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■ [1994 January Table of Contents](#)

1 Comment



*Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, January 1994, page 41

Special Report

## Hindu Extremists Seek Ties With Israel and Its U.S. Lobby

By *Faisal Kutty*

The Hindutva movement appears to be gaining momentum throughout India, and spilling over its borders. Like a contagious disease, this form of religious fanaticism is spreading even among expatriate Hindus, who increasingly are putting their financial power at the service of Hindutva forces.

This includes a segment—a minority so far—of America's estimated 800,000 Hindus. Organizations such as the Overseas Friends of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the U.S. chapter of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America (VHP) "World Hindu Council), and the Friends of India Society International (FISI) are lobbying in and around Capitol Hill in support of ideas considered both fanatical and fascistic by many supporters of secular government in India.

Shekhar Tiwari, in charge of congressional relations activity for the FISI, told the *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, that his and allied groups are latecomers on the lobbying scene. Nevertheless, the BJP-RSS-VHP public relations skills were evident during the visit of former BJP President Murli Manohar Joshi.

According to *India Abroad*, during Joshi's August visit American supporters arranged a meeting with State Department, Pentagon and Indian Embassy officials, as well as analysts from the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Studies, and the Institute of National Strategic Studies. The meeting, which was closed to the media at the request of Joshi's supporters, was intended to dispel the "myth" that the BJP was a right-wing Hindu fascist party.

The radicals are attempting to overcome their late entry into the influence game in Washington by developing ties with its most experienced and powerful advocates of foreign aid and a foreign country, the [Israel lobby](#). This follows a number of incidents over the past few years linking Israel or its American supporters to developments in India which have given impetus to the conclusion by Hindu extremists that Israel is the key to the Washington door.

One such development was the report of alleged Israeli intelligence agents being spotted in war-torn Kashmir. Israel denied the charges and said the Israelis temporarily detained in Kashmir by Indian authorities were tourists or adventurers.

In the summer of 1992, while I was in Kerala on India's southwestern coast, there were reports from credible sources that Israelis were seen in the state meeting with BJP and RSS officials. This was immediately before the worst communal riots in the state since the Moplah rebellion of 1921 (a Muslim-led farm workers rebellion against upper caste Hindu, Christian and Muslim

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landowners).

Prior to the 1992 clashes, Kerala had been a model of communal harmony, even though it is one of the most religiously diverse Indian states with a population that is 60 percent Hindu, 20 percent Muslim and 20 percent Christian. Kerala's former thriving Jewish community has emigrated en masse, largely to Israel, and now numbers only 22 persons.

Early last year, the Federation of Assemblies of Muslim Youth of Sri Lanka wrote a letter to Indian Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao linking the rise in anti-Muslim sentiments in India with the resumption of relations with Israel. The letter stated that in Sri Lanka "the first major communal clash between the [island nation's] Muslims and Tamils occurred within a year" of the opening of an Israeli interests section in the U.S. Embassy in Colombo. The section was subsequently ordered closed by the late President Ranasinghe Premadasa. The Federation urged Rao to take the same action in regard to Israeli representation in India.

All this may be the result of nothing more than conjecture. But reports indicate that BJP-RSS-VHP supporters in the U.S. would like to see a Zionist-Hindu alliance and are striving hard to develop it. The extremist leaders seem to have intensified their new courtship right after India established full diplomatic relations with Israel in January 1992.

The Hindu-chauvinist BJP, RSS, VHP and the Shiv Sena (Army of Shiva, the Hindu god of destruction) are the main groups which orchestrated the destruction of the Babri Masjid (Ayodhya Mosque) and the subsequent massacres of Muslims in Bombay and elsewhere in India. The same groups also welcomed and celebrated Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres' visit to India on May 17, 1993, and the closer ties with Israel which ensued. The Peres group was the highest-ranking Israeli delegation ever to visit India.

Among leading Indian media reporting attempts by BJP-RSS-VHP leaders to get closer both to Israel and to the Zionist lobby in Washington is *The Times of India*. A Washington, DC report in its Aug. 1, 1993 edition noted that although the extent of such efforts cannot be documented, "what nevertheless remains a fact is the persistent lobbying by Sangh Parivar supporters here."

Such efforts by the Hindu fascists are ironic. The leading mind and former chair of the Hindu extremist RSS, the late Guru M.S. Golwalkar, in his now-famous work *Our Nationhood*, wrote of his admiration for Adolf Hitler and suggested that the "race purification" carried out by Hitler was a perfect example to be followed by Hindu nationalists in dealing with India's claimed 150 million Muslims as well as its Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists and other minorities, all of whom should be denied even basic citizens' rights.

