

# MCB

The Newsletter of the Muslim Council of Britain

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# The Common GOOD

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*The newsletter is named after the MCB's commitment to the shared seeking of the common good for our society. We hope you will join in that work.*



**May we take this opportunity to wish all readers a blessed Ramadhan, with a joyous and happy Eid-ul-Fitr**

### MCB Contact Points

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## Landmark Reception



Presentation of Islamic calligraphy to the Prime Minister

The Prime Minister, Tony Blair, was presented with an exquisite piece of artwork painted by the renowned Ali Omar Ermes when he attended a reception for UK Muslims organised by the MCB on Wednesday 5th May 1999. The painting of the letter "seen" has been worked on for over 20 years, it is an extremely valuable piece and shall hang in Downing Street once framing is completed.

The reception was a landmark in the history of Muslims in Britain as it was the first time a serving British Prime Minister had addressed such a gathering of Muslims. Over 300 delegates attended comprising members of the Muslim community, ministers and their under-secretaries, Members of both Houses of Parliament,

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## First Muslim Adviser to Prison Service

The MCB welcomed the appointment of the first ever Muslim Adviser to the Prison Service, on September 7th, 1999. The MCB offered its congratulations to Maqsood Ahmed in a letter. Mr Ahmed has extensive experience in working with ethnic minorities, and shall now turn his skills towards improving the understanding of prisoners' needs in relation to their faith identity.



Maqsood Ahmed

He will be responsible for providing advice in regard to all Muslim issues, including notification of Holy days, dietary requirements and religious obligations. The task shall be a difficult one, as the diversity of Muslim inmates means they cannot be viewed as a single racial entity; they include converts to Islam

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# Annual General Meeting of the MCB

York Hall in Bethnel Green, East London, provided the venue of the first AGM held on Saturday 15th May. The event was chaired by Bashir Maan from Glasgow who is a member of the Central Working Committee. The main business of the day was the adoption of constitutional amendments, presented to the meeting by Khurshid Drabu, Chair of the Legal Affairs Committee. About 200 delegates and observers attended the business session in the morning. The session included the review and adoption of the annual report and the accounts. The MCB's committee and task group chairmen outlined the work done in the previous year and their plans for the future. Lord Nazir Ahmed of Rotherham was the chief guest and Professor Akbar Ahmed, Selwyn Fellow at Cambridge, gave the key note address at the public session in the afternoon entitled "Leadership and the Muslim Community in Twenty First Century Britain: Challenges and Opportunities."

In his opening address, Iqbal Sacranie, Secretary General of the MCB, observed that in its first year, the Council had been able to establish itself in the life of the Muslim community and in the wider society in Britain - "yet, in many senses, our work has only just begun". He offered thanks and praise to Allah *Subhanahu wa Ta'ala*: "we have been able to establish a broad-based national body that can speak for and on behalf of all us. Thanks also for the things we have been able to do or achieve together, but most importantly for the respect and recognition that the Muslim community has begun to win". Although the Muslim Council of Britain is a new name, it represents unity as well as continuity". He identified three tasks that face the Community in the future: to achieve greater understanding of the Islamic faith and recognition of rights and needs, to develop the Community's understanding of the wider society and finally to promote participation in the wider society. In this way it is hoped the change can be effected at early, developmental levels. The Secretary General thanked all who have worked and supported the values of the MCB and praised the foresightedness of others who have showed an awareness of Muslim concerns.

The constitutional amendments related primarily to principles of fair representation and accountability and were proposed by the Finance & General Purpose committee of the MCB. Amendments were adopted to allow for an increase in the number of elected persons to the Central Working Committee (from 15 to 25 for national representatives; the number of the 12 zonal representatives being unchanged) and also to establish that no member body and its branches could have more than five of its members elected to the Central Working Committee (CWC). The number of co-opted members on the CWC was also increased from five to ten. The General Assembly also accepted the proposal for the creation of two additional constitutionally-mandated committees - Legal Affairs and Membership.

In his keynote address, Professor Akbar Ahmed touched on a range of topics, from a vision of Muslim leadership to a personal list of suggestions for action and priorities for the community. He commented on our need to better understand the media and the way it functions. He stressed the need for Muslim publications to be literary and artistic, as well as to be a platform for discussion and communication. Professor Ahmed detailed how minority communities must never be complacent, and stressed: "The burden of history lies on the Muslim leadership." He called for knowledge, and recognition of achievement; unity and to realise that "our enemies are ignorance, prejudice, superstition and lies." He asked the Muslim leadership to pay special attention "to women and the young and their problems and needs." Professor Ahmed closed on a call: "the coming time is a time of great challenges and opportunities. As Muslims, it is our destiny to reach out to them."

