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British Muslims Call for Change on 7/7 Anniversary Amid Lingering Islamophobias

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On the 20th anniversary of the 7 July 2005 London bombings, British Muslims are reflecting on two decades of heightened scrutiny, rising Islamophobia, and counter-terrorism policies that many say have alienated their communities.

The attacks, which killed 52 people and injured hundreds, not only shocked the nation but also left a deep mark on how Muslim communities are treated across the UK. In the aftermath, three of the bombers' links to Leeds led to local Muslim residents being met with suspicion and hostility. Hate crimes surged in the days following the bombings, and many Muslims were left feeling collectively blamed for the actions of extremists.

Community leaders and campaigners say the effects of those events remain embedded in everyday life. Imam Qari Asim, based in Leeds, shared how, after the bombings, he avoided carrying a rucksack in public to avoid being perceived as a threat. For others, the psychological burden was compounded by being repeatedly stopped under counter-terrorism powers or facing casual racism.

Much of the criticism has focused on the Prevent strategy, a central part of the government's CONTEST counter-terrorism programme. Critics argue that it encourages profiling and surveillance over engagement, disproportionately affecting Muslim individuals, including children in schools. Advocacy groups such as the Runnymede Trust point to the strategy's role in institutionalising Islamophobia and eroding civil liberties.

Although some measures have been introduced to address anti-Muslim hate, including new funding initiatives, Muslim leaders believe efforts remain insufficient. They say political rhetoric and media narratives continue to stoke division. Lady Shaista Gohir, a crossbench peer, emphasised that anti-Muslim sentiment has become increasingly mainstream, warning that without meaningful change, the distrust between Muslim communities and state institutions will persist.

Calls for reform are growing louder. Campaigners are urging the government to reassess how national security policies are designed and implemented, advocating for more inclusive approaches that prioritise trust, dialogue, and equal protection for all citizens.

As the UK commemorates two decades since one of its deadliest terror attacks, many British Muslims are not only remembering the victims but also demanding an end to policies and prejudices that have cast a shadow over their daily lives for far too long.