

US issues advisory warning against non-essential travel to Pakistan

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Washington: The United States has warned its citizens against all non-essential travel to Pakistan in the wake of the ongoing 'security concerns' in Pakistan.

In a latest travel warning on Pakistan that replaces the one issue on August 28 last year, the State Department said that "Pakistan continues to experience significant terrorist violence, including sectarian attacks". "Several foreign and indigenous terrorist groups continue to pose danger to US citizens," it said.

Noting that sectarian violence remains a serious threat countrywide and the Pakistan government continues to enforce blasphemy laws, the State Department said religious minority communities have been victims of targeted killings and accusations of blasphemy.

Observing that attacks include armed assaults against heavily guarded facilities such as military installations and airports, the State Department said terrorists have also struck universities, schools, rallies, places of worship, and large marketplaces in several Pakistani cities.

While the US Embassy in Islamabad and its consulate in Karachi continue to provide consular services for all its citizens, the two diplomatic posts are often limited in the services they can provide due to the security environment. The Peshawar Consulate no longer offers consular services and the one in Lahore remains temporarily suspended.

Since the beginning of 2016, a suicide bomber killed at least 15 people and injured 25 others outside a health centre in Quetta, Balochistan; gunmen attacked Bacha Khan University in Charsadda, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, killing 22; and a suicide bomber at a park in Lahore killed more than 70 people and injured more than 340.

The Pakistan government maintains heightened security measures, particularly in major cities, following attacks or in response to threats, the State Department said.

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