayangonj carnage".

The ruling party and its secular sympathisers allege that the main Opposition and the fundamentalist Jamaat-E-Islami are using "foreign trained extremists" to create a situation ahead of the election as they sensed defeat. But the BNP-led alliance has in its turn blamed the Awami League. Nearly two years after the blast in the western Jessore district headquarters that killed 10 leading cultural activists as they were performing on the dais, the police has finally chargesheeted some people, including a few fundamentalists allegedly having links with Pakistan and Afghanistan and local Opposition politicians. But the case is yet to be decided in the court.

Police and intelligence agencies, which had sounded a red alert across the country, have so far arrested a number of fundamentalists, mainly belonging to the Harkat-ul-Jihad, on the charge of planting two bombs at a meeting attended by Sheikh Hasina in Kotalipara, her home district. Army experts said if the explosives has not been detected beforehand several would have been killed. It is generally felt that the bomb culture has been introduced by religious fundamentalists who have close links

with Pakistan and the Taliban, and their target is not only Sheikh Hasina but those who preach secularism or want Bangladesh to be a moderate Islamic country. The recent killing of 10 Christians in a church in Moksedpur in the Prime Minister's home district is again seen as the work of these fanatics.

Fears of destabilisation tactics by fundamentalists, supported by anti-liberation opposition groups, were substantiated when the police arrested some Madrassah teachers and young mullahs and confirmed their hand in the bomb blasts at the Bengali New Year's cultural function in Dhaka and also at several cultural functions across the country. The Opposition BNP, Jamaat-E-Islami and Islami Oikya Jote (IOJ) have criticised the Awami League of acting on behalf of India "to crush Islam".

By all indications, the activities of Islamic militants have grown in Bangladesh and intelligence agencies have confirmed their links with various foreign religious extremist organisations, including the Taliban. But the question is, why was there no trial? And also why is the main Opposition sidetracking the issue.

Against the backdrop of heightening political tension, the much talked-about Bill on life-long State security for Sheikh Hasina and Sheikh Rahena, the two surviving daughters of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, was placed in Parliament on Monday.

THE HINDU

BLAST IN CHURCH

Bangla Islamists playing communal game

SUNDAY'S bomb blast in a century-old Roman Catholic church in a peaceful village in Bangladesh's Gopalganj district killing 11 people and seriously injuring 26 others is an ominous and unprecedented development. This was the first time that a church has been attacked although Christians, who are less than one per cent of the population, are the country's smallest minority community and have been living in peace and harmony with other communities in Gopalganj which also happens to be prime minister Sheikh Hasina's ancestral home. This was the third major blast in the past five months to have rocked Bangladesh. Two earlier ones in Dhaka claimed 18 lives. What is worrying is that besides a definite pattern behind the blasts the main purpose of this violent exercise is to destabilise Bangladesh before the coming parliamentary elections. It would seem to be the work of those who have been giving a communal twist to Bangladesh politics.

Last year Alfred Soren, a Santhal who embraced Christianity was killed in Rajshahi for organising local Santhals and fighting for their rights. Since the Gulf War Bangladesh's Islamist groups, like the Jamat i Islami, having strong links with Pakistan have been preaching hatred against the local Christians and projecting them as Western stooges. Like their counterparts in Pakistan they made Bangladesh's small Ahmediya community their target and branded them anti-Islam. An Ahmediya mosque was bombed in Sylhet last year. With foreign-funded Islamist groups mushrooming all over Bangladesh their brand of disruptive politics is also becoming rampant.

THE STATESMAN

Taliban dress code for Hindus

150-13

NEW DELHI, MAY 20. The tiny Hindu population in Afghanistan has been asked by the Taliban regime to wear yellow cloth to identify themselves and follow the Shariat or face prosecution.

In a recent decree, a separate dress code has been fixed for the Muslims and non-Muslims and a Hindu household is required to put a two-metre yellow cloth on his house so that his identity is known.

According to the decree, a copy of which was made available to UNI, Hindus and Muslims cannot live in the same house.

Those living together have been asked to leave within three days. Any violation would invite prosecution, it said.

The heads of Hindu places of worship have been asked to pre-

pare a list of places where the Hindus and Muslims are living together. Hindus cannot build new prayer houses. They have been asked to conduct prayers in the existing ones. Places of worship once destroyed cannot be rebuilt. Hindu men cannot wear turbans and the women should wrap their body with a big yellow 'chadder' with two small holes over their eyes. Hindu women can go to markets, but they should wear an iron necklace. No Hindu can keep arms.

Over the past few years, the Hindu and Sikh Afghans have watched helplessly as their homes, businesses and places of worship have been destroyed. As minorities in a fundamentalist Islamic country, Hindus are in deep trouble.

'Chechnya a battle in the war against Islamic terror'

Fred Weir
Moscow, April 26

RUSSIA'S MILITARY campaign in Chechnya is the vanguard of a global struggle against Islamic fundamentalist forces based in Afghanistan, who are waging a terrorist war against India, Russia and the West, according to some Kremlin officials.

"In Chechnya, Russia stands in the front lines of the battle to protect European civilisation," Russia's new Defence Minister, Sergei Ivanov, told an assembly of Western military experts in Germany last month.

Over the past year Russia has dramatically stepped up its

security cooperation with India and former Soviet countries of Central Asia, citing the need for a joint strategy against the common threat of Afghan-based terrorism.

There is a good deal of evidence to support the Kremlin's view. Russian forces in Chechnya have captured dozens of Arab mercenaries, many of them graduates of Taliban training camps in Afghanistan. One of the chief leaders of the Chechen rebellion is the Jordanian-born Khattab, who cut his teeth fighting Soviet forces in Afghanistan in the 1980's.

Russian police say Chechen crime gangs are behind a wave of narcotics, originating in

Afghanistan and sweeping through Russian cities. The number of heroin addicts in Russia has grown to four million in the past five years, they say.

Chechen religious militants also pose an ideological threat to stability in Russia's heavily-Muslim southern and Volga regions.

"The Chechen rebels who defeated Russia in the first war (1994-96) were nationalists, fighting for Chechnya's independence," says Yuli Gladkeyevich, an expert with the AVN military news agency.

"But that changed after an influx of trained Islamic militants and money from Saudi Arabia and other sources," he says. "These

new forces were not interested in building a peaceful and independent Chechen state. They wanted to destabilise the whole region".

Some Chechen warlords began supporting militant Islamic sects among neighbouring Caucasian republics. In August 1999, Khattab and his ally, the Chechen leader Shamil Basayev, launched a full-scale invasion of the mainly-Muslim republic of Dagestan.

"Russia might have tolerated an independent Chechnya, but it cannot accept constant subversion and conflict throughout the entire north Caucasus," says Gladkeyevich.

"Determined action had to be

taken".

But experts say the 18-month Russian campaign to quell separatism in Chechnya has been excessively savage, and may have permanently alienated the republic's population from Moscow.

"Basically the Kremlin destroyed Chechnya in order to save it," says Alexander Kononov, director of the Institute of Strategic Assessments in Moscow.

"A whole new generation of Chechen youths are growing up amid ruins, gunfire and horror. They have learned nothing but violence and hatred," he says.

"That is a prescription for permanent war".

Strike costs Bangla economy \$204 m

AN OPPOSITION-LED three-day strike that paralysed businesses and schools and caused traffic snarls in at least 60 cities and towns this week could cost the Bangladesh economy an estimated \$204 million, an industry group said on Thursday.

The strike, called to force Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's resignation, could cost the country nearly \$68 million in lost production and exports per day, the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry said. Police said the strike left one person dead and nearly 10 injured.

Dhaka returned to normalcy on Thursday with thousands of cars, buses and cycle-rickshaws thronging the streets.

AP

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

28 APR 2001

27 APR 2001

Taliban puts Bamiyan rubble on display

Bamiyan, March 26

IGNORING WORLDWIDE criticism by Muslims, Buddhists and art lovers, Taliban showed off their destruction of two ancient statues on Monday to foreigners at the Bamiyan mountainside where the relics were blasted apart.

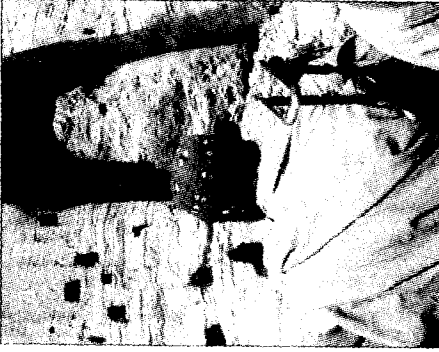
All that remained of the two towering sandstone statues of Buddha that had been carved in the mountainside in the 3rd and 5th centuries was chunks of rubble. Taliban's interpretation of Islam recently caused their reclusive leader, Mullah Mohd Omar, to order them and many other religious statues in Afghanistan destroyed. He said they were idolatrous and against the tenets of Islam, which forbids idol worship.

Soaring 51 metre, the larger of the two statues was believed to have been the world's tallest standing Buddha. Local residents, who considered the mountain monuments neighbours, called the lofty sandstone Buddha, "solsol," meaning "year

After year." The statue measuring 36 metre was thought by residents to be a woman, although no body parts were visible when it stood. They called her "shahmama," or kingmother.

Taken to the site by Taliban on Monday, foreign journalists saw that holes had been cut into both statues and explosives inserted there and set off to destroy the two giant art works. "First, we destroyed the small statue. It was a woman. Then we blew up her husband, the big statue," Abdul Haidi, the Taliban commander who oversaw the destruction, said. "We used explosive material to blow them up."

In early March, explosive charges were used to fell the two statues, according to international aid workers who spoke with Afghans in Bamiyan. Taliban soldiers who have been waging a see-saw battle for Bamiyan against their northern-based opponents initially captured the area in 1997. Since then, international organisations, including the Italian-funded Society for the



AP PHOTO
A Taliban soldier stands guard at the remains of Buddha statues in Bamiyan on Monday.

Preservation of Afghanistan's Cultural Heritage, have been worried about the fate of the Buddhas.

With good reason. As early as 1998, Taliban troops attacked the smaller statue, believing it was a

woman. With mortars they blasted its groin and one of its arms. Giant chunks of the stucco folds in the sleeve of the Buddha's garment were gouged out. "But what is worse, the head, which did not have a face for the last few centuries, seems to have been blown away, possibly with explosives," SPACH said of the damage that was inflicted in September 1998.

The head of the tallest statues had been blackened by two burning tires.

Also lost to history are the ancient frescoes in the niches above the largest Buddha. The recent destruction of the two Buddha statues generated international outrage. Even Taliban's closest ally, Islamic Pakistan, pleaded for the preservation of the statues.

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan recently said: "The Taliban were so certain about the righteousness of their decision that one could simply not move them."

But that was not always the case. In July 1999, Omar issued a

decreed saying "all historical cultural heritage is regarded as an integral part of the heritage of Afghanistan." In the decree, the text of which was published in the cultural society's newsletter, Omar devoted considerable attention to the two giant statues of Buddha in Bamiyan. Omar said the Taliban Government "regards the statues with serious respect." He said they should be protected. They are an example of Afghanistan's pre-Islamic history and "a potential major source of income for Afghanistan from international visitors."

The decree warned of retaliatory actions from Buddhists if the statues were destroyed. "The Taliban Government states that Bamiyan shall not be destroyed but protected." But on February 26, Omar issued a new edict saying Afghanistan's Islamic clerics had studied the Islamic implications of the statues and decided they should be destroyed. The destruction reportedly began on February 4 and 5.

AP

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

Sangh turns rebuild

FROM OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, March 20: Not so long ago, the RSS had flagged off a violent movement to destroy the Babri masjid. Today, they want to piece together stone by stone statues destroyed by others.

Samskar Bharati, a cultural outfit of the RSS, wants to rebuild the priceless statues pulled down by the Taliban. The Bamiyan Buddhas razed to the ground in Afghanistan will be cloned in Kulu valley of Himachal Pradesh.

"We are going to get sculptors and artists from all over the country to replicate the statues," says Ameer Chandra, organising secretary of Samskar Bharati.

They have chosen a stone of the same size and a team of 16 sculptors and artists, led by Sam-

skar Bharati's Delhi chief Advait Gannayak, will begin work on the project on Buddha Purnima.

Despite the RSS' known opposition to "videshi" culture, the Samskar Bharati turns a tolerant face to the public. India, its activists say, has always given shelter to the persecuted and will continue to do so. The Samskar Bharati is so ambitious about its project that it said it will try to retrieve a part of the "debris" left by the demolished statues.

Gannayak was a student of Santiniketan and Baroda School of Art.

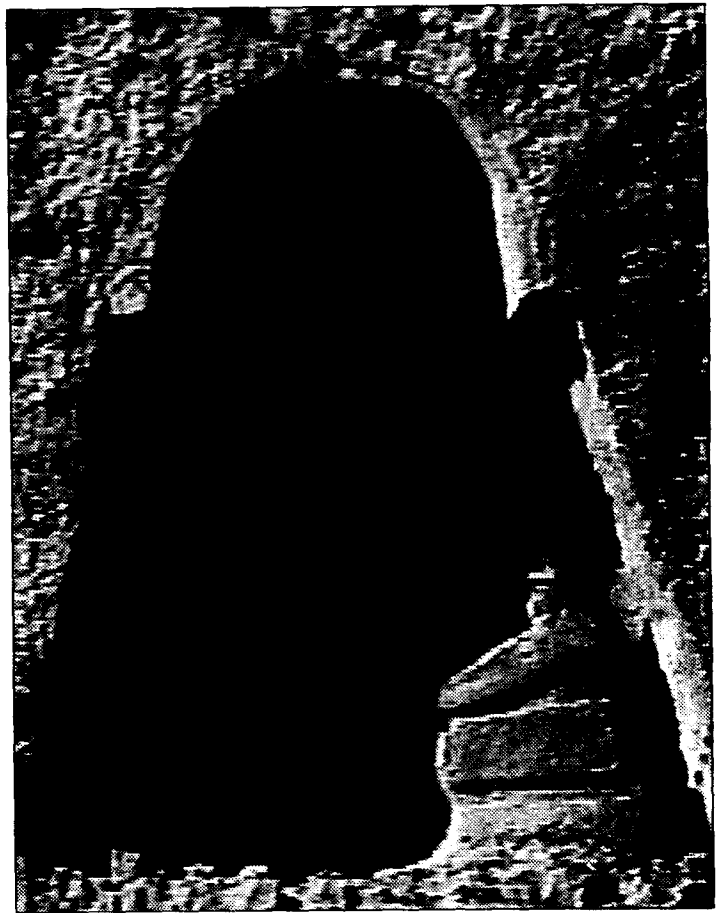
He is also a senior member of an organisation that had attacked Jatin Das two years ago and the organisers of an exhibition the RSS found offending.