## Access to U.S. Policymakers

The BJP-RSS-VHP supporters in the U.S., whom many believe are providing a significant percentage of the financing required by the fascists in India, now have undertaken another task on behalf of those extremists. This is to obtain access to U.S. policymakers in order to ensure that they do not undermine the campaign of Hindu chauvinists to come to power in New Delhi.

The latest attempt to gain legitimacy was through the Global Vision 2000 conference held last Aug. 6 to 8 in Washington, DC. The aim was to gain acceptance of the World Hindu Council (VHP) in North America, even though it is banned in India.

The Washington effort was unsuccessful in appealing to the broader Hindu and non-Hindu Indian community in the U.S. (which numbers more than one million), according to Thomas Abraham, founder and former president of the New York based National Federation of Indian Associations. "They used the name of Swami Vivekanand, who has broad appeal, but the conference catered to the membership of the BJP-RSS-VHP," he told the *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*.

Prominent leaders from India who took part included VHP President Ashok Singhal, RSS leader K.C. Sudarshan, Murli Manohar Joshi and Uma Bharati, a fiery female leader. Singhal was quoted in the Aug. 31, 1993 issue of *India Today* as predicting that "America will realize with this program that Hindutva has asserted itself and now there is no force that can stop it."

The BJP-RSS-VHP leaders in the U.S. make no secret of their admiration for the influential position enjoyed by Israel's supporters in the United States and their desires to make use of it. "The Jewish lobby has a great understanding of the political process in the U.S.," according to Tiwari, of the Denver-based FISI, which supports the radical groups in India. "They have been very favorable to India's interests."

FISI evolved from the Indians for Democracy Movement (IDM), formed in response to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's emergency rule in 1975. Tiwari told the *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, that "our efforts at lobbying are new and weak so we seek guidance from the Jewish lobby and they have helped us whenever they can."

In its Aug. 1 article, *The Times of India* reported that Hindutva leaders also have met both with

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Clinton administration officials and with Zionist leaders to bring about a favorable attitude toward the rising Hindutva tide in India. "It is a known practice that whenever senior BJP leaders visit the U.S.," *The Times of India* reported, "meetings are scheduled with Jewish groups . . . experts from prestigious think tanks such as the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and, if possible, State Department officials."

The Hindutva supporters probably also were encouraged by Shimon Peres' statement during his May visit that Israel supports India on the Kashmir issue and that it would support any moves by the U.S. to declare Pakistan a terrorist state. In return, Peres said, he expects India to vote differently in the international arena on issues affecting Israel. This latter statement was in reference to the fact that India has been a consistent supporter of many Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) positions in various international arenas.

Israel and its supporters obviously view the extremists' attempts to befriend them positively, since this is a shift from the position generally held by Indians since the days of Mohandas K. Gandhi. Gandhi said that "Palestine *belongs* to the Arabs in the same sense that England belongs to the English."

## "Gandhi on Zionism"

He stated unequivocally that it was "wrong and inhuman to impose the Jews on the Arabs. What is going on in Palestine today *cannot* be justified by any moral code of conduct." Gandhi bluntly described the idea of handing over Palestine to the Jews as a "crime against humanity." The champion of nonviolence also stated that "according to the accepted canons of right and wrong, nothing can be said against the Arab resistance in the face of overwhelming odds."

Much of this seems forgotten by Hindu extremists in their rush to capitalize on Israeli influence in Washington by promising Israel economic and military as well as political benefits if they come to power in New Delhi. The Indian media is full of statements by BJP officials questioning why India is sacrificing a "beneficial relationship with Israel for fear of a few Arab despots."

Some analysts note that such Hindu extremists believe that they can make such statements with impunity because no matter how close India gets to Israel, there will be no reaction from most Arab and Muslim states. The Indian government realizes, however, that India benefits far more from its present broad ties with the Muslim world than it can ever benefit from supporting Israel.

There are hundreds of thousands of Indians working in the Middle East and providing India with billions of dollars in direct remittances. Their acceptance as trusted employees at all levels in Middle East states also eases the dismal employment situation at home.

According to the Institute of Development Studies in Trivandrum, the capital of Kerala, the direct benefit to Kerala alone from its more than 150,000 workers in the Gulf amounts to 25 percent of its GDP. The Muslim world also has provided an open market for Indian exports "from agricultural produce to manufactured goods.

Commenting on the increased media attention focused on their lobbying initiatives, Tiwari says that "Our efforts are only attracting attention because of the growing perception that the BJP will come to power in the next election."

Such attention, however, appears to be well deserved. Many India-watchers believe that if the BJP came to power at the national level, the pluralistic society of India as it exists today would soon be relegated to the realm of vanished "golden ages" in the subcontinent's long and colorful past.

*Faisal Kutty is a free-lance writer presently living in Ottawa.*

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