

British Muslim group to tackle forced marriages

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London, June 13 (IANS) More than 70 percent of marriages in the British Muslim community involving a foreign spouse have some element of coercion or force, a leading Islamic group has admitted.

While police and government authorities deal with some 300 reported cases of forced marriages every year, the true figure of such abuse is in its thousands, the Muslim Arbitration Tribunal (MAT) said in a report that backed up government's fears about the scale of the problem.

"These figures reflect the crisis that has loomed within the Muslim community without being noticed or dealt with for the past two decades. The figures that are reported to the authorities are only the tip of the iceberg," the report said.

"Young Muslims in Britain are under siege from their elders and parents because of the generational and cultural gap. They are alienated from the mosques because these mosques are mainly controlled by the elder generation," it added.

MAT was set up last year so that Muslims could self-determine disputes in accordance with Islamic laws on a voluntary basis.

The report recommends that Muslim community leaders work alongside the Home Office and Foreign Office to resolve the issue, and calls for a summit on forced marriages to be held at Downing Street with Prime Minister Gordon Brown.

MAT chairman Shaykh Faiz Siddiqi said: "We will work closely with the government. It has to be joined-forces but up to now the leadership of the Muslim community have not been forthcoming. We are trying to achieve an awareness that the community is now taking very bold steps to self-regulate."

According to the government's Forced Marriage Unit, 65 percent of the reported cases involved Pakistanis and 25 percent Bangladeshi nationals.

IANS

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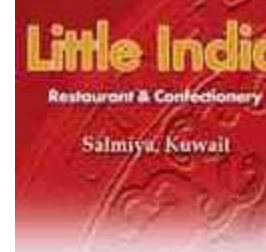
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