

Toppled Waikiki Gandhi statue prompts concern amid acts of vandalism

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Raj Kumar
Founder, Gandhi International Institute for Peace



The statue of spiritual and political leader Mahatma Gandhi that stood in Waikiki was found toppled on the morning of Aug. 8, but there are differing views on what may have happened to it.

While the Mayor's Office on Culture and the Arts says the statue may have tumbled amid strong winds that swept through the islands as the result of Hurricane Dora, the Gandhi International Institute for Peace says it was the result of vandalism.

The incident is still under investigation, however all signs point toward it being the result of strong winds, said Marion Cadora, the Mayor's Office on Culture and the Art's curator of public art.

Meanwhile, the GIIP's perspective suggests a more troubling issue.

"Incidents are happening in the U.S. as well as Canada and around the world," said GIIP founder Raj Kumar.

"This is a group that for the last 10 years has been writing articles online and inciting youth in different places ... and they have damaged Gandhi's statues."

Behind many of the recent acts of vandalism is a group called Sikhs For Justice, one of the leading entities of the pro-Khalistan movement. The group has been misleading its youth members to believe that the former prime minister of India, Indira Gandhi, who is hated by the pro-Khalistan movement, is related to Mahatma Gandhi, effectively leading to his statues being vandalized, according to a GIIP newsletter.

Kumar emphasized that while he was not a witness to the Waikiki statue falling, he believes there is a possibility that the toppled monument could have been the result of a string of organized vandalism attacks timed to make a statement leading up to the annual G20 summit, which took place in New Delhi from Sept. 9-10.

Without video cameras or eyewitnesses, Cadora admitted that there may never be a certain explanation on how the statue fell. However, she was told that residents in the area reported hearing a loud bang in the early

morning of Aug. 8 at the peak of the high winds, which could have been when the statue fell. The statue was also built in 1989 using stainless and common steel, a combination that can advance rusting, she added.

Meanwhile, cost estimates for repairs are currently being evaluated, she said.

"Gandhi's glasses and walking stick broke, so that's probably going to require recasting those pieces," Cadora said. "Once that's approved, then we can start on the restoration of the sculpture."

Once the cost estimate is approved, the matter of how long it will take to repair the statue can be determined, which may depend on the availability of supplies, Cadora said.

Gandhi's annual birthday celebration, which typically sees between 150 to 200 people, is slated to be held Oct. 1 at the location of the Waikiki Gandhi statue, despite its absence, Kumar said. A large photo of the deceased spiritual leader and peace advocate will be hung in the statue's place.

As the founder of GIIP, Kumar said he feels called to protect the statue, its integrity as well as Gandhi's legacy. While he adamantly stated that he does not completely refute the possibility of wind gusts toppling the Waikiki Gandhi statue, he hopes to bring attention to the possibility of it being an act of vandalism.

"The Gandhi statue never fell down in the last 35 years," Kumar said. "We want to make sure that whatever has



The Mahatma Gandhi statue in Waikiki was found toppled over the morning of Aug. 8.



PHOTOS COURTESY GANDHI INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR PEACE

his strong dislike for Gandhi and how he wished the GIIP would be shut down.

While the man didn't specify whether he belonged to a pro-Khalistan organization, the next day, a friend of Kumar's reached out to tell him that the same man had visited the City and County of Honolulu's office and attempted to request the Waikiki Gandhi statue be removed, Kumar said.

"Incidents are happening in the U.S. as well as in Canada and around the world," Kumar said. "At nighttime, there's not too many people in the park and there's not much light. ... I'm not an eyewitness, but there's a possibility they may have traveled down and knocked it down."

The upcoming celebration of Gandhi's birthday is free to attend, and those who want to sign up can do so at gandhianpeace.org.

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So far, incidents of vandalism in the past decade have occurred in multiple U.S. states, Canada, South Africa and India, Kumar said. In India last month a portion of the Delhi Metro was marred by graffiti with pro-Khalistan slogans and a prominent Gandhi statue in Holehon-nur was knocked over.

On Sept. 3, Sikhs for Justice leader Gurpatwant Singh Pannu released an audio message encouraging more disturbances as the beginning of the annual G20 summit grew closer.

Attacks like this have particularly increased in the past five years, Kumar said. About 10 years ago, a Canadian tourist on Oahu directly expressed to Kumar