Lord Nazir Ahmed identified several issues that warrant concerted effort, particularly the problem of youth alienation. He stressed the need for Imams in the UK to have the ability to communicate in



Public session of the AGM

Rashid Khan



(seated from left to right) Imam Jilil Sajid, Professor Akbar Ahmed, Lord Nazir Ahmed, Bashir Maan and other guests

Rashid Khan



A view of delegates at the business session

English and he ended with a spirited call that he would 'go on strike outside Pebble Mill' if this were necessary to bring about a change in the BBC on Muslim issues. Both speakers noted the significant impact that the MCB had made in public circles in a short period.

**As we go to print:** The MCB congratulates Professor Akbar Ahmed on his appointment as Pakistan's High Commissioner to the United Kingdom.

## New Responsibility for Bashir Maan

Bashir Maan, one of the most well known of British Muslim politicians and an active member of the MCB, has been conferred with a new responsibility as Chairman



of the Strathclyde Joint Police Board, the second largest police force in the United Kingdom. In recognition of his many years of service as deputy Lord Provost of Glasgow the University of Strathclyde conferred upon him the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws (LL.D) on June 30th.

## Question Time at House of Lords

Hosted by Lord Nazir Ahmed of Rotherham, the Islamic Society of Britain (ISB) has been holding a monthly Question Time in the Moses Room at the House of Lords. The event is lively with lots of opportunity for audience participation. Panelists have included Lord Nazir, Simon Hughes MP (Lib Dem), Jeffrey Archer, Azzam Tammimi, Iqbal Sacranie and journalists - Roger Hardy, Fuad Nahdi, Ahmed Versi.

Questions have included attempted recruitment of an Imam by the MI5; the treatment of asylum seekers; the Blair baby; religious discrimination and the Kashmir issue.

This event takes place on the last Thursday of every month (not during Ramadhan) 6.30pm - 8pm. For more information please contact: Sher Khan 0181 503 5435; [isblondon@cwcom.net](mailto:isblondon@cwcom.net)

## Leicester Muslim Support for Kosovo

A one day event was held on July 25th in Leicester in support of the Kosovan refugees. Attended by Iqbal Sacranie, Dr Kemal Helbawi and Maulana Adam of Jame Mosque, amongst other key figures in the community, the event aimed to increase awareness and to raise money. Leicester has taken a large number of the Kosovan refugees that have arrived in Britain and the Muslim community has been incredibly

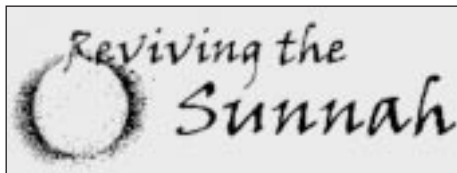
supportive to their needs. The Federation of Muslim Organisations in Leicester worked in co-operation with the Red Cross to help the Kosovo Refugee Centre Leicester. They provided a variety of help: inviting groups of refugees into local homes, liaising with Leicester City Council regarding services, acting as an interface between the refugees and various bodies, as well as providing laundry equipment for the centre including washing machines, electric irons, and ironing boards. They continued helping the refugees at the centre until it closed on September 30th; refugees have now gone back to Kosova or have found more permanent housing elsewhere.

## 50,000 Cassettes for the Millenium

The Young Muslims UK (YMUK) are set to distribute free 50,000 audio cassettes throughout the year 2000. The tapes will have two 35 minute speeches; one in English by Imam Anwar Aulaqi, and one in Urdu, by Mawlana Malik. Half the number will be attached to their magazine, Trends, and the remaining will be distributed by their branches throughout the year. The YMUK are looking for sponsors to advertise on the cassettes.

Contact: Shahid Hussain 0956 939969 or HQ 07000 968 646

## Eclipse Prayers Organised



In conjunction with the Young Muslims UK and Reviving the Sunnah, the MCB attempted to create awareness of the Prophet's (saw) sunnah of an eclipse prayer. The al-kusuf prayer was performed by Prophet Muhammad (saw) on the day his son Ibrahim died. As a true prophet would, he made no claims that this was a sign from Allah relating to his prophethood, but explained it in terms of natural phenomena as Allah's signs. Letters were distributed to mosques reminding them of the sunnah, a press release was issued to explain the Islamic attitude to the eclipse and a website was set up with links to eclipse information. The initiative was well received by mosques and many responded most favorable. There was a large open air prayer event in London and other events around the country. Press coverage was varied; *The Guardian* explained its historical significance as well as quoting the experience for Muslims today; *The Times* described the prayers as "incantations".

