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Krishnas fast for the manor

by EMMA SHRIMSLEY

HINDU hunger strikers began an indefinite fast this week to stop the closure of the Hare Krishna temple in Letchmore Heath.

In Monday's gusting winds and snow supporters arrived at the council offices in Elstree Way, Borehamwood, calling for Hertsmere to pass a planning application for an access road to the temple — Bhaktivedanta Manor.

It is part of a national campaign organised by the Temple Defence Movement in the run up to March 16 — the effective date of Hertsmere's enforcement notice banning public worship there.

The Krishnas believe the access

road is the solution to the temple row.

They say it will take all temple traffic out of the village enabling it to reach the manor from the A41. Chairman of the movement Naresh Chadka said the Hindus would not allow the temple to be closed.

One of the supporters Sruti Dass said although the fast would begin as a relay — 12 hours of fasting with another group then taking over — it could become continuous. "It depends on how people are feeling but at the moment spirits are running high and March 16 is getting closer.

"Last night there was a vigil on the

village green. The Panedeva Sena, which is the British Youth Group standing for Asian rights, performed a religious ceremony outside the gates of the temple as a symbol that we are asking the village to assist us in getting the access road."

"We have nowhere else to go and if the gates do close we will be doing the same every Sunday."

Hasmukh Thakrar who joined other fasters on Monday said he got his inspiration from Bhaktivedanta Manor.

"I found my bearings after having first been there. Until then I was a lost soul and I would be lost without it."

Bhadrakumar Chatwani came over

from East Africa to support the Krishna cause.

"What's happening here is known about all over the World now. I telephoned Bhaktivedanta Manor and asked to go along and join them," he said.

"I will stay here as long as it takes and as long as Hertsmere have a change of heart I will live."

Hertsmere Borough Councillor Frank Ward, who is a strong supporter of the Hare Krishna cause said the council had to negotiate a settlement.

"This protest will identify the determination of those who worship at this temple by embarking on a campaign of civil disobedience reflecting the teachings and examples of one of India's finest sons Mahatma Gandhi."

On Monday morning protestors were told they must stop chanting as they stood outside the doors of the offices and Mr Ward said he thought it was an outrage to ask them to stop praying.

Angela Fieldhouse, the assistant to Hertsmere's managing director, said the movement had agreed before the protest began that they would stand on ground at the front of the offices.

"With the bad weather we were happy to have them standing under shelter but we asked to them to stop chanting because it caused a disturbance.

"They didn't seem to mind this and they are still free to chant at front on the grass."

GUJARAT SAMACHAR

incorporating

ASIAN VOICE

Urgent appeal: can you help Bhaktivedanta Manor?

Time is running out to save Bhaktivedanta Manor as a place of worship for Britain's Hindu community.

This temple was established in 1973 and has won renown not only for training priests, but also as the most important shrine for Hindus in Britain. But from the 16th March the temple is to be forced to ban its adherents from attending for public worship and religious festivals.

This draconian ban can only be seen as a shameful blot on the record of a democratic country at the end of the 20th century. It is being enforced by the local authority supposedly to spare local people any inconvenience from the traffic of visitors arriving at the temple.

The temple authorities and their supporters have been battling against this pitiless ban for the last few years, as readers of *Gujarat Samachar/Asian Voice* will know. A current appeal is even now before the European Court of Human Rights stating that the enforcement action is too harsh and that there is "no need to ban all Hindus on all days to achieve a proper balance".

A second basis of the application to the European Court is that there are no effective remedies in British law to cope with the rights of religious practice.

New access to solution?

In this regard, the temple and the community's aim is to secure a long term solution which benefits everyone. To this end, the temple authorities have finally succeeded in negotiating the purchase of the land required to form a new access linking the temple with the principal road network, thus by passing all local residences.

An application has been submitted to Hertsmere Borough Council for a change of use of the Manor to include public worship and religious festivals



■ British Hindus favourite temple: Hare Krishna Temple at Letchmore Heath on the basis that an access driveway has been provided.

This is just the latest example of the temple authorities bending over backwards to accommodate some local residents' concerns. It remains to be seen how the council will respond. The temple is however grateful to all those members of the community who have helped in the past and now wishes to request your support again at this critical juncture.

As the temple authorities point out: "We are within three months of the deadline but the matter could be resolved if Hertsmere approve the change of use and new access. Would you consider contacting Hertsmere Borough Council directly, Mr Philip Copland, Hertsmere Borough Council, Civic Offices, Elstree Way, Borehamwood, Herts WD6 1WA, urging them to give favourable consideration to this proposal not only for the benefit of the Hindu community, but also in the interests of harmony and equal provision for all communities in the UK".

