

Envoy from India extols 'soulmates' King, Gandhi

Dedicates rights exhibit

By Michael Lollar

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India's ambassador to the United States called Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. "spiritual soulmates" as he formally dedicated the Gandhi exhibit in the National Civil Rights Museum Friday.

Ambassador Lalit Mansingh, a member of India's foreign service for 40 years, said his visit to the museum was as a "spiritual pilgrimage" at a volatile period in history.

The irony is in dedicating an exhibit devoted to men who believed in "the dignity of human beings" at a time when "small demented groups are going around killing people in the name of religion," he said.

Mansingh's visited for the formal unveiling of a small

Gandhi exhibit at the exit from the main galleries of the museum. The Indian community of Memphis paid for the exhibit, inviting Mansingh to take part in its dedication.

Mansingh then toured the museum, standing on the balcony where King was killed in 1968 and sitting on a Montgomery, Ala., city bus next to a plaster statue of civil rights heroine Rosa Parks.

Later, he said his reference to terrorism is a subject close to the hearts of Indians. "The United States came to face terrorism on 9/11. In India, we have lost 63,000 lives to terrorism in the last 20 years."

For Indians, the threat now is from a familiar source, he said of neighboring Pakistan. "There are about 35,000 religious schools in Pakistan, traditional schools for religious training." Al-Qaida members who were driven or escaped from Afghanistan during the ouster of the Taliban regime

now are operating in Pakistan, using many of the religious schools as "centers for training terrorists."

India and the United States have worked closely together on many covert intelligence operations involving terrorist training, Mansingh said.

The ambassador said he agrees with former U.S. secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger who insists the only way to end the terrorist threat from Al-Qaida is "destroy" them. "They are brainwashed, demented. It's pure hatred, like the Nazis and like in South Africa. They have an inability to adjust to other people and their beliefs."

After his tour of the civil rights museum, Mansingh planned to preside as honorary duckmaster of the day at The Peabody.

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By Matthew Craig

Against a bust of Mohandas Gandhi at the National Civil Rights Museum, Lalit Mansingh, India's ambassador to the United States, praises peacemakers and condemns terrorism.