## FOSIS Distribute Freshers' Pack

The Federation of Student Islamic Societies will again be distributing a *Freshers' Pack* to new university students. The pack contains their newsletter, prayer timetable, student advice, as well as a year planner with banners from sponsors including the MCB.

## UPDATES

### Abu Bakr Mosque Wins Planning Battle

The last issue of the *Common Good* detailed the problems the Southall Muslim Community was having in extending the usage of its mosque, the Abu Bakr Mosque. We are happy to report in that they have now won their ten year long campaign for planning application. The 50,000 strong Muslim community in Southall will now have two mosques to service its needs.

With involvement from Iqbal Sacranie, MCB's Secretary General and Asif Amann, secretary of the Social Policy Committee of MCB, Ealing Council finally agreed to the extension of usage for the Islamic Education and Recreational Institute.

IERI General Secretary, Mr Shahid, spoke of his "relief and joy" at the decision, which he feels was greatly helped by MCB's involvement, "I am sure the strength of the voice that the MCB has developed amongst the government departments and the written representation that the MCB sent has helped us."

Mr Amann commented on how the Muslims of Southall had been "made to run from pillar to post... The Muslim leaders in Southall admit that they have learnt the hard way - that they must get Muslim Councillors elected. The MCB's Public Affairs Committee will assist in this effort."

Contacts: Mr Shahid IERI 0181 571 6839, Asif Amann 0181 200 6557

### East London Mosque Extension Project

The Mosque is, insha'Allah, only weeks away from completing the first phase of the fundraising programme for this ambitious project. £1/2 million must be paid to the London Borough of Tower Hamlets when the contracts are exchanged.

In 1998 a scheme was launched asking Muslims to donate £300, equivalent to one square metre, to the extension project. Alhamdulillah, there has been generous response from the Muslim community, especially in East London. The Mosque is now in a position to pay the Council, without having to borrow any money from the banks!

The Mosque extension and community centre will provide vital services to the community. It will allow the prayer area in the Mosque complex to grow to accommodate 10,000 worshippers at the busiest times. Services will be provided for teaching children, training for job seekers, as well as a youth centre.

The second phase of the fundraising programme has already started with the aim to raise £8 million to build the extension. This is a huge task and requires the help and support of Muslims worldwide. For further information contact the:

East London Mosque Development Fund  
82-92 Whitechapel Road, London E1 1JE  
Telephone: + 44 (0)20 7247 1357, Fax: + 44 (0)20 7377 9879  
E-mail: [admin@eastlondon-mosque.org.uk](mailto:admin@eastlondon-mosque.org.uk)

## TURNING VISION INTO REALITY

Muslims in the UK are going through a process of change. This is due to the ever changing world we live in and also recognition among ourselves of the need to adapt. The question is to what extent are we in control of the change and are we in a position to make a change for the better?

Within the MCB's overall vision for a more active and organised role in the community at large, the media committee's objectives are in part to enable the MCB to become a strong voice on matters affecting British Muslims and to help generate a more positive image of Islam.

We are all aware of the regular onslaught in the media which at best provides a detached view and very often a negative view of Islam and Muslims. Positive examples are few and far between. While this may be due to several reasons such as lack of information, underlying prejudice or genuine fear, to an extent this is also due to our own actions, or more importantly inaction.

The MCB has been working hard to encourage a variety of media initiatives, and has been building effective contacts within the media across Radio/TV networks and the printed media. Effective contacts will encourage the relevant sections of the media to seek our views more frequently. It has also been establishing a capable media response unit. We need to demonstrate our presence and do so by articulating proper responses to media incidents. Not responding either implies we agree with what is being reported or that we cannot be bothered to respond. The response needs to be based on sound reasoning and good research. Its style has to be measured or forceful, as the situation requires. And it should be free from emotional outbursts that often lead our point of view to be ignored or misrepresented. We are now more regularly monitoring articles and broadcast programmes, and in many cases our responses have been published or lead to further discussions with the media organisation concerned.

The coming months are to see the appointment of a full time media officer to help pull together the needed actions. We plan to continue the campaign of press releases and responses to media incidents, and not least assist the MCB committees generally in dealing with media matters.

