

Hate crimes, kind acts abound after attacks

By Abid Aslam

WASHINGTON (IPS)— Across the country, email correspondents in informal networks known as "listservs" have kept a grim tally of alleged racial retaliation for the Sept. 11 terror attacks in New York and at the Pentagon. They also have chronicled acts of kindness and solidarity across religious and cultural lines.

The writers — a mosaic of workers, parents, and students who share an abiding commitment to social causes — probably represent a minute proportion of U.S. Internet users, let alone the national population. But they are devoted, often posting listserv items late at night after a full day's work.

In addition to news items and editorials culled from websites, their contributions have included personal testimony, soul-searching essays, and entreaties to compatriots to practice compassion.

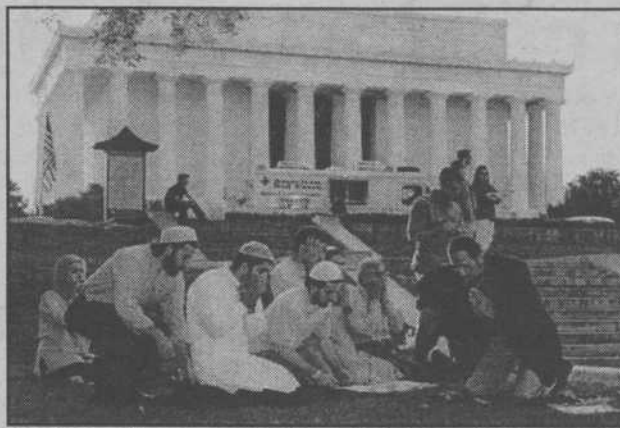
Forexample, as U.S. flags are raised on homes, businesses, and vehicles in a show of unity and defiance, one correspondent on the "TOES" listserv — a collection of students, academics,

and activists in the social sciences — wrote over the weekend that she had wrestled for a way to demonstrate a distinction between patriotism and jingoism without altering the flag and, in so doing, upsetting war veterans.

"I have an idea for a symbol: An American flag. Then, on the same pole, underneath it and smaller, a peace or world flag. This way, you could honor your country without appearing to condone war," she wrote.

On another private list, a New York woman exhorted friends and associates to follow her lead in writing to their elected representatives. "While I grieve for the dead and for my city, I also find myself grieving for the future," she said in her letter to Sen. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.). "I do not believe U.S. citizens are as united as the media portrays and I believe New Yorkers, in particular, have good reason to dissent from the administration's proclaimed war on terrorism, at least as far as we can understand it at this point.

"It doesn't take courage to rally patriotism, indignation and a call to war," she



Muslims offer prayers in front of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington Sunday. The prayer session, one of five daily prayer sessions for Muslims, came during an Afghan-American community sponsored fund-raiser for the American Red Cross.

added. "It takes courage to see that the most effective way to eliminate terrorism may take longer and be less emotionally satisfying to some than bombing innocent civilians. It may require months of intelligence work, years in a judicial system and a lifetime of reassessing U.S. international relations."

The same can be said of domestic relations, according to countless correspondents who wrote over the weekend to decry actual or prospective violations of civil liberties — including police questioning of people who fit

the general racial profile of "Islamic terrorist" and increased telephone and Internet surveillance — as law enforcement and military officials pursue what has come to be called "homeland defense."

And then there are accounts of hate crimes, so-called because they are driven by bias.

The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) reported receiving more than 300 reports of harassment and abuse against Muslims from Sept. 11 through Sept. 13 — almost

half the total for the year 2000. Incidents ranged from verbal abuse to vandalism against homes and businesses, to at least one attempt to run someone down with a vehicle.

And on Sept. 15, a Sikh man was shot dead in apparent retaliation for the World Trade Center-Pentagon terrorism act. Community members said his traditional appearance — including the signature Sikh turban and beard — fit the loose caricature of Muslims that has prevailed in the popular imagination since even before television stations started beaming photographs of prime suspect Osama bin Laden, in his black beard and white headgear — the latter quite distinct from the Sikh turban.

Community members said they believed Balbir Singh Sodhi was the first Sikh to die at the hands of people seeking vengeance for last week's terrorist attacks, although the website sikhnet.com catalogued 152 alleged hate crime reports between Sept. 11 and Sept. 14, including one incident in which a three-year-old boy was hit with a Molotov cocktail in San Mateo, California.

The reports prompted the Indian government on Sept. 16 to ask President Bush to ensure the safety of U.S. Sikhs. Police in Sodhi's adopted community of Mesa, in the southwestern state of Arizona, said they were investigating the petrol station owner's death.

Muslim and Hindu houses of worship have been shot at and attacked with Molotov cocktails, crude incendiary devices usually consisting of a bottle filled with inflammable liquid and a cloth-rag fuse.

The leaders of a mosque in Irving, in Bush's home state of Texas, said the building's windows were shot out during the night of Sept. 11-12, after the congregation went home from offering prayers for the victims of the terrorist attacks and organizing donations of blood and money for emergency relief. No one was hurt.

However, in Denton, Texas, Christian and other residents descended on the local mosque not to attack but to join their Muslim neighbors in prayer after the building was attacked with (See Hate, Page 9)



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