If you need further information or would like any other assistance with your letters, you are invited to contact Vipin Aery at Bhaktivedanta Manor on 0923 857244/5. The temple would also be very grateful to receive copies of any responses you may receive from Hertsmere.

Krishnas prepare to die for temple

by JANE O'BRIEN

SUPPORTERS of the Hindu shrine in Letchmore Heath are preparing to "fast to death" as the threat of closure looms.

According to Bhagavat Dharma, the national spokesman for Bhaktivedanta Manor, members of the Temple Defence Movement are planning to start a hunger strike outside Borehamwood's civic offices.

The relay hunger strike will be part of a national campaign organised by the Temple Defence Movement in the run-up to March 16 — the date when the enforcement notice issued by Hertsmere Borough Council banning public worship at the temple comes into force.

The strike will continue until the council 'looks seriously' at the proposal for an access road which would allow worshippers to reach the temple from the A41, by-passing the village of

Letchmore Heath.

"One thing we are concerned about is communicating with the local people. People have some real misconceptions about what we are trying to achieve," said Bhagavat Dharma.

Devotees at the Manor have secured land for a road at the back of their temple. If the council grants permission for the road to be built, the Hare Krishnas will pay landowners St Bartholomew's Hospital a substantial sum for the strip.

Aldenham Parish Council looks set to recommend refusal of the access road, fearing the road would become a rat-run, and Hertsmere Councillor Michael Colne says residents there think the road would just transfer the problem.

The Krishnas have battled against the enforcement notice

in the British courts, all of which upheld Hertsmere's decision and are now waiting to hear whether the European Court of Human Rights will take up their case.

† Saturday night saw the resurgence of the Hare Krishna Temple Defence Movement at a meeting held at the Manor. Leaders from the Hindu, Sikh and Jain communities were invited.

Chairman of the movement, Naresh Chadha, said: "We aim to get access to the temple, no matter how long it takes. Many Hindus are now prepared to defy the Enforcement Notice in order to continue our worship at the shrine, but we want a solution before the deadline of March 16."

Councillor Frank Ward encouraged everyone by reading a letter from Lord Healey stating "you have my full support."

DIWALI LIGHTS GO OUT DUE TO **THREAT FROM HERTSMERE** **COUNCIL**

For the first time in the history of Bhaktivedanta Manor's existence of over 21 years that the Diwali celebrations were not allowed to take place due to Hertsmere Council's threat to prosecute the Temple authorities for the breach of enforcement order.

The Hertsmere Council were approached by the temple authorities on 31st October to conciliate compromise for holding Diwali and Mr Philip Copland the Managing Director, insisted in his response that "you should not assume that Hertsmere will not take appropriate action in response for further breach(es)". But two days later on 3rd November Mr. Copland wrote "in present circumstances of attempting to negotiate a solution, that prosecution may not be merited". Because of the previous acts of treachery by Hertsmere Council e.g. In 1983 the Council agreed to allow the temple to hold 6 festivals and the public worship but was arbitrarily withdrawn in 1986 by the same Council due to handful of complaints from the village who were worried of their property values. Furthermore, the offer made by the Council in 1988 to find a new location was then withdrawn because of the complaints from the village. The HKTDM has now no reason whatsoever to place any trust in the integrity of this Hertsmere Borough Council.

The Hare Krishna Temple Defence Movement (HKTDM) were therefore forced to send out letters to many Hindu communities informing them not to come as they did not wish the temple to resort to close it's gates for the first time to avoid further prosecution. The HKTDM are very angry and disheartened with the double standards of Hertsmere Council when on one hand are suggesting to negotiate for solution and on the other hand are holding a "loaded gun" on temple authorities for any breaches of enforcement order. Mr. Naresh Chadha Chairman of HKTDM said "if temple had shut the gates, there would have been sheer mayhem and uprising from Hindus, we did not want the temple to be prosecuted for Diwali also especially when DOE is considering the appeal in January 1995."

On this auspicious day of Diwali Mr Nelson Mandela the President of South Africa visited the Hare Krishna Temple on 6th November in Durban and addressed the Hindu Community and thanked them for their support. "Whereas the apartheid is finished in South Africa and the country is enjoying freedom from everything including the right to worship, in today's Britain the Hindus are being persecuted for celebrating their festivals" said Mr. Chadha.

For further information
Contact Naresh Chadha - Chair HKTDM on 0734 772840

Defence Movement

**HKTDM, P.O.Box 624, Harrow,
Middlesex HA2 7ND.**

Dedicated to His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada
Founder Acharya of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness

Spiritual Leader on behalf of ISKCON: His Holiness Krishnadas Swami



**THE HARE KRISHNA TEMPLE
DEFENCE MOVEMENT**

"Remember me and fight"

NO CIVIL RIGHTS IN THE UK!