*Tariq Khan, Convenor - Media Committee*

## Launch of Pakistan Channel

September 10th, 1999 saw a reception in London for the launch of a new cable channel. *The Pakistan Channel* is chaired by Jawaid Pasha and will seek to attract viewers from the large Pakistani community in the UK. The channel organisers feel that there is a gap in the market for such a channel as Pakistanis often have different cultural demands than those catered by Zee TV and others. The launch was well attended; over 300 guests including Lord Nazir of Rotherham and Professor Akbar Ahmed, the MCB was represented by Tariq Khan, convenor of the Media Committee. It is a 12 hour channel, 5 hours being produced in the UK and 7 from Pakistan. The service will be available over cable across all of the UK, with decoders being sold through main retailers.

## Poor Briefing Led to Confusion

The Independent (13/09/99) reported on the initiative by the Judicial Studies Board (JSB) relating to the production of anti-racism guidelines. Unfortunately, the judge concerned, Judge David Pearl, had been poorly briefed which led to him commenting that individuals in court cannot be referred to as Mr Mohammed as "*there is only one Mohammed*", he also suggested that Muslims during Ramadhan maybe "slow, unintelligent or difficult". The unfortunate briefing has had many attempting to provide better information for an obviously well-intentioned scheme, these include the Eastman Dental Institute for Oral Health Care Sciences. Dr Khalid Anees of the MCB's Health and Medical committee along with Professor Raman Bedi, Head of Department for the Institute, wrote to the JSB informing them of an interactive based computer program the Institute has developed. The program, called *Culturebase*, attempts to provide the user with simple

training with regard to cultural and racial issues. The obvious benefits of such a program can be seen not just for the judiciary, but for many others including the media.

*The Eastman Dental Institute: www.eastman.ucl.ac.uk*

## "Prophet of Doom" Causes Anger

*The Times* article "A Prophet of Doom" (18/9/99) and its accompanying cartoon depicting an ayatollah carrying the Koran [sic], presiding over a burning world caused a stream of complaints to the newspaper. The article, which ended with the warning that "*the world is not going to find it easy to bind up the 'bloody borders' of Islam*", caused individuals and organisations to telephone, fax and e-mail *The Times* complaining of the Islamophobic article and cartoon which many felt demonised Muslims. MCB's Secretary General, Iqbal Sacranie, spoke directly to the Opinion Editor, Michael Gove, to explain the hurt and frustration that such caricatures and articles can cause. Although *The Times* has not issued a printed apology, they did apologise to the MCB on the telephone. Additionally the paper has sought the MCB's assistance for a Muslim viewpoint on the subject of co-existence, not confrontation which they will consider for publication.

## BBC Radio Hold Training Day

The BBC's Religious Programming department held a training day for individuals to gain experience in the production of religious programmes; Iqbal Sacranie, Dr Fatima Amer and Masrour Ajmal Hussain from the MCB attended. The event included tips on writing scripts and recording them. Attendees were able to receive critical feedback on their scripts and voice presentation training. It was an excellent course, and a lot of knowledge and valuable experience was gained. A helpful media pack was given out which the MCB office will circulate. Hopefully the participants will be able to use the skills gained in actual programmes in the future.

## Inflammatory Headline Censured

On August 1st 1999, *The Mail on Sunday* featured an article entitled "*The Koran turned him into a dangerous Muslim fanatic*". MCB wrote to the editor of the paper, Russell Forgham, pointing out that the grossly offensive headline had seemingly "*come out of an inventive and possibly Islamophobic imagination*". The editor, in response, published an apology in its following issue.

### MCB Press Releases (since March 1999)

19th November 1999	Delegation calls on OIC for condemnation of Russian aggression in Chechnya.
3rd November 1999	Muslims condole demise of former Chief Rabbi
22nd October 1999	The Book of Jonah
3rd October 1999	No to Neo-Stalinism in Chechnya
14th September 1999	Letter to Foreign Secretary on the Status of Jerusalem
5th September 1999	Muslims seek 'no-informer' assurance from Home Secretary
9th August 1999	Yemeni Sentences: MCB Appeals to President Ali Abdullah Saleh
6th August 1999	MCB Protests to the Mail on Sunday
27th July 1999	Revive the Sunnah - Solar Eclipse
18th June 1999	Muslims Condole Demise of Cardinal Hume
6th April 1999	Don't Disperse Kosovans, says MCB
6th April 1999	Secretary General's Address at Reception for Prime Minister
25th March 1999	Muslims Welcome PM's Historic Message
23rd March 1999	Government White Paper on the 2001 Census, The religion question and what needs to be done

## FOREIGN & COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

### MCB welcomes Peter Hain

Peter Hain MP, the newly appointed Foreign Office minister was the chief guest at a Reception organised by the MCB at the Commonwealth Institute on November 4th, 1999. The reception was attended by a cross section of the Muslim community, senior members from Government departments and prominent Muslim politicians and community leaders. (A detailed report will appear in the next issue of the newsletter *insha Allah*).