"It is sweet irony that Samskar Bharati is outraged by the Taliban, considering it had attacked Arpana Caur's gallery which was exhibiting M.F. Hussain's lithograph showing a woman at the tail of Hanuman," says Ram Rehman of Safdar Hashmi Memorial Trust (Sahmat).

The lithograph was titled "Hanuman rescuing Sita". The title, however, was not given by Hussain. "The RSS was offended because it showed a nude woman," said Rehman.

Raghu Vyas, senior member of the Samskar Bharati, had led a mob on the rampage and slapped cases against Arpana Caur.

Whatever its track record, the Samskar Bharati has now decided to play the role of the high priest



The debris of the Bamiyan Buddha from a recent video. (PTI)

against cultural vandalism. Chandra said the project of rebuilding the Bamiyan statues will gather momentum at the organisation's celebration of the *Bhartiya* new year next Monday, marking the

beginning of the Indian calendar. "We are going to welcome the dawn of the Indian new year on the banks of the Ganga in Varanasi," said Samskar Bharati's organising secretary.

THE TELEGRAPH

01 MAR 2011

Taliban's Islamic ideas baffle Muslims

ISLAMABAD: What sort of religious regime would demand the demolition of grand artworks that have stood for 15 centuries? Or eliminate schooling for girls after age 8? Or chop off the hands or feet of thieves at stadium rallies?

According to the zealous Taliban who have ruled most of Afghanistan since 1996, faithfulness to Islam requires such unprecedented harshness. But Muslim moderates and scholars in other lands say the Taliban are wrong.

Afghanistan's destruction of two monumental Buddha statues in recent days has provoked near-universal outrage, from Muslim leaders as well as art lovers. "Such behaviour comes to undermine the image of Islam and even to make some Muslims skeptical whether their faith can face the challenges of modernism," former Egyptian diplomat Hussein Ahmed Amin wrote this week.

An Afghan scholar in the U.S., Amin Tarzi, charges that his homeland's rulers feed off the peoples' "illiteracy and lack of knowledge of traditional Islamic teachings."

The Taliban employ religion as well as Pashtun tribal traditions "to legitimise their rule based on a terror system," says Tarzi, of the Monterey (California) Institute of International Studies. The Pashtun are Afghanistan's largest ethnic group.

Others are simply baffled. "I personally don't have any idea where they get some of their ideas," says professor Anis Ahmed of Pakistan's Islamic University.

Some tenets come from literal in-

terpretation of the *Quran*, Ahmed explains, but "if you take things literally that will lead to extremism." He says the *Quran* must be read in light of its context and application in the *sunnah*, the authoritative sayings and practices of the Prophet Mohammad. The Muslim world has largely spurned the Taliban. The Organisation of the Islamic Conference refuses to admit the regime and only three of the 56 member nations (Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and UAE) grant it recognition.

Even neighbouring Iran, whose 1979 revolution energised militant Islamists worldwide, spurns the Taliban, although that hostility stems from alleged Taliban persecution of fellow Shi'ite Muslims. Islam's larger Sunni branch dominates in Afghanistan. The Taliban sometimes depict the limit on girls' schooling as temporary. Their prohibition of women working outside the home is part of strict segregation of the sexes to prevent sexual impropriety. Similarly, women are only allowed outside the home if accompanied by a close male relative.

The government relented on employment to let women work for international agencies, but last year shut foreign-run charity bakeries that employ destitute widows.

There's long been debate over Islamic punishments. The *Quran's* prescribed penalty for theft is cutting off the hands, but Ahmed says this applies only in extreme situations and others cite the very next verse, which teaches God's forgiveness of those who repent. (AP)

THE TIMES OF INDIA

19 MAR 2001

Pakistan allows jihadi outfits to collect funds discreetly

By K.J.M. VARMA

Islamabad, March 16: In a major climb-down from its campaign to crackdown on fund-raising activities of Islamic fundamentalist militant groups, Pakistan government has reached a tacit understanding with militant outfits permitting them to discreetly collect funds and recruit volunteers to fight Indian forces in Kashmir, media reports here said.

"After prolonged negotiations with the government agencies, mainstream religious organisations, involved in armed struggle against Indian forces in Kashmir have agreed to discreetly pursue their drive

to collect donations and recruit volunteers," the News said on Friday.

"In return, the government has decided not to pursue, too aggressively, its pledge to force the closure of all such activity," it said.

"The latest development has effectively reversed the dramatic announcement made by interior minister Moynuddin Haider, promising elimination of all such activities on February 13 last," it said.

The police and other law enforcing agencies have been told not to raid or use force against any jihadi outfits following a series of closed door meeting with the leaders of the groups, the report said.

The decision to permit the jihadi groups was taken after an "influential group" within the government prevailed on military ruler General Pervez Musharraf that a "rash official action" might provoke an armed reaction from jihadi groups and

framed to ban any religious organisation found involved in sectarian violence.

But an official clarification that followed made it amply clear that the proposed ban would be confined only to extremist organisations involved in sectarian violence between the majority Sunni and minority Shia sects in Pakistan.

"Though sections of the regime made fine distinction between the sectarian Sunni and Shia outfits that indulged in violence in Pakistan, it is the jihad organisations fighting in Kashmir that have registered phenomenal growth in small and big towns in Pakistan," the News said.

The police records in Karachi show that

in the last one year alone, Jaish-e-Mohammed, formed by Maulana Masood Azhar, Pakistani militant released from an Indian jail following hijacking of the Indian Airlines plane, has opened 135 contact points since last year to collect funds and recruit militants to fight Indian forces in Kashmir.

Following this unpublicised agreement between the government and the militant outfits, the jihadi groups have been permitted to collect funds during the recently concluded Id festival, the report said.

Under the new agreement, the jihadi organisations would not be collecting funds by making direct appeals, unlike in the past. (PTI)

SPOTLIGHT

may push Pakistan to an internal strife of the scale currently being witnessed in Algiers, Egypt and Tunisia, the newspaper said.

The report follows an official announcement on Thursday that a new law has been

THE ASIAN AGE

17 MAR 2001

Destruction of Bamiyan Buddhas confirmed, says UNESCO chief

PARIS: The international community acknowledged on Tuesday that it has failed to stop the ruling Taliban militia in Afghanistan from destroying the ancient Buddha statues at Bamiyan, with UNESCO branding their demolition "a crime against culture."

It was the first time that the destruction of the statues had been independently confirmed, despite a concerted effort by Arab, Islamic and international players to spare them. "I was distressed to learn from my special envoy, Pierre Lafrance, that the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas has been confirmed," the U.N. cultural body's chief Koichiro Matsuura said in a statement.

"It is abominable to witness the cold and calculated destruction of cultural properties which were the heritage of the Afghan people, and, indeed, of the whole of humanity," the statement said.

The Taliban had said the huge figures, carved into sandstone cliffs in Bamiyan city more than 1,500 years

ago when Afghanistan was a seat of Buddhism, are "false idols" and must be destroyed in line with Islamic laws.

Yet there were no shortage of efforts to try reversing the Taliban's edict, including from many Muslim countries and Pakistan, the closest ally of the Taliban and one of only three countries which recognises its puritanical regime. After talks over the weekend between Pakistan interior minister Moinuddin Haider and the Taliban officials failed, Haider played for time "suggesting that since this edict has repercussions for the entire Muslim world, it should be discussed with the Ulema (Islamic clerics) from outside Afghanistan."

But the high-level delegation of Islamic clerics that later visited Afghanistan returned empty-handed on Tuesday.

The Taliban said the clerics had "failed to convince us that destroying the statues was un-Islamic."

They were part of a delegation of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) led by Qatar's

foreign minister and included Egypt's top religious leader and two leading Sunni clerics, the same faith as the Taliban.

"From a religious point of view it is clear, these statues are part of humanity's heritage and do not affect Islam at all," said the Egyptian cleric, speaking on his return to Cairo.

A similar diplomatic mission from Japan this week also failed to overturn Taliban supreme leader Mullah Mohammad Omar's decree, which he said was based on orders of God and the Koran, Islam's holy book, and was "irreversible."

U.N. secretary general Kofi Annan tried his hand at convincing the Taliban not to carry out their "lamentable decision," meeting the Taliban foreign minister Wakil Ahmad Mutawakel while on a tour of South Asia. Mr Annan stressed that many Islamic countries opposed the move, adding that destroying cultural masterpieces was not the way to mobilise the donor community to help Afghanistan overcome its humanitarian crisis. (AFP)

THE TIMES OF INDIA

14 MAR 2001

What became of Islam's democratic vision?

The great betrayal

12-8
19/2

IS Islam undemocratic by the very nature of its teachings? Why is it that no Muslim country has a democratic dispensation? Why is it that almost every Muslim country is governed either by a king, a sheikh, a military dictator or has only a partly-democratic set up? These are important questions which must be satisfactorily answered. But the more important questions are this: is Islam responsible for this state of affairs or Muslims? Can any religion be democratic or undemocratic? Or do its followers make it so?

No religion, in my opinion, should be construed as democratic or undemocratic, since it is rooted in a social structure not necessarily of its creation. A religion provides a vision of a new society but hardly succeeds in totally subverting the existing society.

Islam was born in a society that was basically tribal and in which there were no formal political structures or a state machinery. Islam provided that society not only with a new, humane vision, guaranteeing freedom of conscience, it also gave detailed laws, both written and oral. The Prophet of Islam gave laws through his pronouncements, in addition to what was contained in the Koran. However, the Prophet himself never assumed any political powers. He was essentially a spiritual guide who commanded a tremendous respect. His concept of *ummah* was also an inclusive one and it included Jews, idol worshippers and Muslims within it.

A new society did begin to emerge in the first few years of Islam. However, that phase did not last long. The Umayyads, a clan within the tribe of Quraysh, managed to capture power and convert a proto-democratic society into a feudal, hierarchical one. The Prophet had enjoyed an immense moral authority but he never converted it into formal political power. He was succeeded by four Caliphs, re-

ferred to as rightly guided Caliphs, as they tried to follow the vision of Islam and always consulted Muslims before taking any important policy decision. Although, formally, it was not a democratic society in the sense that modern societies are, it was democratic in spirit during the first 30 years of the rightly guided Caliph.

However, during this period, vested interests of different kinds began to emerge throwing society into political turmoil. This turmoil resulted in the assassination of the third and fourth caliphs. On account of these tumultuous social and political conditions, the Umayyads succeeded in capturing power. They shifted the capital to Damascus



ASGHAR ALI ENGINEER

Muslim intellectuals must reflect on why Muslim countries have not been able to usher in true democracy, despite the claim that Islam is democratic in spirit

in Syria, formerly ruled by the Byzantine emperors, and adopted Byzantine ways, which were thoroughly feudal. In the process Islamic society, which was quite democratic in spirit, became feudal and hierarchical.

The only challenge came from the grandson of the Prophet who resisted the authority of Yazid, who became the first ruler of the Islamic world by virtue of the feudal principles of succession and not through the elective principle of the early caliphs. However, in the encounter, Imam Husain and his supporters were all martyred in Kerbala.

The Islamic society thereafter never saw the return of the early Caliphate period. Muslim society was thoroughly feudalised. Although rulers in

the Islamic world often styled themselves as caliphs, they were in fact absolute rulers. These political developments also had its impact on Islamic jurisprudence. The Ulama, who interpreted the Koran and the Hadith, did so under the influence of feudal values. Many of them went against the spirit of Islam and justified the feudal hierarchy. The few who resisted were isolated and lost out.

The Ulama with integrity and character could not save the early political structure of Islam, although they had great moral authority. The Islamic world was ruled by corrupt and power-hungry monarchs. Western imperialism in the 19th century could not make much difference as the

came even more authoritarian.

The entire Arab world lacks any mass leader of any calibre as its authoritarian rulers use highly repressive policies and do not allow persons of this kind to emerge. What is more disturbing is that the Ulama in these countries support the ruling establishment and use Islam to legitimise authoritarian rule. (Any movement for human rights is condemned as a Western conspiracy against Islam, although human dignity and freedom of conscience are central to the teachings of the Koran.) Iran has held regular elections but there, too, the orthodox Ulama have exercised a stranglehold over the judiciary and, without a free judiciary, democracy remains a nominal construct. Khatami's supporters who are reformists are being persecuted and many newspapers with a reformist orientation are being shut down by the orthodox judiciary in Iran.

Malaysia, too, has limited democracy. With Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammed dubbing human rights as a Western conspiracy, there is no real democratic freedom in Malaysia. Indonesia had for many years remained under military rule and has only now come under a democratic spell. But is experiencing great political turmoil and it will take quite some time for democracy to stabilise here as powerful vested interests are out to sabotage it.

Clearly, then, it is social and economic conditions which are more responsible for the lack of democracy in the Islamic world and not the teachings of Islam. However, Muslim intellectuals must reflect seriously on why Muslim countries have not been able to usher in true democracy, despite the claim that Islam is most democratic in spirit. Without democratising the Muslim world, no worthwhile change can be ushered in. And the absence of democracy only means the further subjugation of the Muslim masses.

INDIAN EXPRESS

14 MAR 2001

Taliban bent on demolition

Kabul, March 12 (Reuters): A Taliban leader today ruled out any compromise with scholars from the world's largest Islamic organisation and said workers were obliterating the last traces of Afghanistan's ancient statues of the Buddha.

A delegation from the 55-nation Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) was in the southern Afghan town of Kandahar, headquarters of the austere Islamic group, to try to halt the Taliban's campaign to destroy all statues

on the grounds they are un-Islamic.

"The (OIC) Al Azhar delegation is in Kandahar and they have no religious justification to show that our work is non-Islamic," Taliban information minister Quadratullah Jamal said.

"We would repeat to them as we have to other delegations that we are not going to back away from the edict and that no statues in Afghanistan will be spared," Jamal said.

UN secretary-general Kofi

Annan said yesterday after meeting Taliban foreign minister Wakil Ahmad Muttawakil it was probably too late to save the statues, which mostly date from the centuries before the arrival of Islam, when Afghanistan was a centre of Buddhist culture.

