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In covering terrorism, U.S. media should not ignore India

By Bal Ram Singh

Even a year after the terrible events of Sept. 11, the world still seems to be in deep search for solutions to the menace of terrorism.

The Indian nation has perhaps the only culture in the world capable of taking moral and spiritual leadership of the situation. India is the only country with traditions of welcoming the differences of every faith.

The world now needs not only the reincarnation of Gandhi, Vivekananda, and Kabir, but also Chanakya and Yoganand, to guide the nations and the spirits of people.

The main problem in dealing with the terrorism is that of inadequate intellectual alternatives.

Academic institutions as well as news and entertainment media need a major overhaul in their mindset. We must stop treating Sept. 11 as another terrible tragedy. It should be used as a wake-up call to review our way of conducting our responsibilities.

The media coverage of terrorism, especially as it relates to India, has been terrible in the United States. First of all, India hardly appears in the U.S. media unless there is an incident for which a patronizing article can be written. There is plenty to be written for the functioning of vibrant democracy being practiced in India even in the remote villages.

Over 140 million Muslims live freely in India. Their ancestors decided by their free choice to live there.

The media hardly examines the root causes of the terrorism. No, it is not poverty, unemployment, lack of political freedom, or even religion. It is the hatred, sometimes in the name of religion, which continuously nourishes the terror tantrum.

There could be no better example to illustrate this than the story of India and Pakistan. The sole power behind the creation of Pakistan was hatred, supported by religious bigotry.

If it was not for religion, then there would not be more Muslims in India today than in Pakistan. Also, Bangladesh would not have separated from Pakistan.

For U.S. media to fail to point out Pakistan-sponsored terrorism is a breach of their professed values of free, fair and factual reporting. Pakistan has remained the mother of all the sanctuaries to terrorists, who have continuously targeted the United States and India. But to treat them softly

either in the name of freedom struggle or allies continues have consequences throughout the free world.

When pointed this out at a panel discussion at the National Press Club, Washington, D.C. in April, Selig Harrison, a veteran journalist and scholar agreed with it.

But a seasoned diplomat-scholar like Dennis Kux thought it was not possible for U.S. media to cover all 193 countries in the world.

India is not just another country. It commands the second-largest population, biggest democracy, highest number of scientists and engineers, and is one of the world's major economic, industrial and military powers.

But that is perhaps not as important as the experience India has in dealing with international and cross-border terrorism, emanating from neighboring Pakistan and Afghanistan and on over from the Middle East. Moreover, India has a direct interest in and has shown a willingness to help combat international terrorism ♦ because it believes in preserving fundamental freedoms and the rights of human beings within its territory and globally.

Certain newspapers ♦ such as Los Angeles Times, and Washington Post, and to certain degree The New York Times ♦ have realized this in recent months. Others, for example, The Boston Globe, resist presenting a full and fair story on terrorism against India.

For a respectable newspaper like the Globe, with sizable Indian-American population in its readership, it is important that historical perspectives to the stories are presented. Also, points of views of both sides should be represented at least in their Op/Ed and editorial sections.

Even stories on the Gujarat violence are presented without paying due attention to facts and fidelity. Reporting of events should be factually confirmed, and sources of their information should be reliable. One-upmanship and sensationalizing these stories could lead to disastrous consequences to public peace in India as well as to Indo-U.S. relations.

Such coverage is not only damaging to India but also to its effort in promoting global harmony. The patronizing attitude of Western (read the United States) media results in the diminishing enthusiasm of countries like India for combating terrorism, which can least be afforded at this juncture.

We are more accommodating to regimes in Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, which have become true axis of terrorism, than to countries like India.

This cannot be acceptable to the people living in the United States, no matter what the diplomatic and political cost. Non-resident Indians have a major responsibility to help bring the truth to the forefront of the public attention. Academic institutions also have responsibility to examine fundamental issues beyond clashes of civilizations and Islam vs. the rest of the world.

Sadly, these responsibilities may be too much to ask under the prevailing culture of anybody but me.

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