

Is god a brothel keeper, wonders ex-law minister and triggers row

Former union law minister Ram Jethmalani Saturday kicked up a row at an international conference on terrorism, asking if Islam's jihadi doctrine does not virtually render 'god a brothel keeper', prompting a Saudi Arabian envoy to walk out of the conference.

Addressing the seminar, Jethmalani wondered if the jihadi doctrine, propagating the belief allegedly held by Islam's Wahab sect that Muslims attaining martyrdom while fighting non-Muslims 'get a place in heaven and the company of the opposite sex there', does not amount to saying that 'god is a brothel keeper'.

The self-confessed maverick legal hawk also went on to equate god as someone 'suffering with Alzheimer's disease', while advising the Indian government and the international community against trusting god in fighting terrorism.

'He will not help as he is suffering with Alzheimer's disease,' said Jethmalani, while advising the government to junk its obsession with 'an irrelevant non-aligned movement' and 'join the forces of good to fight forces of evil'.

Jethmalani made 'the non-mincing' remarks at an international conference of jurists on terrorism, inaugurated by President Pratibha Patil and attended among others by Singapore Chief Justice Chan Sek Keong and Justice Awn S Al-Khasawneh of the International Court of Justice and envoys of several countries.

Jethmalani's remarks caused Saudi Arabia's Ambassador to India Faisal-al-Trad to walk out, while an embarrassed union Law Minister M. Veerappa Moily swiftly sought to distance himself and the government from the controversial remarks.

Justice Khasawneh contradicted Jethmalani on some facts referred to by him on the jihadi doctrine.

Jethmalani made the remark while dwelling upon the need to fight terrorism also at its ideological level.

'I am a student of all religions, including Islam and I have read the Koran several times. I find that the Prophet is a man of peace,' said Jethmalani, adding that it nowhere preaches hate and violence.

'But the decline of Islam started in the 17th century when a person named Wahab propagated hate and violence against all non-Muslims by mis-interpreting one shora (verse) of the Koran,' said Jethmalani.

'I have read that shora thousands of times, but I have not found anything wrong in it. But, according to Wahab, all other people, including Christians, Jews and Hindus, and even Shias have forfeited their rights to live,' said Jethmalani.

Following Jethmalani's speech, Saudi Arabia's Ambassador Faisal-al-Trad was seen walking out of the conference, apparently taking offence at the remarks.

Organiser of the event Adesh Aggarwala said the ambassador had walked out but returned after

Moily's statement that the views expressed by Jethmalani were not that of the government.

Moily, in his address, said that terrorism cannot be attributed to any particular religion.

It was unfortunate that the entire Islam as a religion was being blamed for terrorism, Jethmalani said, adding that 'there are also Hindu terrorists and Buddhist terrorists'.

Terming the Non-Aligned Movement and Panchsheel as evil, Jethmalani said 'India should align with forces of good to combat the forces of evil. India and its foreign ministers must learn to reassess the doctrines of past.'

He said India's foreign policy establishment should be courageous to shun any relationship with the country's 'enemies'.

Referring to Jethmalani's comments, Justice Awn S Al-Khasawneh, a judge of the International Court of Justice, asked him not 'to make sweeping statements'. He also said that the Wahab movement had started in the 18th century and not in 17th century as Jethmalani had remarked.

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