Speaking of Afghanistan's best-known Buddhist statues, two towering images carved into a sandstone cliff in central Bamiyan province, Jamal said the demolition there was nearly finished.

THE TELEGRAPH

13 MAR 2001

Islam
**'Giant Buddhas
completely
destroyed'**

ISLAMABAD, March 11. —
The Taliban have completely
demolished two giant Buddha
statues, hewn from a cliff face
in central Afghanistan, inter-
national aid workers said
today, despite desperate pleas
from abroad to spare the third
and fifth-century relics.

The destruction was ordered
late last month by the Taliban
who say statues are idolatrous.
Taliban appeared today to
have obliterated both statues,
the taller of which was belie-
ved to be the world's tallest
standing Buddha.

The destruction of the two
giant Buddhas was corro-
borated by Taliban officials in
southern Afghanistan and by
an aid worker who said his in-
formation came from witnesses
in the area. — AP

THE STATESMAN

12 MAR 2001

Pakistan under global pressure

By B. Muralidhar Reddy

ISLAMABAD, MARCH 9. Under pressure from all over the world, the Pakistan Interior Minister, Lt. Gen. (retd) Moinuddin Haider, is leading a high-level delegation to Kandahar, spiritual headquarters of the Taliban, to plead with the Taliban leadership that it spare the historic pre-Islamic artefacts.

The decision came even as the Afghan Islamic Press (AIP), quoting sources in the Taliban Government, circulated a report to the effect that the militia used a large amount of explosives on Thursday to destroy the top part of one of the two giant statues. It is not clear which of the two statues was targeted.

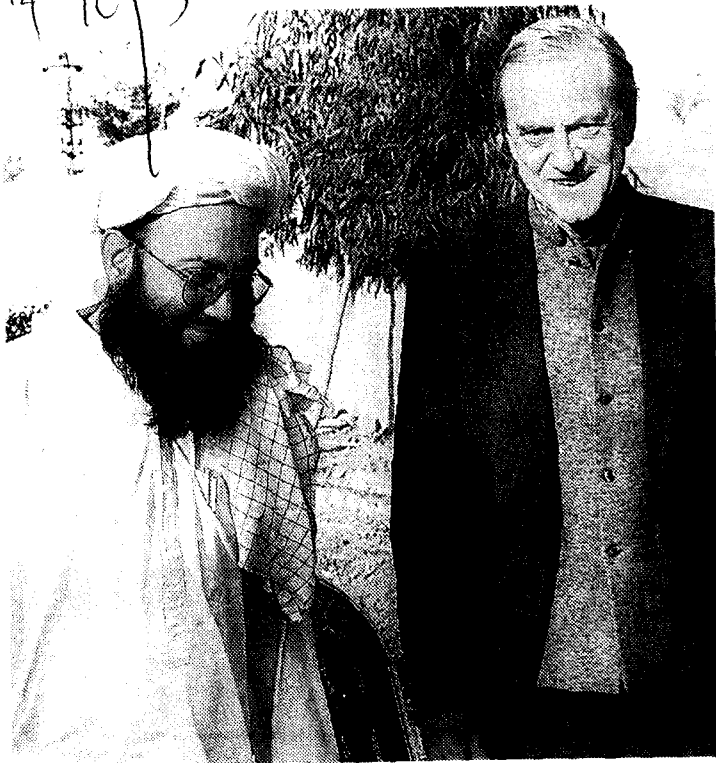
The Taliban has refused to heed the advice of virtually the whole world, including the U.N. Secretary-General, to stop the destruction of the Buddha statues in Bamiyan.

The adamancy of the regime has put Pakistan in an embarrassing situation. In the last few days, it has been under immense pressure from the international community to take up the matter with the Taliban as it was perceived to be a friend, philosopher and guide of the militia in Afghanistan.

As one of the three countries in the world that recognised Taliban, and the only country with a full-fledged embassy in Kabul, the expectations are very high.

Islamabad-based envoys of several countries have conveyed to Pakistan their concern over developments in Afghanistan. The pressure was so much that the Musharraf Government deemed it necessary to call the Taliban Ambassador in Islamabad to the Foreign Office and appraise him of the sentiments of the world community.

The nature of pressure could be gauged from the fact that the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister, Mr. Laxman Kadirigamar, has air-dashed from Colombo to impress upon Islamabad to immediately take up the matter with the Taliban. A section of the Pakistan press had reported that the Sri Lankan Prime Minister, Mr. B. Wickremanayake, would be deputed for the job after the Sri Lan-



The Taliban Foreign Minister, Wakil Ahmed Muttawakil, with the UNESCO representative, Mr. Pierre Lafrance (right), in Kandahar on Sunday. The Taliban leadership refused to revert its order on destruction of Buddha statues in Afghanistan despite Mr. Lafrance's pleas. (Below) Children from the All-India Shia Sunni Front protest near the Pakistani High Commission in New Delhi on Friday. — AP



ka Parliament deliberated on the subject.

Pakistan cannot wish away the Taliban factor and this is evident from the growing number of appeals directed at it. A report from

Tokyo said the Japanese Foreign Minister, Mr. Yohei Kono, would be sending a letter to the Pakistan Foreign Minister, Mr. Abdul Sattar, to 'step up pressure' on Taliban to end the destruction of the

statues. Pakistan should at least be seen as acting on the appeal as Mr. Sattar is slated to visit Japan on a four-day official visit beginning on March 14.

'Declare Pak., Afghanistan terrorist States'

NEW DELHI, MARCH 9. The All-India Shia Sunni Front (AISSE) and the All-India Muslim Unity Front (AIMUF) today said the United Nations should "declare Pakistan and Afghanistan as terrorist countries."

Staging a demonstration against the destruction of Buddhist statues by the Taliban in Afghanistan, the chairman of AISSE, Mr. Z. Ahmed, said, "we call upon the world community to condemn the destructive act and ask the U.N. to declare Pakistan and Afghanistan as terrorist countries."

"This act will damage Muslim image internationally," the president of AIMUF, Mr. Mohammed Younus Siddiqui, said. They later submitted a memorandum at the United Nations, the Afghanistan embassy, and the Pakistan High Commission.

'ISI handiwork'

The Afghanistan Ambassador to India, Mr. Masood Khalili, charged Pakistan's Inter-services Intelligence with masterminding the destruction of the Buddhist relics and said there was a "political agenda" behind it.

"I cannot help myself not to say that Pakistan has been a part of this drama," Mr. Khalili, representing the Rabbani regime, said participating in a discussion programme on Doordarshan.

The Taliban and their "mentors" had a strategy "for a long time to reach central Asia to threaten other countries." Afghans, both within the country and outside, "have indeed not just worried but wept" when they heard about the destruction.

They have always held Lord Buddha in high esteem as "part of their culture, literature and Sufi tradition." They admired this personality (Buddha) who was in search of the great light," Mr. Khalili said. — PTI

Taliban mum on Buddha fate

FROM SAYED SALAHUDDIN

Kabul, March 8 (Reuters): Afghanistan's ruling Taliban movement vowed today to complete the destruction of all statues, but it kept the world in suspense about the fate of two partly-damaged giant Buddhas in central Bamiyan province.

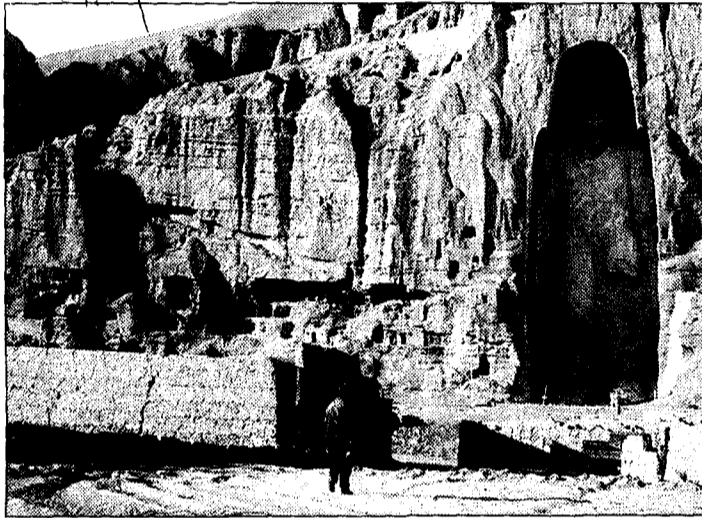
Witnesses had reported that the radical Islamic movement had suspended destruction of the two colossal Buddhist statues earlier this week because of holidays for the Muslim feast of Id ul-Zuha.

The holiday ended today, but there was no word whether demolition of the two towering Buddhas, hewn out of sandstone cliffs, had been resumed or not.

Taliban foreign minister Wakil Ahmad Muttawakil said there was no possibility of reversing an edict issued by the movement's reclusive leader, Mullah Mohammad Omar, for total destruction of all statues — including the two giant Buddhas that are the country's best-known archaeological treasure.

But he said he had no information if the Bamiyan Buddhas' demolition had been resumed or not.

"I don't know how much of the Buddhas has been damaged and when the destruction will resume," he said.



A file picture of the world's tallest standing statue of Buddha in Bamiyan province of Afghanistan. (AFP)

Information and culture minister Qudratullah Jamal, whose ministry is overseeing the demolition, was unavailable for comment as he had not returned from his home town after the Id-ul-Zuha celebrations.

Lanka appeal

Predominantly Buddhist Sri Lanka made another appeal today to the Taliban to reverse its campaign to destroy the Buddha statues.

Prime Minister Ratnasiri Wickremanayake told parliament he would travel to Pakistan on Saturday to seek help from Kab-~~le~~ neighbour to overturn the Taliban edict.

He said he would seek "joint action on the issue" with other countries to help save the Bamiyan statues, which date back to centuries of Buddhist rule before Islam arrived in the country in the ninth century AD.

But Muttawakil's comments

today, that any alternative to the destruction would fail to satisfy Islamic law, appeared to rule out any change in policy despite intensifying international pressure to save Afghanistan's rich heritage.

He said the Taliban would make clear to any international or religious delegation that it would not back down.

Three members of parliament from Japan — a major donor of aid in the region — were also due in Islamabad today to press Taliban authorities to change their minds.

The Taliban's main target is Buddhist art almost 2,000 years old, including the 175 feet and 120 feet Bamiyan statues.

Egypt said yesterday President Hosni Mubarak had accepted a request from the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco) to ask the Taliban to halt the destruction.

"We have no problem meeting anybody about this," Muttawakil said.

"We have explained our position to the Unesco team and will mention this to others, be it Hosni Mubarak, a Japanese envoy or Islamic scholars that our decree is based on Islamic orders and that we will spare no pre-Islamic or post-Islamic era statues."

THE TELEGRAPH

- 9 MAR 2001

Taliban's Vandalism An Un-Islamic Act

By ASGHAR ALI ENGINEER

713
THE destruction of the grand statues of Buddha in Bamiyan region of Afghanistan by the Taliban is vandalism of the worst sort being perpetrated in the name of Islam. The Taliban are not in any sense authentic representatives of Islam and their acts of omission and commission should not be looked at as representative of Islamic teachings, much less the Islamic spirit. The Taliban are a product of the madrasas in the North West of Pakistan which foster a very narrow sectarian mindset. The teachings in these madrasas is far from spiritual and is politically motivated.

No doubt Islam prohibits idol worship as according to Islam there is one God who cannot be conceived of in any shape. This concept of Islam comes quite close to the Hindu tradition which teaches that God is nirgun and nirankar (i.e. without attributes and shape). But that does not mean that Islam believes in destroying idols worshipped by others. On the contrary the Qur'an very clearly says: "And abuse not those who call upon besides Allah (i.e. worship other than Allah), lest exceeding the limits, they abuse Allah through ignorance" (6.109).

Thus it is the duty of Muslims, if they follow the Qur'anic teachings, not to abuse others' gods and worship Allah in their own way. If they abuse others' gods others could do likewise which will only increase hatred and conflict. Not only that, the Qur'an makes an even more significant statement: "Thus for every people have We made their deeds fair-seeming" (6.109). This clearly means that Allah has made deeds (rituals, ways of worship etc) fair-seeming to every community whichever way it worships God. Also, the Qur'an adopts a very catholic approach when it says, "For you is your religion, for me mine" (109.6).

The Qur'an also maintains that Allah protects the places of religious worship of different faiths. Thus the Qur'an says: "And if Allah did not repel some people by others, cloisters, and churches, and synagogues and mosques in which Allah's name is much remembered, would have been pulled down" (22.40). Thus we see that Qur'an maintains that Allah's name is much remembered in all religious places, be they cloisters, churches, synagogues or mosques. And Allah protects them by repelling one set of people (bent upon demolishing

71-10
them) by others (who protect them). Thus it is totally against the Qur'anic teachings to vandalise anyone's place of worship.

There is absolutely nothing in the Qur'an which can incite Muslims to destroy idols that others worship. It would, on the contrary, be the most un-Qur'anic act one can think of. The Taliban are destroying Buddha statues which are not even idols that are being worshipped by anyone there. These are fine specimens of sculpture carved out in 3rd and 4th centuries and represent a creative blending of Graeco-Roman and Indian styles of art.

Statues, even otherwise, must be distinguished from idols. Installing statues even by Muslims is not un-Islamic according to Muhammad Abduh the Grand Mufti of Egypt in late 19th century. Muhammad Abduh's famous fatwa says that in Islam deeds have merit or demerit according to intention (i.e. niyyah). If the intention is not to worship them, then statues of famous personalities can be installed. Muhammad Abduh issued this fatwa when many other 'ulama of al-Azhar, the premier Islamic seminary in Cairo, were opposing installation of statues of some political leaders.

An eighteenth century sufi saint Mazhar Jan-i-janan who is buried in Delhi even maintained that Hindu worship of idols is qualitatively different from idol worshipping of pre-Islamic Arabs. According to him, the pre-Islamic Arabs worshipped their idols as God whereas the Hindus who believe God is nirankar and nirgun worship them not as God but as intermediary to God. They see in these idols the reflection of God and Jan-i-Janani compares it with a sufi's tasawwaur-e-sheikh. A sufi reaches Allah through a Master called Sheikh, not by himself. Similarly a Hindu reaches God through the agency of an idol in which he sees God's reflection. And thus he maintains that such idol worship does not lead to kufr i.e. denial of the oneness of God or shirk i.e. associating partners with God.