We have a moral and religious right to worship Krishna as He has directed in ancient Vedic scripture. However, we have no civil rights to do so. In other countries freedom of religion is a civil liberty protected by law. But not in Britain where **no laws will provide your civil right**. Without true religion there can be no moral right or social law and order. If the government does not uphold our rights we must inform the government of the truth. **Conscience dictates that we must defend our sacred rights.**

GOVERNMENT IGNORING SOLUTION!

The temple has secured land for building an access road to the temple from the A41. This would be invisible from the village and would divert all traffic. It runs by a gigantic electrical sub-station and, hence, hardly spoils the Green Belt. Locals with vested interests are prejudicing the planning issue. This issue must be decided on merit, not on vested interest and prejudice. We have the solution. Hertsmere Council should accept it honourably.

PERSECUTION OF MINORITY RELIGIONS!

We are all equal in the eyes of God and this Government has been officially advised that Krishna Consciousness is an authentic religion. Tens of thousands of Hindus agree. For them Bhaktivedanta Manor is the most important sacred centre. **Devotees of Lord Krishna have a right to worship here. To prevent them from doing so is persecution.**

Chairman: Naresh Chadha (0734 772840), Vice Chairman: Cllr. Frank Ward (081 953 9216),
Treasurer: Davender Tah: (081 866 6398), Secretary: Vipin Aery (0923 856269)

Hare Krishna Temple Campaign

DIRECT ACTION DIARY

Sunday 13th February

Hindu youths who regularly visit Bhaktivedanta Manor formed themselves into a direct action group called "Pandava Sena". They organised a peace vigil on the village green just outside the temple and worshipped a picture of the temple Deities to demonstrate that the Manor is a place of pilgrimage. The Pandava Sena vowed that they would continue worshipping at the shrine - even from outside the gates.

In the meantime, ladies and children from the congregation visited all the houses in the village and distributed prasadam (sanctified foodstuffs). A number of villagers said they support the Manor's proposed solution of an access road, and some of them signed a no-objection document to this effect.

Monday 14th February

The relay hunger strike began outside Hertsmere Borough Council Offices on the coldest day of the winter. A blizzard welcomed a dozen members of the Hindu community as they started their fast for justice. Their determination in the face of the appalling weather conditions attracted the attention of both the local and national press, as well as regional T.V. Due to the severe cold, the Deity of Lord Nrsinghadeva (a fearsome incarnation of Lord Krishna who protects His devotees) could not be worshipped, but was wrapped up in a shawl.

Despite the imminent closure of the temple on March 16th, the council has delayed its decision on the proposed solution of the access road until **16th June**. Why is the council messing the Hindu community around like this? As council officials and members of the public went in and out of the council offices, they were handed leaflets by the protestors who explained why they were fasting.

Tuesday 15th February

Six devotees fasted outside the council offices. A protest banner was unfurled by the main road attracting the attention of passing motorists. Media coverage was supplied by TV Asia and Sunrise Radio. With slightly improved weather conditions, the Deity of Lord Nrsinghadeva was worshipped in an altar outside the offices.

The day was marked by the presence of an 83 year-old grandmother, Mrs. Sarla Bhatia from Greenford, whose husband had been part of Ghandi's civil disobedience movement. She said she was prepared to fight for justice for the future of her children, grandchildren and succeeding generations. "When I heard that the temple was closing, I felt that I had died" she said. "Most of my life has now gone, so I will spend the rest of my years fighting for dharma and justice."

Wednesday 16th February

Hertsmere Borough Council leader Michael Byrne became rather flustered when the fasters decided to erect a protest banner in full view of his office window. Despite several requests to remove the banner, the demonstrators continued their protest and proceeded to chant Hare Krishna up and down the lawn in front of the council offices. After the banner was finally removed, Mr. Byrne was handed a leaflet explaining the grievances of the Hindu community at the closure of the Manor. He refused to take the leaflet, however, saying that he had already read hundreds of similar leaflets that had been passed on to him.

The leaflet distribution received a welcome boost when a number of children who were passing by voluntarily handed out several leaflets to members of the public. One lady wondered why "the Hindus should have to starve for the likes of them (the councillors)".

Thursday 17th February

Today the strikers were visited by members of the Rotary Club. They were very appreciative of the devotees and even promised to fast with us. The receptionist at the Council offices, however, was not in such a good mood. She complained that the smoke from the incense was wafting into the building giving all the staff a headache!

