**Religion and respect**

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All religions of the world are equally respectable and no one has the right to pass derogatory remarks on any religion. However, it is highly unfortunate that lack of tolerance is penetrating in almost every society across the globe.

Currently, there is diplomatic outrage and public anger from Muslim-majority countries after top officials in India's ruling party made derogatory remarks about Islam, resulting in hurting sentiments of thousands of people across the globe. According to international media reports, several Middle Eastern states, including Saudi Arabia, UAE, Iraq, Egypt and Qatar, have lodged official protests against India whereas Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey, Indonesia and others also reacted in strong words.

The patriotic Hindu community residing in Pakistan has a firm belief on following the true teaching of Hinduism and we reject all kinds of extremist ideologies. We believe that the last Prophet of Allah (pbuh) was sent as mercy to all of humanity. There are many Hindu followers who have openly expressed their immense devotion to the Prophet of Islam (pbuh).

I just heard a report that in response to the blasphemy incident in India, a temple was being attacked in Sindh. It is really heart-wrenching to see a vulnerable community residing in Pakistan peacefully is now in a state of insecurity due to the irresponsible act of extremists on the other side of the border.

In my view, extremist elements are present in every society, bringing a bad name to the entire nation. It is the state's primary responsibility to arrest them to maintain law and order in society. When there is injustice towards one segment of society then extremist elements on the other side get the courage to exploit the situation. In Pakistan, incidents like forced conversion of minor Hindu girls and the appointment of a Muslim scholar as chairman evacuee trust properties board (ETPB) for looking after the properties related to Hindu and Sikh communities are a few such examples. Today, the minority community in Pakistan have reservations because of the non-implementation of the Supreme Court of Pakistan’s June 19 judgment that was in fact a ray of hope for all vulnerable minorities.

India, since achieving independence, has been branding herself a secular country but unfortunately under Prime Minister Modi extremist elements have been let loose in the country, not only tarnishing the image of India but also encouraging others to carry on their hate agenda under the guise of revenge.

On various forums, I have termed the rise of extremism as a global challenge which should be tackled jointly by all peace-loving persons. A few years ago, the way New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern handled the incident of the mosque attack in a brilliant way was an eye-opening lesson for the whole world. Similarly, we need to learn lessons from the UAE, which has a dedicated ministry to promote tolerance. People from all over the world used to come there to work in a peaceful atmosphere of interfaith harmony.

Being good human beings, we need to analyze where we are moving and what kind of message we are delivering to our future generations. In my view, everyone should join hands to ensure respect for all religions and intolerance must be stopped at any cost. The UN has already termed targeting religions a global challenge and called for its prevention. In my view, the media should play a positive role and promote the message of peace and harmony regardless of any bias.

The writer is a member of the National Assembly and patron-in-chief of the Pakistan Hindu Council.

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