Mr Hain being introduced to MCB members

### A delegation visits Saudi Arabia

A three man delegation led by the Secretary General of the MCB, Iqbal Sacranie along with Dr Ahmed Yar Choudary, Vice Chair of the Muslim Doctors and Dentists Association and Mr Khalid Parvez, Secretary of the Association of British Hujjaj went on an official visit organised by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to Saudi Arabia to discuss the arrangements for British hujjaj attending the pilgrimage.

The delegation were accompanied by the deputy British Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Mr Simon McDonald and the Consul General in Jeddah, Mr Innes Ray. The delegation had a constructive meeting with minister of Hajj, Mr Iyad Madani and officials from his department. The minister assured the delegation that the government of Saudi Arabia will provide the necessary facilities in Makkah so that any difficulties or concerns of the British hujjaj can be dealt with by the Hajj office. The office will be manned by British Muslims. The delegation also met the deputy minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr Nizar Madani who assured them of his fullest support and cooperation. The British delegation conveyed their deep gratitude to the government of Saudi Arabia for the excellent facilities provided to the pilgrims coming from different countries and assured them that the British Hajj office in Makkah will be of great benefit and will serve to complement the extensive facilities and services provided by the Saudi Government.

### Video Launched

"Islam in Britain", a set of two films commissioned by the FCO, was launched on July 29th. The films cover both the history and present day life of Muslims in Britain. Described by Lord Ahmed of Rotherham as "a well researched, well balanced, informative and constructive documentary", the films were generally well received.

## HOME OFFICE

### Peers to Lead Forced Marriages Working Group

A committee has been formed headed by Baroness Pola Uddin of Bethnal Green and Lord Nazir Ahmed of Rotherham into the issue of Asian girls being forced to marry. The MCB has made it clear that the controversy

surrounding forced marriages is not a Muslim issue, but concerns the Asian community and its culture. It is a practice which was condemned by the Prophet Muhammad, peace be on him, which unfortunately exists today amongst the Asian communities in Britain including some Muslims. The committee will attempt to determine the extent of the problem, as well as look at ways that social services and teaching staff can approach the issue. Mike O'Brien the Race Equality Minister, said "Forced marriages are wrong and we are determined to tackle the issue. The Government must respond sensitively to issues of cultural diversity but multicultural sensitivity is no excuse for moral blindness."

### MI5 tried to recruit Imam

The case of the young Pakistani imam from Rotherham, Shafiq-ur-Rehman, raises difficult questions for the government. He says he was approached by MI5 to work as an informer for them, when he refused they sought to deport him.

However, the unsettling idea of MI5 recruiting from within the community has caused outrage, and has resulted in unfortunate consequences. A Muslim inmate at a prison in NE England confronted his prison visitor Imam and questioned whether he could now trust him as the imam might be an informer!!

In response to the community's deep concerns on this issue and the ramifications of mistrust both within the community and towards the government MCB issued a press release and wrote to the Home Office. The Home Secretary, Jack Straw, has responded to the letter, but does not answer effectively the concerns raised. A meeting has been sought to seek further clarification.

## TREASURY

### 2001 Census - more lobbying needed!

The Queen's speech on 17th November at the House of Lords was a disappointment for the faith communities that have been lobbying for a religion question in the 2001 Census for the last four years. Such a question needs an amendment to the Census Act (1920), but the speech, that sets out the next session's parliamentary programme, made no reference to any legislation in this area. The MCB and other faith communities are now seeking clarification from the Treasury in view of the fact that both the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary had given their support for the inclusion of the question. Moreover the White Paper on the 2001 Census proposed that the census in England and Wales should include the religion question. Perhaps the Government intends to introduce the amendment via a Private Member's Bill. It is now important for Muslim organisations to contact their MPs and seek their support for such a Private Member's Bill.

A representative of the MCB's ReDoc (Research & Documentation) Committee attended a one-day workshop organised by the Office for National Statistics in May 1999. Following this briefing, the MCB initiated a campaign to ensure that if a religion question was asked, the results would be in the public domain. The ONS's original proposal was that the free publication called the 'Key Statistics' would aggregate non-Christian faiths into a general 'Other' heading. The detailed data by faith groups would then only be available at a cost in other customised reports from the ONS. The MCB objected to this, and also to the proposal that the Census 'Standard Tables' relating to religion should be limited to cross-tabulations by age and gender only. The MCB submitted a detailed response to the ONS and also sought the support of census data users. Brother Musa Tukelji, of MCB's Public Affairs Group assisted in this lobbying effort. The MCB's position is that the Census relies on public cooperation and British Muslims and other minority faiths will undoubtedly be more responses to a Census containing the religion question. This is because the Census is seen as a landmark opportunity through which society can be better informed on the multi-religious and multicultural make up of our society. If the ONS does not publish the results of the religion question in detail then this will be regarded as a failure of the Census. For the 2001 Census to make its mark on the social climate of Britain it should reflect the popular campaign for the religion question.