Thus seen in the light of these opinions (fatwas) Taliban's vandalism is totally un-Islamic and must be strongly condemned. All Islamic countries have preserved their pre-Islamic heritage be it Egypt, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Malaysia or Indonesia. The world will be culturally poorer if the Taliban are allowed to have their way.



**THE
SPEAKING TREE**

Time Pak. reined in fundamentalists

113 By Kuldip Nayar

Some of the best Buddha statues of the Gandhara school of art are in the Peshwar museum. Many years ago when I visited the place, I found only a few people conscious of such aesthetic and antique pieces in their midst. Others knew about their presence. But the city, once the citadel of secular forces, the "Red Shirts", before Partition, recognised the status as part of their heritage. Not even once did anyone demand or demonstrate against their display at the museum.

I have not visited Peshawar or, for that matter, the North West Frontier Province, since. The types of

OPINION

Gen. Hamid Gul, former ISI chief, have, however, spoilt the atmosphere. They have sown the nettle of fanaticism which has grown into a crop of fundamentalism. The Taliban is the produce.

What I have read in newspapers shows that the family of Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan — Frontier Gandhi — still fights against bigotry and "Mullaism": theirs is a secular politics. Mr. Abdul Gani Khan, his son, along with his wife and the level-headed son, keep the flag of tolerance aloft. They could not stop the Taliban but they should save the Buddha pieces in Peshwar because the Taliban's unofficial headquarters is located in the city and they can turn their ire against the museum any time.

If it ever came to that, Islamabad may not do anything against them. Its mute reaction to vandalism in Afghanistan is a testimony to the Pakistan junta's future course of action. I know some of my Pakistani friends would feel horrified at the proposal. But they should seriously consider transferring the Buddha statues at museums in Peshawar and Lahore to India or some other safe place till the tide of fanaticism subsides in their country. The way in which the Pakistan Interior Minister, Mr. Mohuddin Haider, went back on his word to curb the "jehadis" indicates the Government's helplessness. Say tomorrow, were there an agitation by some Lashkaris to remove the Buddha pieces from museums or to destroy mounds at Taxila, what would Islamabad do?

I concede that the Pakistan Government is too

much under the pressure of fundamentalists and "jehadis". Still I had imagined that it would use the destruction of the Buddha statues as an opportunity to rap its child, the Taliban, over the knuckles. Pakistan is supposed to be a modern, liberal Muslim state. I recall when General Pervez Musharraf took over, a photo appeared with his two pet pups in his arms. The impression sought to be conveyed was that a liberal reformer had stepped in. But there has been little on the ground to indicate any action against fundamentalists.

The induction of Mullah-type men by General Zia-ul-Haq in the Pakistan army may be one reason why Gen. Musharraf looks helpless. Some of them, according to Gul Mohammad, occupy high positions in the army. Still, Islamabad's reluctance to chastise fundamentalists has damaged the country's image. It cannot combine the opposites: use the fanatics to destabilise India and wish that the fall-out would not contaminate the Pakistan society.

The silence of the liberals is intriguing. True, they are in unhappy as is the majority in Pakistan. But the fear to join issue with the extremists has silenced them. They are afraid to annoy fundamentalists. But they should know that no voice has ever gained strength if it is not raised.

When the Babri Masjid was demolished, a dastardly act by fanatics, the Hindu community, by and large, showed its anger against the attack on the composite culture which the building depicted. The BJP State Governments were dismissed and the party lost four of them in new elections. The Supreme Court punished the then U.P. Chief Minister. Three top BJP leaders, including the Home Minister, Mr. L. K. Advani, are still facing charges in connection with the demolition. Even the BJP-led Government dares not challenge India's secular polity.

The Taliban, who run Afghanistan, know of fundamentalism alone. In fact, the stigma which they have put on its face will take several years to rub off. The "Umah" has not only to dispel the disgust which the Taliban have evoked in the minds of people all over the world but also have to prove that Islam is not what the Taliban or other fundamentalists are trying to show. An Iranian cleric is quite right to observe: "Unfortunately, the Taliban's destruction of statues has cast doubt on the comprehensive views offered by Islamic ideology in the world".

THE HINDU

3 6 MAR

- 5 MAR 2001

Cultural genocide, says Muslim forum

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MARCH 5. The All-India Muslim Majlis-e-Mushawarat (AIMMM) today condemned the deliberate destruction of the irreplaceable historical monuments and Buddhist relics by the Taliban regime in Afghanistan.

Termining it an "act of cultural genocide, a crime against history and an un-Islamic act," the AIMMM president, Syed Shahabuddin, said it was horrifying that the Taliban sought to justify its vandalism in the name of Islam.

Islam was "indeed a monotheistic religion which does not countenance idol worship. But the statues which have been destroyed were not idols as they were not being worshipped because of mutilation."

The act not only brought disrepute to Islam but provided grist for the mills of anti-Islamic propaganda, the objective of which was to mobilise the world against Islam and the Muslims. The Taliban could not feign insensitivity to the world's outrage or justify its "heinous misdeeds" in the name of sovereignty.

Expressing sympathy to the people all over the world whose religious sensitivities and cultural sensibilities had been outraged, the AIMMM called upon them not to identify Taliban with Islam.

In a separate statement, the CPI(M-L) also condemned the Taliban's action and deplored the Sangh Parivar for its "political hypocrisy of the most repulsive kind." The party sought to know how the demolition of Babri Masjid in 1992 was any different from the Taliban spree of destruction.

'Vandalism,' says first Sikkim CM

PTI reports: **A D V A**
The first Chief Minister of Sikkim, Kazi Lhendu Dorjee Khangsarpa, condemned the Taliban's act of "religious fundamentalism and cultural vandalism."

The nonagenarian leader, who ruled the State between 1975 and 1979, said he was 'deeply pained' at the decision to destroy the 'priceless relics.' These statues were the identity of Afghanistan and landmark in the history of other civilisations and their destruction would be the "loss for the humanity as a whole," he said in a statement from Gangtok.

Religious organisations condemn act

Several religious and social organisations in Varanasi condemned the destruction of the Buddha statues and relics and appealed to the world community to oppose the act unitedly.

Describing the Taliban act as "uncultured, uncivilised and barbarous," the secretary-general of the World Hindu Federation, Mr.

Ajay Singh, demanded the launching of worldwide tirade against the Islamic militia. He appealed to the Government and the United Nations to take immediate action against the Taliban to prevent the destruction of the remaining monuments and relics.

The convener of Masjid Intezamia Committee, Maulana Mohammed Yasin, termed the act "anti-Islamic" and said Islam did not advocate hurting of religious sentiments of other communities.

The vice-president of the Indo-Tibet Maitri Sangh, Pasang Norbu, also condemned the act. The local Christian community organised a prayer at the St. Mary's cathedral here and wished peace to the Buddhists who were hurt by the uncivilised acts of the Taliban.

The local Hindu priests and mahants also condemned the incident. The activists of the Nationalist Youth Congress took out a procession yesterday and burnt the Afghanistan flag to protest the destruction of the idols.

Activists of the Republican Party of India (Kawade group) and NCP today staged demonstrations in Mumbai to protest the destruction of the statues. The demonstrators gathered in Azad Maidan to denounce what they called "religious fanaticism and cultural mania."

Destroying statues an honour for Islam: Taliban

Kabul, March 5 (Reuters): The supreme leader of the Taliban today defended his order to destroy historical statues as an honour for Islam as well as the nation and found the first voice of support outside Afghanistan in a Kashmir militant group.

The first hint of punitive action also came today with Japan saying the demolition of the Bamiyan Buddhas might affect the flow of aid. "Don't break these statues because it is a religious issue... Your act might cause difficulties for aid in Afghanistan," Japan's ambassador to Pakistan, Sadaki Numata, said.

In a message quoted by the official Voice of Shariat radio on the eve of Id-ul-Zuha, Mullah Mohammad Omar dismissed criticism of the plan and said Afghan Muslims should be proud of smashing the statues.

"It is a shame for those Afghans who criticise

this decree," the radio quoted Omar, who denounces what he calls un-Islamic idols, as saying. "I ask Afghans and the world's Muslims to use their sound wisdom... Do you prefer to be a breaker of idols or a seller of idols?" he added.

Harkat-ul-Mujahideen, a Kashmir militant group, voiced support for the Taliban campaign. "In an Islamic country there is no concept of idols and our holy prophet taught us to break the idols," a statement from the Pakistan-based group said.

Omar's call sparked international outrage and calls from around the globe for a change of heart. New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art offered to buy the statues to save them.

Omar said the statues formed 1 per cent of Afghanistan's cultural relics and Islamic principles ordered their annihilation.

There has been intense international cover of

the story. Omar said the BBC and other Western media had begun a campaign against the *Koran*.

"I ask the Muslim people of Afghanistan not to be afraid of the infidels' pressure... and do not synchronise with them."

The head of anti-Taliban forces in Afghanistan, the country's internationally recognised President, condemned the Taliban campaign to destroy the country's pre-Islamic heritage.

"We strongly condemn and oppose the Taliban's anti-national and anti-cultural action in respect to the destruction of Buddhist statues in Afghanistan," Burhanuddin Rabbani said in a statement.

Afghanistan was a centre of Buddhist culture before the arrival of Islam more than 1,200 years ago.

Afghan Islamic clerics earlier urged Omar not

to bow to international pressure and to push ahead with the plan.

Their call was echoed through loud speakers in most mosques in Kabul on the eve of Id-ul-Zuha.

"They (non-Muslims) want to deviate us from our firm responsibility and we here request that the policy of smashing these idols to go ahead," said one cleric.

The Taliban say they have smashed major statue collections in several parts of the country since last week when Omar first issued his decree to destroy the statues.

The fate of the colossal Buddhas, hewn out of the rock face at least 15 centuries ago, remains unknown. A Taliban source today said they had yet to begin destroying the relics. Other officials have said the piece-by-piece demolition was already underway.

Leading industrialised countries, Muslim and Buddhist nations, and the United Nations say the statues are part of the world's common historical and cultural heritage.

An envoy of the Paris-based Unesco said he had held "a very long discussion" with Afghan foreign minister Wakil Ahmad Muttawakil in Kabul yesterday. Pierre Lafrance told CNN that he hoped to meet Omar in a few days, after Id-ul-Zuha. Lafrance had even hinted at a solution after talks.

"All doors have not closed," he said. "Contacts are going on and new consultations of religious leaders are taking place in Afghanistan."

Many Afghans, including some Taliban officials, say the statues should be preserved as they are no longer worshipped. Some say that scrapping the decree could cause a split within the Taliban ranks.

THE TELEGRAPH

6 MAR 2001

Destruction of Buddhist icons will continue: Taliban

KABUL, MARCH 5. The Taliban chief, Mulla Mohammad Omar, used the Id-ul-Adha festival today to urge the Muslim world to support the destruction of ancient Buddhist icons and unite behind his vision of Islam.

The reclusive war veteran and "Islamic scholar" said the annihilation of Buddhist statues in Afghanistan would proceed despite vehement international condemnation and protests from Islamic States.

He said the statues, including the giant ancient Buddhas in the central province of Bamiyan, were only "one per cent" of Afghanistan's historical heritage.

Mulla Omar also dismissed the global outcry as a "drama" which should be transparent to Muslims with "common sense". "Now that we are destroying false idols, the world has made a drama out of this. The Muslims of the world, particularly Afghan Muslims, should use their commonsense," the Taliban militia's radio *Shariat* quoted him as saying.

"I would like to ask you, do you prefer to be called statue-destroyers or statue-sellers?" Mulla Omar last week ordered his followers to destroy all statues in Afghanistan, including the country's precious

pre-Islamic figures, to prevent idolatry in line with a *fatwa* (religious decree) from local clerics.

His comments at the start of the three-day Islamic holiday today came a day after the UNESCO special envoy, Mr. Pierre Lafrance, apparently failed to persuade the Afghan leadership to reverse their decision. The Afghan Foreign Minister, Mr. Wakil Ahmad Mutawakil, said that after meeting Mr. Lafrance in Kandahar on Sunday he could see no

More reports on Pages 13, 14

reason to stop the destruction, the private Afghan Islamic Press reported.

The Islamic world has also expressed its indignation, notably Pakistan, one of only three countries which recognises the Taliban regime and its closest ally. But Mulla Omar, known as Amir-ul-Momenin (leader of the faithful) in Taliban circles, said the issue was clearcut and that Muslims should not be influenced by people of other faiths.

"I would like to ask the world Muslims not to harmonise their voices with those of non-believers," he said.

"The infidels want to rob Islam of its spirit." — AFP

5 MAR 2001

Taliban reject Iran offer

DEUTSCHE PRESS AGENTUR

ISLAMABAD, March 4. — Taliban foreign minister, Mr Ahmad Mutawakil, today rejected Iran's offer to take the historic Buddha statues into safe-keeping.

The rejection comes on the eve of a visit by Unesco envoy, Mr Pierre Lafrance, who left for Afghanistan today on a mission to save the statues from destruction.

An Iranian foreign ministry official spoke to Mr Mutawakil over phone this morning. But Mr Mutawakil rejected Iran's offer to buy the statues or take them to Iran for safe-keeping, saying both options were in conflict with Islamic teaching.

"We accept it is our duty to protect archaeological heritage...but Islam is against keeping statues. Hence the order to

destroy them," Mr Mutawakil said.

"The question of removing them would have arisen if we did not have museums. As for buying the statues, Islam teaches that one should not wish on another Muslim something that you would not wish on yourself — and both our countries are Muslim," he said.

Mr Lafrance met the Taliban's ambassador to Pakistan, Mullah Abdul Salam Zaeef in Islamabad yesterday and demanded an immediate stop to the destruction. Mulla Zaeef said the statues were being eliminated under Islamic injunctions.

Mr Lafrance, commissioned by Unesco to talk with the Taliban, will meet with Mr Mutawakil in Kandahar.

But the Taliban minister in charge of cultural issues, Mullah Qudratullah Jamaal, vowed that no statue would be spared. He said two-thirds of religious statues and relics have already been destroyed and the rest would be destroyed in two or three days.

"Our people are destroying statues with axes and shovels to make sure nothing of the statues remains intact," he said. On the fate of the giant Buddha statues carved out of a mountain face in Bamayan, the minister said: "Let me assure you neither their legs nor heads will be spared."

The Tehran-based Cultural Heritage Organisation termed the move as "damaging to Islam (and)...harmful to minori-

ties" in other countries.

"Even worse is that the militia is acting in the name of Islam to inflict heavy damages on Islamic community worldwide, especially the Muslims of Afghanistan," the CHO said.

