



Indo European Kashmir Forum (IEKF)

TELEPHONE: 07886 439 506

EMAIL: bhank17@live.co.uk

President: Krishna Bhan

PRESS RELEASE (For Immediate Release)



“Kashmir Debate”: Thursday 11th September 2014, House of Commons, London

A heated debate in the House of Commons on Thursday 11th September 2014, on Jammu and Kashmir, saw the majority of British MPs uphold India’s position, with one Member of Parliament – Labour Party’s Barry Gardiner MP questioning whether it was right for the British Parliament to hold such a debate, citing a hypothetical situation of the Lok Sabha debating Scotland.

The Liberal Democrat MP-David Ward (MP for Bradford East) had called for this debate about the ‘political and humanitarian situation in Kashmir’ on behalf of the Jammu & Kashmir Self Determination Movement (Europe). Notably, Bradford City has the biggest Pakistani-origin population in Britain and in the past, such constituents have been known to pressurise their MPs to censure India on Kashmir.

The debate took place in Committee Room 10, at the House of Commons and under the auspices of the Backbench Business Committee, i.e.: it wasn’t a part of Government business and there was no vote at the end of the debate. At the same time, it had official recognition and was recorded accordingly. MPs from the three main parties spoke in favour of Kashmiri Pandits and acknowledged their forced exodus from their homeland 25 years ago .They further stated that the Kashmir issue has to be negotiated bilaterally by India and Pakistan and welcomed Indian Prime Minister Modi's invitation to the Prime Minister of Pakistan for his inauguration ceremony and PM Modi's offer of financial help to Pakistan for the victims of the flood disaster.

The British Parliamentarians at the debate condemned terrorism and violence and rejected mediation in the dispute between India and Pakistan on Kashmir. Leading the charge for India, **Labour Party's-Barry Gardiner MP**, stated: "Britain would be outraged if the Indian Parliament debated the merits and demerits of the Scottish referendum." The Simla Agreement between India and Pakistan requires the two countries to deal with Kashmir bilaterally and without the involvement or interference of another state". He called the debate as 'ill-judged'.

Conservative Party's-Paul Uppal MP, poured scorn over "white middle-aged men lecturing India". He reminded Parliamentarians that Britain "carried imperial, historical baggage" and that it should have "more faith in the subcontinent".

Labour Party's- Virendra Sharma MP stated by saying he was 'disappointed' the debate was taking place and described it as 'divisive', stressing he is elected from a diverse constituency (Ealing Southall) where there are Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims and the debate could 'inflame tensions' in his constituency. He asserted that "Jammu and Kashmir State was an integral part of India, the largest democracy in the world, one that is secular and with elected representation from all the country's main religions. The elections in Jammu & Kashmir have not reflected any determination for separatism. It is for us to respect the democratic choice of the citizens of Jammu & Kashmir, not to question it," he added.

Conservative Party's-Bob Blackman MP highlighted the issue of 'ethnic cleansing of Kashmiri Pandits', their displacement and refugee status in their own country, which, he felt, was of the highest 'humanitarian' concern. The Kashmiri Hindu Pandits were forced out in a process of ethnic cleansing and it would be ridiculous to reward those who engaged in ethnic cleansing." He said "the Shia Muslims do not support the right of self-determination and nor do the Gujjars, Bakarwals, Buddhists, Hindu Dogras, Kashmiri Pandits or Sikhs or Christians. The only issue is that the Muslim population support it, but they are a minority".

Speaker after speaker echoed this sentiment, thereby drowning out the Pakistani plea that Indian security forces were committing human rights violations against Muslim Kashmiris in Jammu and Kashmir. Though David Ward MP maintained that Britain have some part to play in Kashmir, this stand was roundly rejected by a majority of his fellow MPs.

Those reflecting India's stance on Kashmir were well prepared. Not only did they seem to have been well briefed through the Briefing Document prepared by The Indo European Kashmir Forum & Hindu Council UK, but had done their own home work. By comparison, the apologists for Islamabad indulged in propaganda, including questioning the legitimacy of elections in Kashmir.

Replying at the end of a three hour debate on the political and humanitarian situation in Kashmir, **Tobias Ellwood MP, Junior Minister in the Foreign Office**, said: "Talks between India and Pakistan

can only take place free from terrorism and violence.” He reiterated there would be ‘no mediation’ by Britain in respect of the differences between India and Pakistan over Kashmir.

John Spellar MP, Labour Party’s Shadow Minister for Foreign and Commonwealth Office, stated that the Labour Party’s stand on the Kashmir issue was that it required no interference from the British Government unless it was officially asked to do so. The matter of disputed Kashmir was for the Indian and Pakistan Governments to negotiate without any outside interference.

Unlike past debates on Kashmir in the British Parliament, the crowded public gallery appeared to be equally divided between Indians and Pakistanis. Rumbblings of discontent were often heard from a section of the audience every time a speaker took up cudgels for India and correspondingly clapping from another segment, which were frequent as the strength of solidarity with India was unprecedented.