# COMMITTEES & TASK GROUPS

## Research and Documentation Committee

### NATIONALISM, IDENTITY AND MINORITY RIGHTS

Mohammed Abdul Aziz represented the MCB at a conference organised by the University of Bristol on *Nationalism, Identity and Minority Rights* between 16th and 18th September 1999. It was attended by 300 specialists in philosophy, law, anthropology, education, history, Black studies, cultural studies and literary and media studies, presenting just over 200 papers. Whereas the inter-disciplinary approach provided depth to the discussions, breadth was certainly not missing, and was provided by the spectrum of nearly 40 national social and political contexts represented by these participants. It is not unusual for a Muslim participant to feel marginalised at a conference of this size and nature. However this was not the case at this conference. Special provisions were made for Halal meat and prayer facilities. More importantly, however, Islam and Muslim communities featured in at least 10-15 sessions and between 25-30 papers, and were on the whole not so vilified as one has come to expect. Presentations on Islam and Muslims ranged from discussions on state recognition of Islam in the UK and incorporating Islamic Law into the English Legal System to discussion on various Muslim minorities in the UK, for example, Bangladeshis, Pakistanis, Turks, Muslim youth, and Muslim Women. Papers were also presented on Muslims minorities abroad, for example, Palestine/Israel, Kashmir/India and the former Yugoslavia. What was pleasing about the papers was that, generally speaking, they were sympathetic to the Muslim position.

Tariq Madood, Professor of Sociology, at the University of Bristol, made an important contribution to the success of this event. His paper examining the emergence of a Muslim political identity in modern multi-cultural Britain was thought provoking and will become required reading for those seeking insight into what makes British Muslims tick.

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## International Affairs Committee

### YEMEN REQUIRES DELICATE NEGOTIATIONS

A meeting was arranged by the MCB with the Foreign Office Minister, Peter Hain, and was attended by lawyers and family members of detainees in Yemen. A press conference was held in Conway Hall and the MCB's stand on the case was

presented to the press. MCB's spokesmen appeared on various radio and TV programmes.

Although three of the detainees are finally safely back in Britain, five still remain detained in Yemen. The MCB has been continually monitoring the situation and have been in regular contact with Foreign Office officials, but the unpredictability of the Yemeni legal system has made all forms of negotiations difficult. MCB wrote to the Prime Minister, Tony Blair, in July asking him to remind the President of Yemen of his legal and international obligations to British citizens. With different messages coming out of Yemen from political and legal quarters, it is difficult to know whether the President is fully in control of what happens in the trial. The Prime Minister assured MCB in a reply that he has written to the President of Yemen and that the British Government will continue to keep a very close eye on the progress of the case.

### STATUS OF JERUSALEM

On the 10th September 1999, the Secretary General of the MCB, Iqbal Sacranie wrote to Rt Hon Robin Cook MP, The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, urging him to make sure the status of Jerusalem will not be compromised. The letter made clear that the MCB felt the FCO "should marshal its diplomatic strengths, and through the EU particularly, ensure that the status of Jerusalem is not altered. The British Government should further ensure that no EU country should relocate its embassy to Jerusalem. It should also dissuade the US from doing so out of unprincipled opportunism."

The letter reminded the Foreign Secretary not only of the history of the status of Jerusalem, but of UN resolutions regarding it which declare Israel's measures in Jerusalem as invalid.

The MCB called upon the Foreign Secretary to make sure that "a foreign policy that draws on principle and respect for international convention should not allow an occupying power to get away with illegally annexing Jerusalem as its 'eternal and undivided capital'".

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## Legal Affairs Committee

### HUMAN RIGHTS CONFERENCE

A major conference is being planned for Spring next year on the impact upon the Muslim community of the Human Rights Act 1998. The Lord Chancellor is being

invited as the keynote speaker. The four areas of focus will be (i) Education, (ii) Family, (iii) Employment and (iv) Immigration. The conference is jointly organised with the Association of Muslim Lawyers (AML). Further details may be obtained from Suleman Osman or Mahmud Al-Rashid.