The Iranian news agency, Irna, alleged that the demolition of relics is a "joint Pakistani-Taliban plot". "In a systematic trend of subjecting to Pakistani dictates, Mullah Mohammed Omar has ordered the destruction of all statues, including the giant fifth century Buddha, the news agency said.

"The latest decree among scores of the kind issued thus far by the Pakistani-Taliban... brings to light a pre-planned diabolical scheme by the ruling Pakistani junta...", it said.

Afghan ambassador to Teheran, Mohammed Kheyrkhah, said the Taliban's effort to demolish the Buddha statues in Bamayan was a "Pakistani engineered" plot.

Meanwhile, the Japanese branch of Unesco launched a campaign today to collect signatures and cash donations to save the statues, AFP adds from Tokyo.

"We resolutely oppose destructive challenges to world peace and human culture and strongly demand an immediate halt to any destructive acts which will leave a tremendous bill to pay in the future," an Unesco goodwill envoy said.

China's official Buddhist association too expressed "shock and sorrow" and urged the Taliban to immediately halt the destruction of the statues, PTI adds.

NO QUESTION OF SELLING STATUES TO TEHRAN: FOREIGN MINISTER

THE STATESMAN

5 MAR 2001

The Buddha Smiles

The Buddha would have been amused at the headlines describing the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddha statue by the Taliban. The Buddha cannot be blasted nor can he be bombarded. To mistake the likeness of the Buddha made by human hands and not to take part in a communion with the essence of the Buddha is to miss the message of impermanence, non-spirit and suffering of the Mighty Intellect. The artist who visualised the Bamiyan Buddha would have first invoked, as per tradition, the moods of friendliness, compassion, sympathy and impartiality. He would not be driven by considerations of self-expression nor ideas of connoisseurship and aestheticism. The state of mind and the importance of the idea itself was all important. All these virtues are sadly amiss in the hearts and minds of those who are breaking ancient monuments in Afghanistan as well as those who seem to be protesting about such vandalism. In the *Divyavadana*, Upagupta asks Mara, who has the power of assuming shapes at will, to take the likeness of the Buddha. Upagupta bows in reverence to this figure, which shocks Mara. Upagupta says that he is not worshipping Mara but the person represented by Mara: "Just as people venerating earthen images of the undying angels do not revere the clay as such, but the immortals represented therein." The least that can be said about the events in Afghanistan is that these are the triumph of the slave mentality, the main characteristic of which is the spirit of revenge. The ideal typical slave is incapable of forgetting, unable to love, admire or respect. Such individuals constantly impute wrong to others and perpetually blame the whole world for real and imagined wrongs. They cannot give or create. (11-10 5/3)

In other words, there are Taliban-like organisations, individuals and symptoms within India which are as intolerant and brutal as their counterparts in Afghanistan. The sangh parivar for long has represented and actively promoted this negative strand in Indian society. Acharya Giriraj Kishore's reaction to the happenings in Afghanistan is indicative of the cult of hatred and mindless recriminations that the sangh parivar has promoted. Where were these self-righteous guardians of Indian heritage when the Babri Masjid was destroyed? If the statues in Bamiyan are 'our' heritage, then so is the Babri Masjid. Instead, the Taliban and the sangh parivar have sought to divide the world into 'us' and 'them', between 'friend' and 'foe'. What is common to both is a very literal interpretation of Islam and Hinduism, without remotely understanding the essence of either faith. Also, the sad state of our museums and monuments suggests that our concern for heritage is extremely superficial. What the Taliban has done in a couple of days is being systematically done slowly and steadily for the past fifty years. "We shall not stand on the Buddha's head at Bamiyan, upright in his niche like a whale in a dry dock" lamented the writer Bruce Chatwin in 1980. Sad indeed. But this gives us an opportunity to look inwards and set our own house in order.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

- 5 MAR 2001

VULGARITY IN EXTREMIS

Can the world stop Taliban? 4/8

EVERYBODY agrees, even the Pakistanis and the Iranians, that the Taliban have definitely gone over the top, this time, in wanting to blow up the Buddhas of Bamiyan and whatever remains of a past they wish to disown. One doesn't know if the strong reaction from its neighbours and its strongest patron will be enough to stop this insanity. Even as we write, the Taliban is mobilising troops and explosives to commit this dastardly deed. India has made a splendid gesture by promising to provide political asylum to these witnesses to mankind's history and so have several museums in the United States. Money is involved, there is an outside chance that the Taliban may be interested, but, for the moment, lunacy reigns. The Taliban doesn't give a damn for Indian money or Indian sentiment, they know India is actively backing Ahmed Shah Masood via Tajikistan.

The real problem is that the Taliban cannot be stopped, because even those who back it may not go to the extent of withdrawing support just because a few pieces of stone have been blown up. There is even understanding. The Pakistani ambassador to the UN defended, if not the action, then the motives behind it, when he said, "When people are ostracised, isolated, politically, economically, socially and culturally, do you expect them not to act in a desperate manner?" The point is taken. Question is: is that the world's problem? Should the international community bend its knees and recognise a crude, atavistic regime just because it is threatening to go mad? What kind of precedent will that set for other such madmen elsewhere? Possibilities are that the degree of international ostracism will increase if and when the Taliban execute this piece of folly and this, in turn, will reinforce the logic of mad extremism in whose grip the Taliban now is.

For India, this unfortunate development has some positive consequences, because the jihadi campaign in Kashmir and the Taliban conquest of Afghanistan, derive from the same mother lode of radical Islam nurtured in the seminaries of Pakistan. One message is that this is what we are dealing with in Kashmir. This is true — see the attacks on the Sikhs in Jammu and in Srinagar. It is the same intent at work — radical Islamisation. India will also be hoping that Pakistan takes some of the international blame for supporting such a regime and, thereby, loses some more of its manoeuvring space over Kashmir, especially when Pakistan itself has begun suffering the from the capillary effects of the jihads it supports in Afghanistan and Kashmir.

The real pity is that the Afghans are going to wake up eventually from the Taliban nightmare to find their country turned into a desert. It will take years to recover.

THE STATESMAN

- 5 MAR 2001

Taliban blasts two relics as Buddha purge continues

Kabul

4 MARCH

TALIBAN SOLDIERS blasted two towering ancient statues of Buddha with anti-aircraft weapons, according to the account of the first eyewitness on Sunday. Other statues throughout the country were being demolished with rockets, tanks and explosives, ridding the nation of reminders of its pre-Islamic past. Residents of central Bamiyan, said Taliban soldiers began attacking the two third and fifth centuries statues of Buddha hewn from a cliff at least three days earlier.

"I could see the Taliban soldiers firing anti-aircraft weapons at the two statues. That was three days ago," said Safdar Ali, a resident. The Taliban have ignored pleas from an outraged world to stop the destruction of the ancient relics from their pre-Islamic past.

"We are not against culture, but we don't believe in these things. They are against Islam," the Taliban's foreign minister



THE POWER TO FORGIVE

Wakil Ahmed Muttawakil said in a telephonic interview from southern Kandahar — the headquarters of the Taliban.

Later on Sunday, Muttawakil

was to meet Pierre Lafrance, a special UNESCO envoy sent from Paris to try to negotiate with the Taliban and register the world's outrage at the destruction. Lafrance met with the Taliban's ambassador to Pakistan, Abdul Salam Zaeef on Saturday, who said the destruction had not begun.

On Saturday, Quatradullah Jamal, the Taliban's information and culture minister, told that troops had destroyed two-thirds of all the statues in Afghanistan as well as large parts of the two giant statues of Buddha. "His information is accurate information," said Muttawakil.

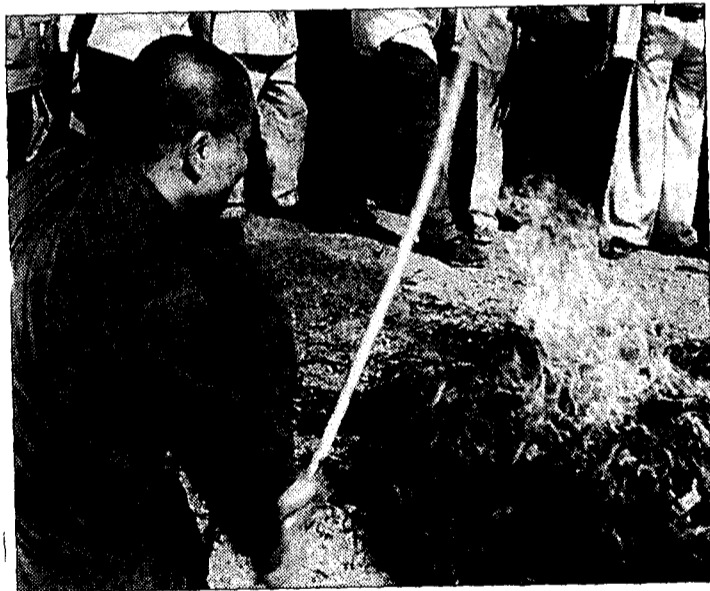
By tomorrow — exactly one week after the Taliban's reclusive leader, Mullah Mohammed Omar, ordered all statues to be destroyed — the task will be complete, Jamal said.

The two Buddhas, 52.5 and 36 meters tall, were damaged in fighting. Witnesses who have climbed atop of the Buddha statues say that Russian soldiers had carved their names on the statues following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979.

Caves at the foot of the statues had become home to families of refugees and a place for soldiers to stash their weapons. The destruction of statues began after Omar ruled that they were idolatrous and against the tenets of Islam. Others argue that Islam does not ban images, only their worshipping.

Muttawakil rejected offers from several countries as well as the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. "Why should we give them to anyone? They are against our beliefs. We have museums here and we will keep our cultural and historical artefacts there," he said.

— AP



THE FIRE WITHIN: A Buddhist monk beats up an effigy symbolising the Taliban in Mumbai on Saturday. — AP

The Economic Times

5 MAR 2001

Buddhas of Bamiyan face barrage of rocket, tank fire

Kabul
2 MARCH

AFGHANISTAN'S ANCIENT Buddha statues located in central Bamiyan province came under a barrage of rocket and tank fire from the ruling Taliban militia on Friday. The world watched in horror.

Taliban and Opposition officials said the militia were attacking the two giant stone Buddhas, estimated to have been built between the second and fifth centuries AD, with rockets, tanks and even automatic rifles.

"They have started attacking the Buddhas with guns and tank shells — with whatever arms they are carrying," a militia source said, declining to be named. "People are firing at them out of their own sentiments."

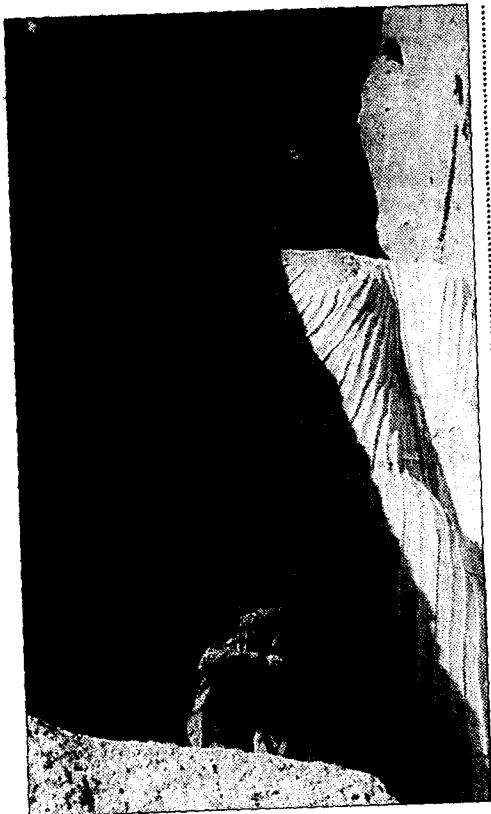
Fanatical Taliban soldiers, on Thursday, started destroying all the statues throughout the country in compliance with a decree issued on Monday by supreme leader Mulla Mohammad Omar.

Omar said the decision was in line with a fatwa from local Islamic clerics designed to prevent the worship of "false idols."

The militia had started accumulating explosives around the two Buddhas, a report said earlier on Friday, but it now appears that local commanders are taking matters into their own hands. Explosives had been brought to Bamiyan from surrounding areas, the scene of heavy fighting recently, the Afghan Islamic press reported.

Minister for information and culture Qudratullah Jamal, on Thursday, said historic statues in the Kabul museum and elsewhere in the provinces of Ghazni, Herat, Jalalabad and Kandahar were also being destroyed.

A storm of protest from the international



TALL BELIEFS

community has failed to stop the militia from destroying the Bamiyan Buddhas.

Carved out from a sandstone mountain near the provincial capital, the taller figure is the largest standing Buddha in the world.

They have been off limits to journalists since fighting broke out in Bamiyan province last month.

— AFP

UN warns Taliban against demolition

United Nations
2 MARCH

THE CHIEF of the United Nations (UN) political wing in Afghanistan has warned the Taliban against carrying out demolition of ancient Buddha statues, saying it would provoke international outrage.

UN special mission to Afghanistan chief, Francesc Vendrell, discussed the Taliban's edict calling for the destruction of all pre-Islamic statues and shrines with the militia's foreign minister Wakil Mohammad Muttawakil.

"Voicing UN secretary general Kofi Annan's strong concern about the edict, Vendrell asked the Taliban not to carry it out and warned that if implemented, it would provoke global outrage," a UN spokesman said.

"But he (Vendrell) did not get any positive response," the spokesman added.

Vendrell said he did not receive assurances from the Taliban officials on the edict.

Unesco director general expressed shock at the announcement that the destruction of statues had begun in Afghanistan, despite various initiatives undertaken since Monday to convince the Taliban to reverse their decision.

"They are destroying statues that the world considers masterpieces and this is being done in the name of an interpretation of the Muslim faith that is not recognised anywhere else in the world," Konchiro Matsuura said at the agency's Paris headquarters.

PTI

The Economic

4 MAR 2001

Taliban refuses to relent, blasts Buddha heads

Kabul, March 3

HFI 4/3
MOST OF the ancient Buddhist relics, including the head and legs of two soaring Buddha statues in Central Afghanistan, have been destroyed, despite international pleas to save the priceless treasures, a Taliban official said today.

What hasn't been destroyed will be destroyed tomorrow and on Monday, the Taliban's Information Minister Quadratullah Jamal told journalists here. "Two-thirds of all the statues in Afghanistan have already been destroyed, the remaining will be destroyed in the next two days."

