

## British Hindu loses legal battle for funeral pyres

A devout Hindu in Britain Friday lost his legal battle for traditional open-air cremations which were described as 'abhorrent' by a government minister.

Davender Ghai, 70, a spiritual healer from Newcastle, northeast England, had challenged a 2006 city council prohibition of funeral pyres.

He had based his case on Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which protects religious freedom, and said a pyre was essential to a 'good death' and the release of the spirit into the afterlife.

He wanted to die 'with dignity' and not be 'bundled in a box', said Ghai.

But High Court judge Ross Cranston, describing the prohibition as 'justified,' said the court had to respect the conclusion of elected representatives on this 'difficult and sensitive issue.'

The judge also cited the words of Justice Secretary Jack Straw who had argued that people 'might be upset' by pyres and 'find it abhorrent that human remains were being burned in this way.'

Ghai, who is the founder of the Anglo-Asian Friendship Society (AAFS), has been given permission to take his case to the Appeal Court.

'I will not deny my claim is provocative, least of all in a nation as notoriously squeamish towards death as our own,' Ghai said in a statement.

However, he did not believe that natural cremation grounds would be offensive as long as they were placed in designated sites far from urban and residential areas.

In his ruling, the judge said that the Cremation Act, dating back to 1902 and amended in 2008, was clear in its effect.

'The burning of human remains, other than in a crematorium, is a criminal offence. This effectively prohibits open air funeral pyres,' he said.

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