### PROVISION OF LEGAL ADVICE

The MCB office receives many enquiries from individuals requiring legal assistance. Some of these have been passed on to members of the Legal Affairs Committee (LAC) who have dealt with them accordingly. A procedure has been set up to deal with individual enquiries. Only cases that raise an issue of general importance to the community as a whole will be taken up by the LAC; others will be directed towards particular legal advisors. Further information may be obtained from the office.

### RELIGIOUS DISCRIMINATION IN FRANCE

The LAC is in the process of collecting more information on the issue of discrimination against Muslim girls for wearing scarves in schools. The purpose is to see whether any legal remedies may be available to remove this pernicious discrimination. It is an issue that may have repercussions in the UK.

### THE MUSLIM LAWYER

This is a quarterly legal magazine and the LAC is part of the publishing team. The MCB will be making a contribution to the publishing costs.

### REGIONAL SUB-COMMITTEES

Suleman Osman is engaged in setting up regional subcommittees of the LAC. Legal persons working in different regions please contact Mr Osman.

### OTHER PROJECTS

The LAC is assisting the process of MCB registering as a charitable trust. Members have also attended various Home Office reviews on different aspects of the law. MCB also responded to the CRE's 3rd Review of the Race Relations Act.

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## Health & Medical Committee

### CONCERNS OVER CHEWING TOBACCO

The Health Committee of the MCB has recently been involved in discussions with MPs including Claire Ward, over the

availability and grave dangers of chewing tobacco products which are increasingly available in the UK. The majority of products are imported from India/Pakistan.

The tobacco is called 'Gutkha', which is a generic name for sweetened/perfumed chewing tobacco. It may be known within our communities as Gutkha, Pan-Parag. People may also confuse this with Pan Masala, which is a similar substance but does NOT always contain tobacco. Even more dangerously people may confuse Gutkha with Supari (sweetened fennel seeds). Supari is commonly eaten within Pakistani/Bangla/Indian households, and anecdotal evidence exists that parents have given Gutkha thinking that it was Supari. Most of the confusion arises from poor labeling and the fact that Pan masala, supari and Gutkha are almost identically packaged - often in bright colours to make them attractive to children.

That tobacco is carcinogenic (cancer causing) is well known. Reports from the Indian subcontinent report patients presenting with cancer and pre-cancerous lesions of the mouth at a younger and younger age. Gutkha and its derivatives are thought to be the cause. The Muslim community in the UK is the most affected. In the UK there are 2000-2500 new cases of oral cancer every year. This is known to be increasing. Figures from a study in London, show the levels of oral cancer to be proportional to the population that is from a minority ethnic background. Levels of tobacco use (smoking and chewing) within the UK Bangladesh population have been consistently shown to be 80-90%.

The MCB in conjunction with the National Centre for Transcultural Oral Health, Eastman Dental Institute (UCL) has been liaising with the Dept of Health and MP's. Our discussions have led to debate in the new Westminster Hall chamber at the House of Commons. Publicity has been wide within the national press with most papers devoting some space to the issue, but more is required. A concerted campaign needs to take place which will increase awareness within communities, shop keepers, health professionals etc., including a health promotion campaign within schools. There also needs to be surveillance of tobacco products within the UK, monitoring new products and research on existing products.

Contact: Dr. Khalid Anees,  
National Centre for Transcultural Oral Health,  
0171 915 1192  
K.Anis@eastman.ucl.ac.uk

## Public Affairs Committee

### MAYOR FOR LONDON

A public meeting is being organised by the Public Affairs Committee for the Muslim Community in London to hear the views of the three prospective mayoral candidates once they have been chosen by their parties. This will give the Muslim Community in London an opportunity to listen to and put questions to the candidates on matters affecting them as a community.

## Social and Welfare Committee

### RELIGIOUS DISCRIMINATION

A research team at the University of Derby has been set up to look at Religious Discrimination. The MCB has been campaigning for some time for religious discrimination to be recognised as something separate to racial discrimination. Members of MCB's ReDoc committee have sought confirmation regarding quality assurance and validation methodology relating to Derby's research design. Also, members of the MCB Legal Affairs Committee have met with representatives from the University of Derby team and presented the Muslim case. The New Muslims Project at the Islamic Foundation in Leicestershire has been trying to co-ordinate the discrimination experiences of white Muslims as it is their religion and not their race which causes them to have problems. All Muslims are strongly advised to provide information to the Home Office and the University of Derby with details of religious discrimination that has been faced. University of Derby can be reached via their website: <http://www.multifaithnet.org/projects/religdiscri/questionre.htm>, or telephone Lynne Kynnerley 0132 622222. The New Muslim Project can be contacted on 01530 244 944.