"The head and legs of Buddha statues in Bamiyan were destroyed yesterday," he confirmed. "Our soldiers are working hard to demolish their remaining parts. They will come down soon. We are using everything at our disposal to destroy them." The two Buddhas, 52.5 and 36 meters tall, are hewn from the side of a mountain in Bamiyan - located roughly 130 km north-west of the Afghan capital. The tallest statue is thought to be the world's tallest of a Buddha standing rather than sitting. The Taliban troops used heavy explosives and rockets to destroy the statues carved in the third and fifth centuries, relics of Afghanistan's pre-Islamic past. Both the statues were already damaged by artillery fire during Afghanistan's protracted civil war.

Jamal did not have details about which statue was targeted first and whether the heads of both statues had been removed or of only one.

Annan move: UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan today asked the Taliban to accept an offer by

Islam
New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art to house the statues destined for destruction, a spokesman said today. "The Secretary-General received a call from the museum director Phillippe de Montebello, who made an offer to field a team to remove at all cost all moveable sculptures from Afghanistan," a UN spokesman said. The New York museum expressed its readiness to save the cultural relics yesterday. The UN has conveyed the offer to the Taliban, but is yet to receive a feedback.

US reprimand: The US State Department, hitting out at the Taliban, said the militia was using drug money to finance weapon purchases and military operations. In its annual international narcotics control strategy report, the State Department said Afghanistan continued to be the largest opium producer, accounting 72 per cent of the world's illicit opium supply despite severe drought in most parts of that country. Qatar, as current president of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC), today urged the Taliban to abandon its campaign to destroy the pre-Islamic statues.

France reaction: French Culture Minister Catherine Tasca today called for the Taliban's foreign allies to "make their voice heard" and help prevent the militia's destruction of ancient Buddhist statues.

"I hope that, very quickly, the countries that support the current Government in Afghanistan make their voice heard to prevent the irreparable," Tasca said.

Afghanistan's Taliban rulers are only recognised by Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

Related reports on Pages 8, 11

Taliban destroy Buddha statues

ASSOCIATED PRESS

KABUL, March 3. - The Afghanistan's ruling Taliban have destroyed most of the ancient relics from their nation's pre-Islamic past, including parts of two towering Buddha statues, in less than a week, Taliban officials said today.

By Monday - exactly one week after the Taliban's reclusive leader, Mullah Mohammed Omar, issued the destroy order of all statues - the task will be complete, information minister Mr Quatradullah Jamal said.

"Two-thirds of all the statues in Afghanistan have already been destroyed, the remaining will be destroyed in the next two days," he said.

Using explosives, rockets and heavy artillery Taliban soldiers blasted away at the two ancient statues of Buddha hewn from a cliff face in central Bamiyan.

"The head and legs of the Buddha statues in Bamiyan were destroyed yesterday," he said. "Our soldiers are working hard to demolish their remaining parts. They will come down soon. We are using everything at our disposal to destroy them."

The two Buddhas statues,

175 ft and 120 ft tall, were damaged during early rounds of fighting. People who have climbed to the top of the statues said Russian soldiers, who invaded Afghanistan during the 1980s, carved their names in the statues.

Caves at the foot of the statues had become home to families of refugees and the soldiers stashed their weapons in these caves.

The tallest statue is thought to be the world's tallest of a Buddha standing rather than sitting.

The destruction of statues began after Omar ruled that they were idolatrous and against the tenets of Islam.

A special Unesco representative met with the Taliban's ambassador to neighbouring Pakistan Saturday to register the world's outrage.

Mr Pierre Lafrance said the destruction of the statues will only worsen the Taliban's already troubled relations with the world community.

But the Taliban's ambassador Mr Abdul Salam Zaef said there was no reversing the order.

"It's a decree by ulema (clerics) and the government can't stop its implementation," Mr Zaef said. The

Taliban Islamic militia, which rules 95 per cent of Afghanistan, including Kabul, adheres to a strict brand of Islamic law. Their interpretation has been questioned by Islamic scholars in other Muslim countries and Islamic institutions.

But the Taliban have been unmoved by international appeals to save the statues, appeals from fellow Muslim nations, including their close ally Pakistan.

The Taliban said there is no place for statues in an Islamic country.

An estimated 6,000 statues were housed in the Kabul Museum. It's believed most have been destroyed, although the Taliban have refused to allow anyone inside the war-ravaged building.

Two armed Taliban guards keep watch outside the building. Previously Jamal said the Taliban would put the ruins on display.

"Words fail me to describe adequately my feelings of consternation and powerlessness as I see the reports of the irreversible damage that is being done to Afghanistan's exceptional cultural heritage," Mr Koichiro Matsuura, director-general of the Unesco said yesterday.

THE STATESMAN

4 MAR 2001

A file picture shows unidentified Taliban men standing beside defaced Buddha statues in the National Museum of Afghanistan, Kabul. — AP

Destruction spree continues

KABUL, MARCH 3. Most of the ancient Buddhist relics, including the head and legs of two soaring statues of the Buddha in central Afghanistan, have been destroyed, despite international pleas to save them, a Taliban official said today.

"What hasn't been destroyed will be destroyed tomorrow and on Monday," the Information Minister, Mr. Quadratullah Jamal, said, "two-thirds of all the statues in Afghanistan have already been destroyed, the remaining will be destroyed in the next two days..."

"The head and legs of Buddha statues in Bamiyan were destroyed yesterday... Our soldiers are working hard to demolish their remaining parts. They will come down soon. We are using everything at our disposal to destroy them."

The two Buddhas, 52.5 and 36 metres tall, are hewn from the side of a mountain in Bamiyan — located roughly 130 km northwest of Kabul. The tallest statue is considered the world's tallest of a Buddha standing rather than sitting. The Taliban troops used heavy explosives and rockets to destroy the two statues which were already damaged by artillery fire during Afghanistan's protracted civil war.

Mr. Jamal said he was in contact with troops in Bamiyan and the destruction was being carried out in keeping with the fatwa of the Taliban's reclusive supreme leader Mullah Mohammed Omar.

Several wooden and clay "idols" had also been demolished at historic sites in Herat, Ghazni, Kabul and Jalalabad since the start of destruction on Thursday. "They were easy to break apart and did not take much time."

Qatar's plea

Qatar, current head of the

world's largest Muslim body, Organisation of Islamic Countries, appealed to the Taliban to stop destroying ancient statues that they deemed un-Islamic, the official news agency QNA reported.

"Qatar believes that these ancient monuments, regardless of their nature, belong to a common human heritage which must be protected, and appeals to (Muslim) brothers in Afghanistan to reconsider their decision," a Qatari Foreign Ministry official told QNA.

Dalai Lama 'shocked'

The Tibetan spiritual leader, Dalai Lama, has expressed deep

shock and concern over the destruction of the statues.

In a statement in Dharamshala today, the Dalai Lama said, "I am deeply concerned about the demolition of statues in Afghanistan at a time when there is close understanding and better harmony among different religious traditions of the world. It is unfortunate that these objects of worship are targets of destruction".

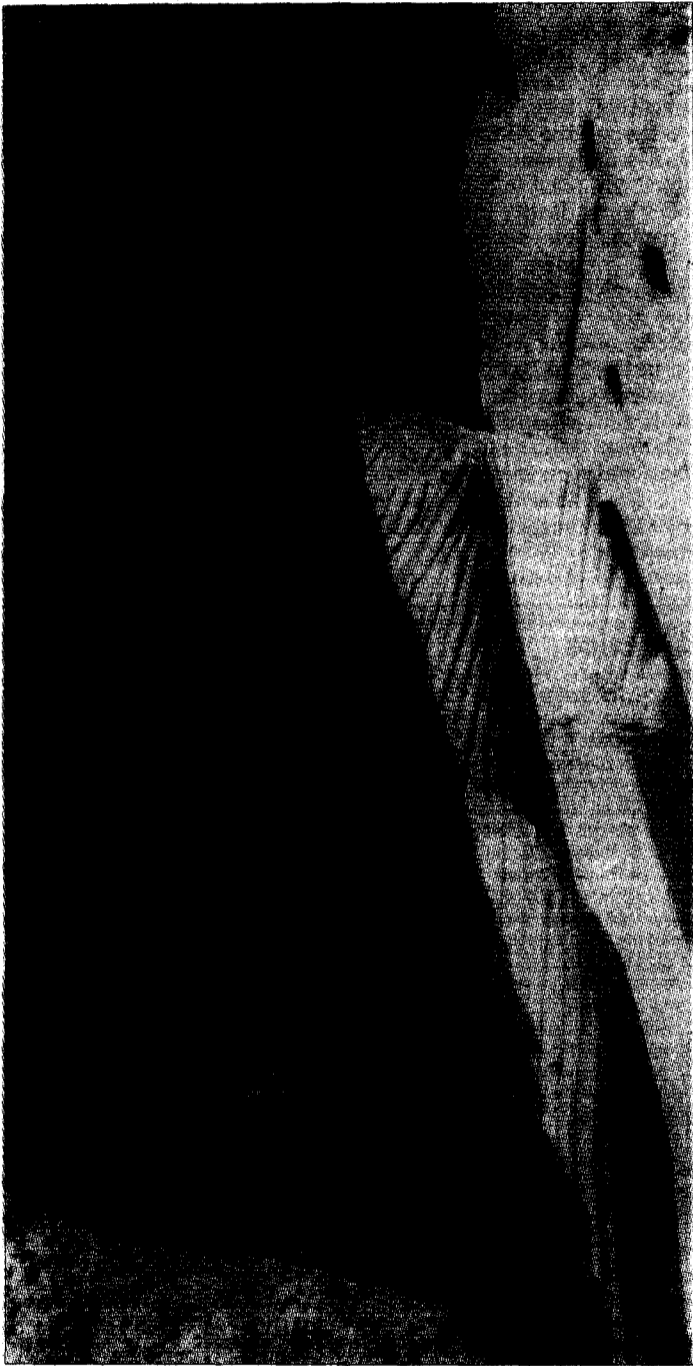
The Kasag (cabinet) of the Tibetan government-in-exile also expressed concern. — UNI, AP, Reuters

Widespread protests: Page 8

THE HINDU

4 MAR 2001

Parliament decries vandalism



UNDER THE SHADOW OF THE GUN: A Taliban militia man sits near a 37-metre Buddha statue in Bamiyan, 150 km west of Kabul. The photograph was taken in November 1997. — AP/PTI

India offers to bring relics

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, March 2. — Parliament today sought immediate intervention of the international community to halt the "senseless" destruction of Buddhist relics by the Taliban even as India offered to bring the artefacts and preserve them as treasures of the Afghan people.

Strongly condemning the "barbaric and anti-civilisational intent of the Taliban," Parliament unanimously adopted resolutions seeking intervention of the world community, especially the United Nations, to prevail upon the Taliban regime to desist from this "senseless, destructive act."

The Prime Minister, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee, has written to leaders of 14 countries, urging them to speak against the Taliban's reported plan to destroy the ancient Bamiyan Buddhas.

Mr Vajpayee has written to the leaders of Japan, South Korea, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar, the USA, Britain, France, Russia and China as well as the UN Secretary-general, Mr Kofi Annan.

The resolutions — moved by the external affairs minister, Mr Jaswant Singh, in the Rajya Sabha and the Speaker, Mr GMC Balayogi, in the Lok Sabha — denounced in the "strongest possible terms" the acts of religious fundamentalism and cultural vandalism of the Taliban in destroying the artefacts in Kabul, Gzani, Herat and Kandahar.

If the Taliban did not want to retain this inheritance, Mr Singh said India would be happy to bring the relics and preserve them. "...We would like to convey that destruction of these precious manifestations of the cultural heritage of humankind should stop," Mr Singh said. Amid shouts of "shame, shame" in the Rajya Sabha, Mr Singh conveyed the members the information available with the government on Taliban's decision to destroy some priceless relics in museums and elsewhere on the diktat of their leader, Mulla Mohammad Omar.

Mr Vajpayee called it a "disquieting development" and added that the reported decree "represents a further obscurantist regression — an assault on centuries of Afghan tradition and upon an irreplaceable civilisational inheritance of all mankind."

The resolution said: "They (Taliban) have moved tanks and guns to destroy one of the greatest examples of human creativity. This intent of destroying the 2000-year-old statues of Buddha and Buddhist shrines in Bamiyan would constitute an appalling act of cultural vandalism."

Mr Singh said it was tragic that this act of vandalism was being pursued despite a global outcry against it. "This regression into medieval barbarism is precisely what India, amongst many other countries, has been cautioning the world for so long."

Taliban troops prepare to destroy Buddha statues

ASSOCIATED PRESS

ISLAMABAD, March 2. — Taliban troops assembled explosives today to demolish two ancient statues of Buddha as the UN cultural agency sent an envoy to try and dissuade the ruling Islamic militia, which plans to destroy every statue in Afghanistan.

The two Buddhas, 52.5 and 36 metres tall, are hewn out of the side of a mountain in Bamiyan and heavy explosives would be needed to destroy them. Afghanistan's hard-line leaders have deemed them and all other statues in the country idolatrous. "The Buddhas in Bamiyan were not touched today, but preparations are being made," said Mr Abdul Salam Zaeef, the Taliban's ambassador to Pakistan.

The Taliban's closest ally — Pakistan — pleaded with the Islamic militia to spare the statues.

"The government of Pakistan joins all nations in appealing to the Taliban government to reconsider and rescind the reported decision regarding the statues of Lord Buddha," the foreign minister, Mr Abdul Sattar, said in a statement.

"Respect for other religions and for their beliefs is enjoined upon Muslims," he said.

A day after the Taliban announced they had ordered soldiers to begin purging the country of all statues, Unesco sent a special envoy to negotiate with Taliban leaders.

THE STATESMAN

MAR 2001

Experts condemn Taliban's move to raze Buddhist relics

Shriram Vemoka

By Rekha Dixit

MUMBAI: Heritage experts and Islamic leaders in the city have raised their voice in unison against the Taliban's campaign to destroy ancient Buddhist sculptures in Afghanistan. The Taliban, on Thursday began demolishing non-Islamic sculptures, terming them "false gods."

Condemning the destruction of world heritage sites, they pointed out that if every dominant faith in a country began razing sculptures and structures of other faiths, there would be no ancient relics left on earth.

