UK Parliament criticises Pakistan's minorities record

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London: British parliamentarians have called on Pakistan to protect the fundamental rights of the minorities.

Taking part in a debate, in the House of Commons, the parliamentarians expressed deep concern about the persecution of the minority Ahmadiya community in Pakistan, Algeria and other countries.

The debate also focused on the impact of hate preachers across the world and discussed the radical activities of Syed Muzaffar Shah Qadri and others.
The parliamentarians urged the UK government to caution the governments of Pakistan and Algeria on the issue of treatment of minorities. The government was also asked to ensure hate preachers don't enter the UK.

Around 21 parliamentarians were engaged in the debate. Minister for Asia and the Pacific Mark Field briefed the House about the government's views on the issues and the steps it was taking to flag it in the right quarters.

He said, "I hope the world outside, in particular the countries mentions today that clearly discriminate against Ahmadi populations, do not think that calm does not underpin a certain amount of anger and our real sense of mission. The plight of the most peaceable of communities should be in akk of our hearts. I hope we continue to work consistently and persistently on it."
The government will continue to challenge extremism, he added.

On the issue of hate preachers, Field said, it is a matter of concern for people in the UK. Ministers of religion and religious workers come to the UK through two routes, either Tier 2 as a minister of religion for longer term postings or Tier 5 for temporary positions of two years. Visas based on point system and a certificate of sponsorship from a licensed sponsor is required by them to enter the country.

He further revealed that in October 2013, the government started conducting tests to identify those who may be trying to abuse the above mentioned routes. This test, he added, assesses the credibility of visa applicants.

Field said his concern was that there are people who maybe blacklisted in their homelands for inciting religious hatred but can pass the test and enter the UK to preach against Ahmadis.

About the GSP Plus issue raised during the debate, Field said that the most recent report came out in January which made a number of recommendations to Pakistan and other countries. European Union will also continue to press Pakistan in this regard.

"We are aware of a number of reports of Ahmedis being arrested in Algeria." "We will continue to raise our concerns with the government of Algeria and urge them to rectify the anomaly and to respect the right of freedom of religion or belief," Field said.

The Ahmadi community in Pakistan forms 0.2 to 2.2 percent of the population. It doesn't have basic rights like the right to practice religion freely, to be electorally franchised or be regarded as full members of the Pakistani community.

The view in the UK is that Christians and Shi'a Muslims too suffer in the same way. Last November, the UK pressured Pakistan to protect its minorities and announce measures taken to tackle abuse arising out of perceived violation of blasphemy and anti-terror laws.

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