Just to prove that there *are* favourable people out there, an English lady from the public declared that she would talk very seriously with the Council leaders about the whole affair. The leader himself, Michael Byrne, walked through the middle of the group of devotees chanting. One devotee commented that during the chanting, he felt the severity of this campaign. In their attempt to pray to Krishna, who is seated within everyone's heart, they prayed for a change in the heart of the leader of Hertsmere Borough Council. As he drove past the devotees, the devotees called out, "Bhaktivedanta Manor dhama ki jaya!" Mr Byrne reversed his car and asked if we were shouting at him. We replied - NO! Krishna was obviously keeping him from his supper, yet feeding him with the holy name.

Friday 18th February

The weekend began with the hunger strikers having to tolerate insults from a few of the local jobs, but this did in no way dampen their spirits. A message from Sweden, stating that the Manor's case was being represented to the British Consulate there, gave added heart to the campaigners.

Saturday 19th February

The campaign battle intensified as the hunger strikers went behind enemy lines in what is turning out to be a war of attrition. As well as demonstrating in the main shopping precinct in Borehamwood, accompanied by a *harinama* party, some of the campaigners picketed outside Councillor Southern's and Councillor Byrne's respective residences. At one point, Mr. Southern's wife became so infuriated with the protestors that she drove at them in her car, causing the assembled devotees to scatter out of the way. C.B. Patel, the editor of the Asian newspaper *Gujarat Samachar*, and active supporter of the temple, knocked on Mr. Southern's door for a

short interview. Later on in the day, Mr. Southern himself came out to meet the hunger strikers. In response to one of the placards which said, "Hertsmere have a heart - grant the solution: the access road", Mr. Southern challenged "Let's see if you win the villagers' hearts. We've got the best legal brains working for us."

Mr. Southern did not believe that if we were given permission to build the access road we would close off the front gates. He wanted legal assurance of this. Surprisingly, he did not feel that there was any problem with pilgrims visiting the Manor on Sundays. A glimmer of hope arose when Mr. Southern actually stated that he himself would visit the Manor on a formal invitation basis.

A second battlefield was opened up as another group of hunger strikers picketed Michael Byrne's house (Byrne is the leader of the council). Mr. Byrne panicked at the sight of the strikers and called the police. Within minutes a police van pulled up outside his house, and as the sergeant exited from the vehicle he was handed a leaflet. The police said that the demonstrators were not breaking the law by their presence.

The devotees received a nice morale booster when an English lady offered them a hot drink and some words of encouragement. They also pulled off a nice 'stunt' by paying the newspaper boy a nominal sum to deliver their leaflets on his morning round!

In the high street in Borehamwood, the demonstrators were moved on from their place of protest outside the local church by the church warden. In response, one of the hunger strikers proclaimed that such a representative of God should be lending his support to the Manor campaign. Shortly afterwards, a 20-minute argument ensued with a rather unsavoury local councillor who said that we were breaking the law by our presence in Letchmore Heath and should be evicted. He then argued that Indians would not allow a Westminster Abbey to be built in their country, to which one of the hunger strikers replied that not only would he be welcome to build Westminster Abbey, but it would not be closed down either! At the end of the day, three English girls approached the party and unexpectedly offered their support by signing protest forms.

International pressure continues to be exerted as Mr. Bhailal Patel, President of the Federation of India Associations in the U.S., personally delivered a letter of protest at the threatened closure of the temple to Consulate at the British Embassy in Chicago.

Prepared by Bhakta Deepak Vohra, with help from Bhakta Pradip Gajjar.

Hare Krishna Temple Defence Movement
PO Box 624, Harrow, Middlesex HA2 7ND

Press Release

24th October 1994

For Immediate Use

Malicious Racist **Police Brutality** **Against 69 Year Old** **Pensioner**

The callous face of policing in today's Britain was strikingly evident on the 26th May this year when members of the Metropolitan Police arrested a 69 year old pensioner. The shocking arrest came during a peaceful sit-down demonstration against the closure of the largest and the most important temple for the Hindus in Britain.

Mr. Velji Bhal Patel, who suffers from a heart condition was pushed and shoved by the two policemen before being taken away in a van. After a lengthy and harrowing stay in a cell he was charged with assault and obstruction. Mr. Patel, who can not speak English, had never been inside a police station before and was said to be shaking and terrified.

On the 26th October at Bow Street Magistrates court, London, Mr. Patel will face charges of assaulting a Police Constable. These allegations will be contested and demonstration are expected.

For Further Information

Contact Naresh Chadha - Chair Temple Defence Movement on 0734 772840

Jitesh Thakrar - Solicitor on 081 843 1599