

China asks Muslim citizens to oppose religious extremism

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Beijing: As it tightened security in the restive Muslim-majority Xinjiang province with stern measures, China asked all its Muslim citizens to resolutely be in opposition to religious extremism and stick to socialism with Chinese characteristics.

Chinese Muslims should resolutely oppose religious extremism, Wang Zuo'an, chief of the State Administration for religious affairs, said.

In his address at the 10th National Congress of Chinese Muslims on Saturday, Wang said the development of Islam in China should stick to socialism with Chinese characteristics, state-run Xinhua news agency reported on Sunday.

While respecting Muslims' beliefs and customs, religious interference in the fields of politics, justice and education is intolerable, Wang said.

It is strongly advocated that new mosques should demonstrate Chinese characteristics and national features, instead of deliberate copying foreign architectural styles, Wang said.

He also said he appreciated the work of the Islamic Association of China (IAC) during the past five years.

The IAC should foster Islamic clergy and actively carry out friendly exchange with foreign countries, Wang said.

His comments came as China has tightened rules for religious ceremonies and directed residents in Xinjiang province to surrender their passports in a bid to restrict their attempts to migrate abroad.

People of the province have been told to surrender their passports to local police stations for examination and management.

"Those who refuse to hand in their passports should bear the responsibility themselves if they are forbidden from going abroad," the local government directive said last week.

Also Xinjiang has established religious committees and residential communities to manage religious practices since September, requiring local residents to report their religious activities or activities attended by religious people, including circumcision, weddings and funerals, La Disheng, a professor at the Party School of the Communist Party of China Xinjiang regional committee, said.

Getting a passport is often complicated and takes more time in Xinjiang than in other provinces, given the rising threat of terrorism in the region and the government's ongoing anti-terrorism campaign, an official in the province said.

The new passport followed steady migration of Uyghurs, Turkic speaking Muslims to Turkey and several other countries.

According to reports, several hundred Uyghur youth have been fighting along with Islamic State in Syria and China apprehends that the battle-hardened militants may return to cause more violence in the troubled province.

Resource-rich Xinjiang, bordering PoK and Afghanistan was on the boil for over six years following unrest among

Uyghur Muslims over the increasing settlements of Han Chinese from other provinces.

The province has witnessed some deadly terror attacks in recent years which also spread to Beijing and other parts of China. The attacks were officially blamed on the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) which is linked to al-Qaida in the past and now Islamic State.

- (With PTI inputs)