"Going by the same logic, someone would one day want to demolish the pyramids of Egypt, or just any other structure," said Ishaq Jamkhanwala, president of the Anjuman-i-Islam trust. "The Taliban is living in the Dark Ages and has not understood the teachings of Islam, leave alone learning to respect the religious sentiments of others."

Islamic scholar Rafiq Zakaria told this newspaper that the Taliban-sponsored desecration was a very serious issue as it went against the basic tenets of Islam. "The Holy Quran is very specific on this subject. It clearly denounces the desecration of sacred sites of other religions, pointing out that such intolerance could be targeted at the Muslims too. These fanatics in Afghanistan are bringing disgrace to the Islamic faith."

He said India should take firm action to prevent the demolitions from escalating by joining forces with the United Nations. "We have to strike at the root of the trouble, which is Pakistan. Pakistan is after all, both the instigator as well as the protector of the Taliban," Mr Zakaria said.

Director of the Prince of Wales museum Kalpana Desai noted that the cultural heritage of a country was not necessarily in tune with the

faith practised by the majority of people. "Ancient relics must be preserved for the sake of art alone and not because they are shrines of a particular faith."

Ms Desai pointed out that most of the sculptures being targeted in Afghanistan were from the Gandhara period, dating back to the second and third centuries AD.

"They are a fusion of the Graeco-Roman style with the Indian style that developed after cultural interactions between the two civilisations," she said. Among the statues are two towering 50-metre high sculptures of Buddha, believed to be the tallest statues of the standing Buddha.

Heritage activist Cyrus Guzder denounced the Taliban move as a "tragic one which cannot be condoned". He said, "The ancient works of art are not the property of Afghanistan alone, but are part of the world's cultural heritage. Many countries can trace their culture to these relics and to destroy them under some fanatical frenzy is outrageous."

Kekoo Gandhi, owner of an art gallery, felt that the immediate step for India should be to join forces with the United Nations and halt the destruction.

"On a long term basis, it is important to fight the increasing fanaticism the Gandhian way. By strong reactions, we will only be playing into the hands of these fanatics."

General secretary of the Ulema council Maulana Zahir Abbas said, "The Quran, on the topic of religious tolerance clearly says, 'You follow your religion, we will follow ours.' Allah himself has said that no one can be made to accept something forcibly. How then, can the Taliban use such force. It is absolutely un-Islamic."



BJP activists burn an effigy symbolising the Taliban at Churchgate in Mumbai on Friday to protest against the destruction of the 2,000-year-old Buddhist statues in Afghanistan.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

3 MAR 2001

Vandalism, says Russia

By Vladimir Radyuhin

MOSCOW, MARCH 1. Russia added its voice to the international outcry over the destruction of historical statues in Afghanistan. The Russian Foreign Ministry expressed "grave concern" over the Taliban's orders to destroy all non-Islamic religious and cultural monuments and denounced them as "vandalism".

"These plans cannot but be regarded as an encroachment on the cultural and historical wealth belonging not only to the people of Afghanistan, but to global civilisation," the statement said. Moscow used the occasion to highlight the barbarous nature of the Taliban regime, to which it is opposed. The vandalism against the material evidence of the rich cultural heritage of ancient Afghanistan demonstrates their undisguised hostility towards mankind's universal values, the Russian Foreign Ministry said, adding that the Taliban's ideology was hostile to the humanistic philosophy of the Islamic religion.

Moscow called on the world community to take every possible step to save the monuments as their destruction would "do irreparable harm to all mankind".

"We do hope that the Taliban will heed the appeals by the U.N. Secretary-General, the UNESCO leadership, many states and the world to recall the odious decree," the Russian Foreign Ministry said.

THE HINDU

- 1 MAR 2001

HD-12
2/3

Pak. reaction too little, too late

J. Kar

By B. Mukalidhar Reddy

ISLAMABAD, MARCH 1. The Pakistan Government's appeal to the Taliban regime not to act on the decree of its supremo, Mullah Omar, ordering destruction of all statues, including those of the Buddha in Bamiyan, is a classic case of too little and too late.

Under intense pressure from the international community to prevail upon the Taliban regime to stop destruction of the priceless historical monuments, Pakistan appealed to the Afghan Government to preserve historical artefacts almost 48 hours after the decree from Mullah Omar.

By the time the appeal was made public, it was perhaps too late. Reports by international news agencies quoting Taliban authorities suggested that the destruction of the monuments had already started and that the Taliban was in no mood to heed to appeals from the rest of the world.

The Pakistan Foreign Office was perhaps compelled to make an appeal to the Taliban regime as the diplomatic missions of countries around the world urged it to use its good offices to persuade the Taliban to spare the monuments.

The Sri Lankan mission appears to have taken the lead. The Sri Lankan High Commissioner, Gen. (retd.) Sirilal Weerasurya, actually deemed it necessary to call a meeting of envoys of some coun-



A file photo of a Taliban official standing beside a Buddha statue at the National Museum of Afghanistan in Kabul. — AP

tries to mobilise international opinion.

At the meeting, attended by envoys of some SAARC countries including India, he gave details of the efforts made by Sri Lanka, through Pakistan and directly, to stop destruction of the artefacts.

The Sri Lankan High Commissioner told the envoys that the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister, Mr.

Lakshman Kadirgamar, who was in Abu Dhabi when the news broke, took up the matter with the Governments of Pakistan, the UAE and Saudi Arabia. Incidentally, only these three countries recognise the Taliban regime.

When the Pakistan Foreign Minister, Mr. Abdul Sattar, reportedly expressed helplessness, the Sri Lankan mission took up

the matter with the Taliban mission here. An official of the Sri Lankan mission visited the Taliban embassy and expressed concern over the edict in his meeting with the Taliban Ambassador.

The Taliban Ambassador reportedly told the Sri Lankan official that Afghan authorities would go ahead with their move. The Taliban envoy reportedly wondered as to why there was such hue and cry over "stone figures" when there was no compassion for the people who were dying. The Japanese Embassy here also appears to have made a vain attempt to persuade the Taliban.

The troika of the European Union that recently sent a delegation for an assessment of the ground situation in Afghanistan is also reportedly upset. The diplomatic community here has been given to understand that the EU would take a common position on the subject.

In its appeal to the Taliban regime, Pakistan said it shared the concern of the international community and supported the preservation of the world's historical, cultural and religious heritage.

Appealing to the Afghan Government to take measures to protect the monuments, Pakistan said, "We hope the Afghan Government will show the spirit of tolerance enjoined upon by Islam as well as respect for international sentiment in this regard."

THE HINDU

2 MAR 2001

India protests assault on heritage monuments ^{10/13}

NEW DELHI, MARCH 1. India today termed as an "absolute outrage" the move for destruction of all statues, including the Bamiyan Buddhas, in Afghanistan following a decree by the Taliban militia.

"It is an absolute outrage," an External Affairs Ministry spokesman told presspersons. "The Taliban is persisting with their obscurantist and medieval programme in destroying valuable cultural, historical and archaeological artefacts."

They were also not paying heed to admonitions and appeals from the international community.

Condemning the decree, New Delhi said it was an "assault" on the common heritage of humankind. The decree once again profiled the militia's "narrow and obscurantist ideologies", the Ministry said in a statement.

"We condemn this edict and call upon the Taliban to ensure that the Bamiyan Buddhas and other relics are fully protected."

The statement recalled earlier decrees such as the one in 1998 which required that Afghan nationals who professed the Hindu faith wear a distinctive piece of clothing or put a distinctive mark on their bodies so that they could be easily distinguished.

Echo in LS

Members of the Lok Sabha also condemned the decree, even as the Government assured them that it would do everything possible to elicit international support to stop the action.

Raising the issue during zero hour, the BJP member, Mr. Vijay Kumar Malhotra, said a strong message should be sent that such an action was "unwarranted" and should be shelved.

Supporting him, the CPI(M) member, Mr. Suresh Kurup, said the Taliban regime's decision had hurt the sentiments of people in different countries, especially those who were followers of the Buddha. India should take the initiative to prevent the regime from going ahead with the move.

Sharing the members' anxiety, the Parliamentary Affairs Minister, Mr. Pramod Mahajan, said the Government was equally concerned and assured them that it would raise the issue at international fora, including the United Nations.

The Congress member, Mr. Ramesh Chennitala, said India must take up the matter with Afghanistan.

The Buddhist Monuments Development Council (BMDC) also slammed the Taliban decree, saying it would be "the most heinous crime in the history of the world".

The BMDC chairman, Dr. Arvind Alok, called upon the international community to exert pressure on the Taliban as its act "will not only hurt religious sentiments of millions of Buddhists the world over but also create disharmony among the people of different faiths". — PTI, UNI

THE HINDU

• 2 MAR 2001

Taliban orders all statues destroyed

Islamabad, February 27

AFGHANISTAN'S TALIBAN rulers yesterday extended their hardline vision of Islamic law by ordering the destruction of all statues, including the world's tallest standing Buddha.

The edict came directly from Mullah Mohammad Omar, the Islamic militia's leader, a recluse who has rarely left his home in Kandahar. "Based on the verdict of the clergymen and the decision of the supreme court of the Islamic emirate all the statues around Afghanistan must be destroyed," he ordered.

"Because God is one God and these statues are there to be worshipped and that is wrong. They should be destroyed so that they are not worshipped now or in the future."

Officials from the Ministry for the Prevention of Vice and the Promotion of Virtue will be sent out to destroy the statues.

Mullah Omar's order, the latest in a long line of anti-cultural and misogynistic decrees, appeared to be a stark response to a visit by western diplomats who travelled to Kabul after reports that ancient statues in the capital's museum were being

destroyed. The diplomats met the Taliban's information and culture minister yesterday but were not allowed into the museum.

More than a dozen pre-Islamic artefacts in the museum have been damaged in recent months by zealous Taliban soldiers. Most of the building's finest treasures were looted in fighting which followed the decade-long Soviet occupation.

Over the past 20 years many of Afghanistan's richest archaeological finds have been smuggled across the border to Peshawar, Pakistan, and sold to private collectors. Others have been destroyed by artillery and rocket fire. In the past Mullah Omar has ordered non-Islamic artefacts to be protected, although to little effect. Afghanistan's finest archaeological site is in Bamiyan, 90 miles west of Kabul, where the world's tallest standing Buddha is 53 metres high, carved out of a sandstone cliff-face. Nearby stands another Buddha 37 metres (120ft) high.

Although the sculptures, carved in the 2nd century AD, withstood Genghis Khan's invasion, the land was mined during the Soviet occupation.

The Guardian

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

28 FEB 2001

Pak check on militants' weapons display

Karachi, Feb. 26 (Reuters): Pakistan said today Islamic groups fighting in Kashmir have agreed to stop the public display of weapons and talks were underway on how to regulate the collection of funds for the holy war.

Interior minister Moinuddin Haider, at the centre of a storm since saying this month that the government might ban collections for *jihad* , said he had held nine hours of talks with Islamic groups on the issues.

"There were two portions of my directives, one was to stop the display of weapons. Don't you think the *jihadi* parties have accepted this principle?" Haider told a news conference. "All have accepted it, they said 'yes we will not display weapons'."

Haider said he told militant organisations that they should not collect funds in an offensive manner, showing pictures of rockets and weapons for the Kashmir fighting.

"There is a humanitarian aspect to the Kashmir issue as well, thousands of Kashmiri civilians

are pouring into Pakistan crying for help," the minister said.

Haider said the government will hold fresh talks with the Muslim groups to resolve the issue after progress in recent talks.

"We got up with good feelings that the rule of law will be established... We are preparing a code of conduct and plan to hold fresh talks with them (Islamic militants)," he said.

Haider said the government has also launched a crackdown on banners and hoardings illegally pasted on public and private properties by Islamic and political groups.

"Blackening walls of the whole country is not acceptable in a civilised society," he said, adding that the community should also play a role in stopping the menace.

"There should be a role for the community in this. Somebody has to stand up and say why you are forcing me to give charity," he said.

Haider said the government

has also gone after hard-core sectarian organisations who are allegedly involved in the recent killing of Shiite and Sunni Muslims in Pakistan.

Over 100 militants have been arrested from the Punjab province and several arrests have also taken place in Karachi, he said.

"We don't want to take action against one faction, but have asked the administration to go ahead and arrest those who are involved in sectarian killings," Haider said.

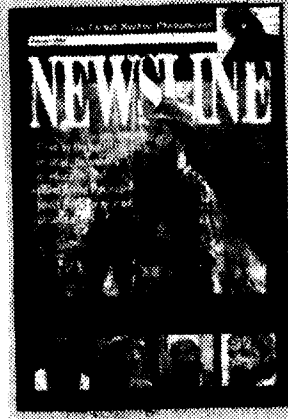
Nearly two dozen Sunni and Shiite Muslims have been killed in tit-for-tat shootings in the past two months in a fresh wave of religious killings stemming from differences over interpretation of Islamic beliefs.

Haider said the government also has taken precautions before executing a Sunni militant convicted of murdering an Iranian diplomat in the early 1990s. The death sentence will be carried out in Punjab province on Wednesday.

THE TELEGRAPH

27 FEB 2001

Inside jihad: Another view



Newsline, a respected Pakistani magazine, looks at the jihad industry which has now expanded with cadres drawn from campuses and the professional class.

country every week. The majority are from Punjab and the North West Frontier Province, but a large number of them also come from Sindh, specially Karachi. Many of those who want to join the jihad come from rich families.

Sohail (an alias), an 18-year-old college student, driving his own car, arrived in the Lashkar office in Islamabad earlier this month to sign up for training. Apparently, a student at an English-medium institution, he could hardly speak Urdu.

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"The Fidayeen is one who must complete his mission even in the worst circumstances," says Abdullah Muntazir, a Lashkar spokesman. However, he said, they are totally different from suicide bombers who blow themselves up. "We consider suicide attacks unIslamic. Many Fidayeen come back alive after completing their mission," said Muntazir.

Abu Ukrema may be one of few Fidayeen who return alive after successfully completing their mission. On January 16, six Lashkar Fidayeen garbed in In-

ZAHID HUSSAIN

ABU Ukrema, a young warrior, has just returned home after successfully carrying out a 'daring attack' on an Indian army post in Kapwara district. An activist of the Lashkar-i-Taiba, he received a bullet wound during the encounter with Indian forces which lasted several hours and left many Indian soldiers dead. His thin frame, gentle eyes and polite manners, however, do not give even the slightest indication of his being a guerrilla fighter.