As the British MPs' held the debate, the Indian Government expressed its anger and displeasure over UK Parliamentarians holding such a debate. India has construed the move as an attempt to criticise India’s role in Kashmir, even putting a question mark on its sovereignty over the region. Speaking at an event to mark the 125th birth anniversary of the Indian freedom fighter Sarat Bose, the Deputy High Commissioner for India in the UK, Dr Virander Paul, surprised his audience by stating: "From time to time, we find that there are certain tendencies in certain sections of the society, which are not in the interest of our strong relations.". He cautioned: "We need to watch out and be mindful of any such efforts." While the Deputy High Commissioner for India in the UK made no reference to the upcoming debate, his remarks were apparently aimed at the senior Conservative/Liberal Democrats Coalition Government Cabinet Minister- Dr Vince Cable who was present at the function. The Indian High Commission has, however, launched a diplomatic offensive by highlighting to British MPs that it is a widely recognised fact and clearly recorded internationally that infiltration of terrorists into Jammu and Kashmir is aided and abetted by Pakistan, including use of cover fire and other military actions on the border. It is necessary that no encouragement should be given to the proponents of terrorism and jihadi elements which are being sent into India to create mayhem. India has always considered any debate on Kashmir by British parliamentarians as interference in India's internal affairs.

Contrary to what has been said already in Social Media, media reports, websites and other forums, IEKF & HCUK believes that it is not important which UK MPs supported the Kashmir debate or not, but more importantly the fact that such a debate should never have taken place in the first place in the UK Houses of Parliament. The issue of disputed Kashmir is for the Indian and Pakistan Governments to deal with and no interference from outside Governments or Human Rights Organisations should be allowed. The Indian Government has remarked that the whole debate has caused great suspicion on the ‘possible’ role of the UK Government with regards to India’s credibility.

Of course, MPs in the UK have every right and should address any concern raised by their

constituents in Parliament, but surely it is not for the UK Parliamentarians to be committing this brazen attempt at interfering in the sovereign internal affairs of India. However, what is needed is to ensure that such an abuse of free speech, Parliamentary privilege to debate important matters and ludicrous vote bank politics is never allowed to happen again, as all it has done is inflame tensions and encourage divisions amongst the diverse communities here in the UK.

Everyone involved in getting this outcome needs to be congratulated. Special thanks to the entire IEKF and HCUK team, for working tirelessly for last the eight weeks and making every effort in achieving this result. We are grateful to Krishna Bhan & Sanjay Jagatia for preparing the Briefing Document and issuing it prior to the Kashmir Debate to ALL 650 Members of Parliament, the Prime Minister David Cameron, Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg and Leader of the Labour Party Ed Milliband together with Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Department for Communities and Local Government, the Government Equalities Office, Home Office and the High Commission of India. Many of the MPs present at the debate and those that were not have commented how useful the Briefing Document was to them. We would also like to thank, Marcus Jones MP, who made it possible for us to have a conference in the House of Commons urgently on 4th September 2014 to express our concerns for the Kashmir Debate on 11th September 2014. Well done to all those who attended both the conference and the debate to show solidarity to Kashmiri Hindus and to India.

Well done to Hindu Council UK and Indo European Kashmir Forum for a job well done. This is the first time that the Hindu Community in the UK have developed a strategy, and effected great lobbying with All the Political Parties in the UK in a professional, ethical, organised and in an unbiased way to gain support for an issue and got the desired results. THIS IS A LESSON FOR ALL HINDUS TO LEARN. Long may that continue..... HCUK & IEKF have set the benchmark and standard!!! - CONGRATULATIONS to all the team.

God bless India. Vande Mataram, Jai Hind.

News Coverage of the Conference on the plight of Kashmiri Pandits & Kashmir Debate in UK Houses of Parliament:

NEWSROOM TV REPORT: "KASHMIRI PANDIT CONFERENCE":

<http://youtu.be/gr12xiWC2Vc>

On Thursday 11 September, the Liberal Democrat MP for Bradford East, David Ward, led a debate on the political and humanitarian situation in Kashmir. WATCH FULL COVERAGE OF DEBATE:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/democracylive/house-of-commons-29164341>

Teluguvaartha Newspaper: "Article on IEKF & HCUK Conference at HOC"

<http://teluguvaartha.co.uk/conference-on-the-plight-of-kashmiri-panditshindus-at-the-houses-of-parliament-uk.html>

The Nation Newspaper: “Kashmiri Pandit Conference favours Indian stand on Kashmir”

<http://www.thenation.org.uk/180914/page18.htm>

Asian Lite Newspaper: “Moral victory for India in British Parliament”

<http://asianlite.com/news/uk-news/moral-victory-for-india-in-british-parliament/>

For Further information please contact:

Ms Krishna Bhan
President of Indo European Kashmiri Forum
& Director of Hindu Council UK
Tel: 07886439506
Email: bhank17@live.co.uk

Mr Sanjay M Jagatia
Director/Secretary General
Hindu Council UK
Tel: 07969756164
Email: info@hinducounciluk.org

About the Indo European Kashmir Forum (IEKF): Indo-European Kashmir Forum (IEKF) is the voice of the displaced Kashmiri Hindus in India and in the Kashmir Valley. The organization was founded in the late eighties with the support of the wider Indian communities. The Forum highlights the plight of the displaced Kashmiri Hindus.

About Hindu Council UK (HCUK): Hindu Council UK represents various Hindu communities and Temples and Hindus from different parts of the world settled in the United Kingdom. Its main purpose is to give the UK Hindus an effective voice on policy matters with the Government, whilst enhancing mutual understanding among the major faiths predominant in the UK.

Website: www.hinducounciluk.org



Some of the Members of Parliament at the Kashmir Debate