

Muslims have to fight misconceptions about Islam: Saudi envoy

The 'anti-Islam' remarks by former law minister Ram Jethmalani who linked Wahhabis, a conservative Muslim sect, with terrorism, is a closed chapter for him, but Saudi envoy to India Faisal Hassan Trad says Muslims have a long way to go and work hard to rid their faith of the Islamic terror stigma.

'Despite all the humanistic teachings of the religion, Islam is still linked with terrorism. It is an irony. It has turned out to be a global phenomenon and is a dilemma for the Muslim world,' Trad told IANS in an interview.

'I believe it is a long way and we have to work hard to rid our faith of this stigma. I agree terrorists have hijacked Islam, but Islam is not what they propagate and what they are killing for. In fact, it is all un-Islamic,' he said, days after he staged a walkout following Jethmalani's comments that 'India had friendly relations with a country that supported Wahhabi terrorism'.

Wahhabism is a sect attributed to Mohammad ibne Abdul Wahhab, an 18th century Arab scholar, who believed in puritanic Islam and launched a movement against what he considered innovations in Islam.

Jethmalani angered the Saudi envoy with his remarks at an international conference on terrorism here Saturday.

'I found his utterances bad as he was directly blaming Islam and my country (Saudi Arabia) for terrorism. I did what I should have done as a Muslim and also as a Saudi ambassador. I walked out in protest but offered my apologies to President Pratibha Patil who was on the panel in the conference. I didn't want to create an impression that I was protesting against her,' Trad said.

'And can you believe he was speaking in his own country which has some 140 million Muslim population?

'He was targeting the centre of Islam. We Saudis are proud to be from the birthplace of Islam. We have a huge responsibility of serving the Muslim world, and accusing Saudi Arabia or the Muslim world of breeding terror is just unacceptable, I repeat just unacceptable.'

He said his country -- itself 'a victim of terrorism' -- has always expressed a will to wage a fight against the menace.

'Saudi Arabia has even volunteered to host a centre for global fight against terror -- an idea which was mooted in an international conference on counter terrorism in 2005, in which India also participated,' he said.

'It (the Jethmalani controversy) is a closed chapter now. I have nothing against Ram (Jethmalani) personally. I don't want to drag this issue on and on,' Trad said, adding the lawyer was speaking for himself and not representing India.

'King Abdullah (of Saudi Arabia) has initiated a movement to start a dialogue between different faiths and civilisations. That is what Islam teaches us,' he said.

'Islam is the religion of humanity. You see any great human value and belief ends up to be a part of Islamic teachings. Islam stresses on justice, transparency, love, respect and freedom for each other, love for family and women's rights,' he said, while expressing concern that people 'misread and misinterpret Islam'.

Quoting the Quran, Trad said: 'The holy book says he who kills a person without a legal trial is like he killed the whole humanity. What more do you need to prove Islam is for brotherhood, peace and love? It is a religion that doesn't even allow suicide. Killing your own self is a big sin in Islam.

'Prophet Mohammed's wife Khadija is the first business woman in Islamic history. The Prophet used to work for her. And even continued to work for her after getting married to her. This is an example to explain how Islam respects and ensures women's rights and freedom.'

'Islam,' the envoy told IANS, 'has no justification for terrorism'.

'What is not human is forbidden in Islam. Allah says we have created mankind and given it dignity. Islam cannot accept anybody in its fold who trashes human dignity,' he said, adding terrorists have 'no identity, no religion and no border. You cannot attribute it to Islam in any case'.

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