A school dropout, the bearded 25-year-old 'Fidayee', who operated inside Kashmir under the nom de guerre of Abu Ukrema for months, comes from a working class family of Lahore. His other three brothers, who work as labourers in a local factory have also completed their guerrilla training and are waiting for a call from the party high command to join the fighting across the Line of Control (LoC).

"Our entire family is dedicated to the cause of jihad," Abu Ukrema tells *Newsline* at the Lashkar's headquarters in Lahore. He was injured during the fighting as soon as the bullet removed from his leg. "It is my duty to become a martyr," he says.

Abu Ukrema is among the thousands of young "holy warriors" who have been involved in the guerrilla war in Kashmir. The concept of jihad, which was revived in the 1980s during the Afghan resistance war against the Soviet occupation, sees its continuation in Kashmir, Chechnya, Bosnia and the Middle East.

Afghanistan provided an inspiration to a whole generation of Islamic radicals who see it their religious duty to fight against oppression of Muslims anywhere in the world. Thousands of Pakistanis have joined the independence struggle in Kashmir which they believe is the first stage towards their ultimate goal of achieving domination of Islam over other civilisations.

"We believe in the clash of civilisations and our jihad will continue



until Islam becomes the dominant religion," declares Hafiz Mohammed Saeed, the chief of Lashkar-i-Taiba, the most militant of the Muslim guerrilla outfits fighting in Kashmir. The organisation which has its headquarters at Markaz-e-Dawa-ul-Irshad, in Muridke near Lahore, has produced a large number of highly motivated Islamic fighters who have given a new dimension to the guerrilla war in Kashmir. Its cadres prefer to die in an encounter rather than be arrested by Indian security forces.

The group, which believes in a Taliban-like orthodox Islam, draws its recruits largely from the universities, colleges and from among the unemployed urban youth. Islamic madrasahs provide only 10 per cent of the volunteers. "Those coming from the universities and colleges are much more motivated and conscious of what they are doing," says Naveed Qamar, a Lashkar activist and a graduate of the Lahore University of Engineering. There are, however, some others like Ukrema who come from a working class background.

Scores of young men, many of them still in their teens, are taken to the camps for military training from various centres across the

country every week. The majority are from Punjab and the North West Frontier Province, but a large number of them also come from Sindh, specially Karachi. Many of those who want to join the jihad come from rich families.

Sohail (an alias), an 18-year-old college student, driving his own car, arrived in the Lashkar office in Islamabad earlier this month to sign up for training. Apparently, a student at an English-medium institution, he could hardly speak Urdu.

He was told to come to the office on any Saturday evening to be taken to the camp. The training in various camps in Azad Kashmir and in the North West Frontier are conducted in two stages. At the initial level a volunteer is given basic weapons training for three weeks. The second stage of rigorous guerrilla training is restricted only to those who are fully committed to jihad and are practicing Muslims.

There are thousands of trained guerrillas in the country who are anxiously waiting for their turn to sneak into Kashmir. But not everyone is lucky enough. "I pray to Allah that my turn (to go to Kashmir) comes soon," says Abu Mohammed, a volunteer of a guerrilla organisation, in Muzaffarabad. "I have only one dream — to be a martyr."

The Lashkar, which faces the threat of being declared a terrorist organisation by the US administration, was responsible for last month's attack on Delhi's Red Fort.

A Lashkar camp across the border

dian police uniforms attacked the high security Srinagar airport and fought a fierce gun battle with security forces before being killed. Identified by their nom de guerres, Abu Salahuddin, Abu Hanzala, Abu Hubaid, Abu Osama, Abu Abdullah, Sayyaf and Abu Sadullah, the guerrillas were all from the Punjab and in their 20s. They joined the jihad across the Line of Control two years ago.

More than 5,000 militants, many of them in their camouflage guerrilla outfits, brandishing automatic weapons, vowed to avenge the death of their comrades and continue the jihad at a ghaibana namaz-i janaza in Muzaffarabad. "Jihad, jihad," they chanted fervently.

"We will force the Indian troops out of Kashmir..." Hafiz Saeed told his supporters.

Other militant organisations like Jaish-i-Mohammed, however, believe suicide attacks are one of their most lethal weapons in the guerrilla war in Kashmir. One of the newest Islamic militant outfits, the Jaish is led by Maulana Azhar Masood. Its cadre are largely drawn from among the urban and rural lower middle class.

'Jehad outfits cannot be stopped from raising funds'

By B. Muralidhar Reddy

SLAMABAD, FEB. 21. The confrontation between the Pakistan-based religious and militant outfits and the military Government is poised to take an interesting turn with the observation of the Lahore High Court that no one can stop these outfits from raising funds for jehad (holy war).

During the hearings on the petition filed by the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI), the court on Tuesday was quoted as saying "go ahead, nobody can stop you from fundraising." It also urged the Deputy Attorney General to present the Government side on the plea.

Though it is an oral observation and not a verdict, it is a setback for the Musharraf Government in its efforts to rein in extremist outfits.

The petition, which says that the Government has no right under the Constitution to prevent religious outfits from raising funds for jehad, has argued that Pakistan is an Islamic State and Islam enjoins upon its followers to participate in jehad. It has complained about the recent statements of the Interior Minister, Lt. Gen. (retd.) Moinuddin Haider, regarding the Government's resolve to stop religious groups from forcibly collecting

THE HINDU

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Pakistan bans public fund collection for ^{HG 15} ^{19/2} jihadi groups

Islamabad, February 18

PAKISTANI MILITARY regime has directed all provincial governments to ban public collection of funds by the jihadi groups and open display of weapons by their activists, according to a media report.

Although there has been no official announcement, *The News* daily reported today that the federal government has directed all provincial governments to enforce its orders prohibiting the public fund collections and open display of weapons by Islamic militant outfits.

"An interior ministry directive says that there should be no permission of arms display to anyone",

the daily said.

The regime has already been facing criticism from the jihadi groups, including the Lashkar-e-Tayyeba and Harkat-ul-Mujahideen, after Interior Minister Moinuddin Haider announced on Tuesday last that the government was planning to check the public collection of funds by Islamic militant outfits.

"No one will be allowed to display arms whether he belongs to a jihadi or religious group or force people to give donations for the purchase of weapons in the name of the *jihad*", Haider said in Karachi. The militant outfits have reportedly decided to form an alliance to resist the government's

move. Lashkar chief Hafiz Saeed was quoted two days back as saying that he had held a meeting with various other jihadi outfits to work out a broad alliance to resist any attempts to impose curbs on them.

Sources said the regime is in no mood to totally get rid of these groups as they were too important for furthering the low cost war against India in Kashmir.

It is in this context that General Pervez Musharraf has countered country's stereotyped image of being an extremist nation. He claimed that Pakistan was a modern, progressive and tolerant Islamic state bestowed with abundance of rich natural and human resources. (PTI)

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Pan-Islamic meet calls for ceaseless militant campaign

By Atul Aneja

NEW DELHI, JAN. 19. Pan-Islamic insurgents, including representatives of the Hizb-ul-Mujahideen and the Lashkar-e-Taiba, have concluded a brainstorming session in Jeddah on the fallout of sanctions imposed on Afghanistan and the Indian peace initiative in Kashmir.

According to highly-placed government sources, the six-member group, which participated in the three-day meet which began on January 3, included the Hizb chief, Syed Salahuddin, who had proceeded to Saudi Arabia on a pilgrimage. The LeT representatives and other 'jehadis' from Afghanistan also participated. The talks were unofficial, and not held under Saudi Arabia's patronage.

The meeting concluded that a militant, pan-Islamic campaign should continue uninterrupted. Analysts here point out that this decision has implications for India as the LeT and the Harkat-ul-Mujahideen have been perpetrating violence and rejected the Prime Minister, Mr. A. B. Vajpayee's ceasefire initiative in Kashmir. The LeT, in particular, has carried out high-profile attacks against Indian forces, installations and symbols of national importance in Kashmir and beyond.

Despite the meeting of the 'jehadi' groups on Saudi soil, India is unlikely to seek Riyadh's

support for restraining Kashmiri militancy. The External Affairs Minister, Mr. Jaswant Singh, said in Berlin *en route* Riyadh that he discounted the possibility of a Saudi role in curbing the militancy.

Mr. Vajpayee, in a statement on Thursday, said the responsibility of restraining Kashmiri militants lay with Pakistan. "What is particularly surprising and distressing is the fact that the leadership of Pakistan continues to do nothing to restrain these terrorist organisations, which operate from the Pakistani soil, even as it professes its eagerness to resume talks with India."

The Saudi meeting also dealt at length on possible options related to the Saudi dissident, Osama bin Laden. The United Nations Security Council, in a resolution, has asked the Taliban to hand over Osama or face international economic and political isolation. The sanctions, which include an embargo on military sales, and the freezing of the Taliban's overseas assets,

come into force today.

According to an assessment, the Taliban's hectic diplomatic exertions are unlikely to dilute the sanctions. The Foreign Minister, Mr. Wakil Ahmad Muttawakil, is trying to reach out to India, Russia and Iran, which back the rival Northern Alliance. Sources feel that both the United States and Russia — co-sponsors of the U.N. resolution — are not in a mood to relent.

A significant meaning is being read into the visit to Pakistan by the Commander-in-Chief of the U.S. Central Command, Gen. Tommy R. Franks, on the eve of the imposition of sanctions on Afghanistan. The General, it is felt, may convey to the Pakistanis, Washington's readiness to take decisive action on the Afghan front. General Franks' mission assumes additional importance as the sanctions demand withdrawal of foreign military advisors from Pakistan. This is likely to cause discomfort in Islamabad, which has deputed its officers to the Taliban.

THE HINDU

20 JAN 2001

Hasina Govt. arrests fundamentalist leaders

By Haroon Habib

DHAKA, FEB. 5. Deeply concerned over the alarming rise of religious fundamentalists who recently killed a policeman in a mosque and declared two High Court judges *murtads* for ruling against issuing of *fatwas*, the Government of Sheikh Hasina Wajed has decided to deal with the zealots with an iron hand.

In a major crackdown, the Government arrested two top fundamentalist leaders — Shaikhul Hadit Maulan Azizul Huq and Mufti Fazlul Haq Amini — the president and the secretary general of the Islami Oikya Jote (IOJ) and dozens of their supporters over the last two days.

This is the first major offensive by the Government against religious hotheads who, of late, have accepted the leadership of the main Opposition leader, Begum Khaleda Zia, under the banner of the four-party alliance.

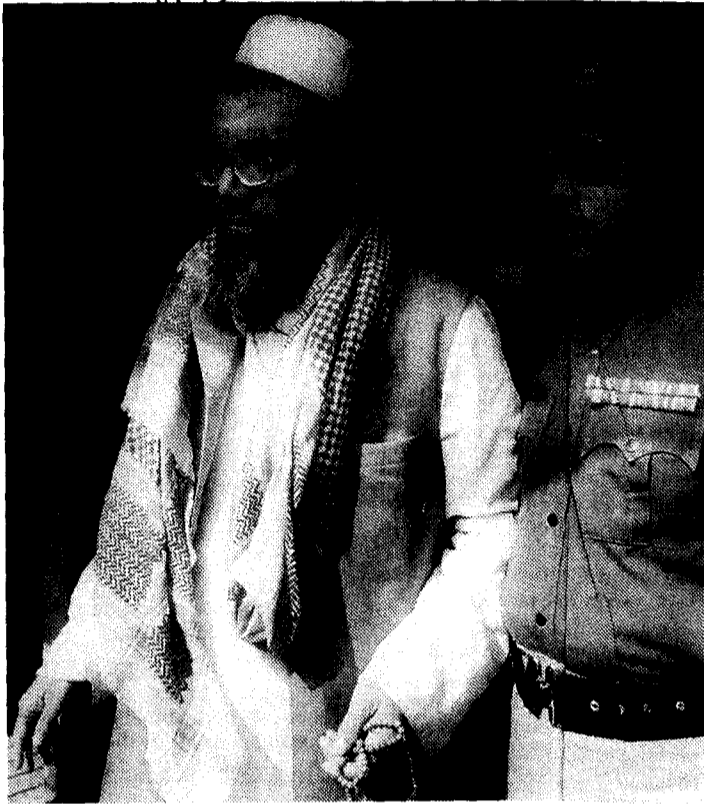
They were arrested after their militant supporters clashed with the police, mainly in Dhaka and killed a policeman.

The police also recovered a large number of lethal weapons from a madrasa run by the IOJ leaders.

The arrest of Amini, who is also the convenor of the "Committee for Implementation of Islamic Laws", drew instant reaction from his supporters on Sunday. Several hundred activists of the IOJ clashed with the police.

Some of them were also arrested.

The detective police arrested Shaikhul Hadit Azizul Haq on



Mufti Fazlul Haq Amini (left), secretary general of the Islami Oikya Jote, being taken to the central jail in Dhaka on Monday. Amini is charged with mobilising Islamic activists who killed a policeman in Dhaka on Sunday. — A

Sunday night when he was returning to Dhaka from northern Rangpur after addressing a public meeting there as one of the key leaders of the four-party alliance.

The police said the two leaders were arrested under the Public Safety Act on charges of threatening to kill the two High Court judges and damaging public and

private properties.

Political analysts see the crackdown as a major policy decision of the Hasina Government which is going to leave office on completion of its five-year tenure within months, and face the general election under a neutral caretaker government.

Sheikh Hasina Sunday de-

nounced the use of religion for political purposes.

"Islam is a religion of peace. But certain traders in religion and anti-Liberation forces are trying to misuse it through violence."

She was firm on her decision to crack down on fundamentalists though her Government is facing criticism, particularly from the Opposition alliance, of being "anti-Islamic".

Begum Zia, who condemned the police action on the fundamentalists, has claimed that agents of the Government had killed the policeman and placed the body inside the mosque.

It is risky for a political party to take drastic action on leaders who talk religion.

But a senior police officer said the recent violence had forced the Government's hand.

The Home Affairs Minister, Mr. Mohammad Nasim, described the recent events as the "result of a blueprint" by "pro-Pakistani elements" who, according to him, were trying to create an unstable situation in the country ahead of the general elections.

The ruling party suspected that the Begum Zia-led BNP was behind this "conspiracy".

The arrest of the fundamentalist leaders did not draw any adverse reaction in the country except in Brahmanbaria township, where supporters of Mufti Fazlul Haq Amini attacked and burnt government installations on Monday.

Paramilitary forces have been deployed in support of the police in controlling the violence.