## Business and Economics Committee

### MUSLIM BANKS IN THE UK A FUTURE POSSIBILITY

The Financial Service Authority (FSA) held a meeting in their offices with the Citizen Organising Foundation and representatives from the Muslim community. The meeting was part of the FSA's declared aim of improving mutual understanding of Islamic banking and the FSA's regulatory

framework. Iqbal Asaria and Iqbal Ahmed Khan for the MCB, and Dr Ahsan of the Islamic Foundation, attended the one day assembly to discuss Islamic banking in the United Kingdom. The current Bank of England rules for registration make it very difficult for an Islamic bank to register in the United Kingdom. The Citizen Organising Foundation is concerned with a decrease in High Street banks generally, which it feels leads to a down turn in small, local economies. By extension many local Muslim communities would like to have access to Islamic Banks but the current registration rules make this difficult.

## Development Policy Forum 2000

The Department for International Development (DFID) is organising a series of Development Policy Forums across the country in 2000. The Forums are aimed at sharing thinking and ideas on developmental issues with individuals and representatives of groups from across society, and also raise awareness and understanding of the UK's development programme.

The MCB has been discussing with DFID the modalities of raising awareness of the UK's developmental programme amongst Muslims. The MCB's Business and Economics Committee will shortly be issuing a policy paper on the subject for affiliates. The DFID Policy Forums would be a good starting point for affiliates and members to gain first hand knowledge of the Department's work.

For further information about the Policy Forums contact Fred Robarts at DFID Tel: 0207 917 0944; e-mail: [forum@dfid.gov.uk](mailto:forum@dfid.gov.uk) or visit DFID website: [www.dfid.gov.uk](http://www.dfid.gov.uk)

## Jubilee 2000 - Drop the Debt

The Jubilee 2000 Coalition is calling on Western leaders to "drop the debt". The debt referred to the crippling and unpayable debts of the world's most impoverished countries. Payment of interest alone eats into the gross domestic product of a nation, leaving the poorest countries with nothing for education, health, regeneration.

The MCB's Secretary General, Iqbal Sacranie, spoke at a rally in Trafalgar Square on 13th June, 1999. Along with religious leaders, trade union officials, politicians and other personalities he detailed the enormous burden faced by developing countries just to service the debt. He called upon world leaders to "grasp the nettle and make grand gestures at the turn of the century to give the poor a fighting chance in the next millenium."

Jubilee 2000: [www.jubilee2000uk.org](http://www.jubilee2000uk.org)

## Landmark Reception - continued from page 1

representatives of the diplomatic community in the UK, representatives of other faith communities, social and community workers and representatives of the media. The Prime Minister was accompanied by his wife Cherie Booth QC and the Home Secretary, Jack Straw.

Dr Basil Mustafa, Deputy Secretary General of the MCB, chaired the occasion, first introducing Iqbal Sacranie, to address the gathering. He highlighted the plight of Muslims in Kosova, thanked the Prime Minister for his efforts in this regard but urged him not to let to strike a deal with Milosevic "in the name of diplomacy and realpolitik." Mr Sacranie then went on to note the government's positive strides towards including the Muslim community in the life of the country, but underlined important matters still to be resolved; including issues relating to a religion question in the 2001 Census and legislation to address religious discrimination.

Mr Blair was then introduced and he underlined his commitment to the Kosovan people, and said how moved he and his wife had been at the recent visit to the refugee camps in Macedonia. He commended the efforts of the Muslims in the UK to raise funds and to help the refugees in Britain. The Prime Minister then spoke of the recent race bombings which affected amongst others the Bengali community in Bethnal Green, and praised the police commissioner, Sir Paul Condon, who was also in attendance, for his forces' speedy response to the bombings.

Mr Blair acknowledged the contribution of Muslims to the life of British society, which he said "often goes unrecognised." He recognised the problem of Islamophobia, describing it as "prejudice, pure and simple". The Prime Minister commended the MCB for its aim to "work for a more enlightened appreciation of Islam and Muslims in the wider society" and said that that task fell on the whole of society. He encouraged more Muslim to enter politics and noted the contribution of Lord Nazir Ahmed and Baroness Pola Uddin in the Lords. Committing to education, the 2001 Census, and an end to religious discrimination, he hoped the Muslims "will always find in this government not just a sympathetic ear but a friend willing to do all it can to make Britain a safe and fulfilling place to live."

## First Muslim Advisor to Prison Service - continued from page 1

many of whom embraced the faith as inmates, foreign nationals, as well as people from Britain's ethnic minorities.

The appointment is the culmination of substantial work performed by The Iqra Trust and The London Islamic Cultural Centre; both of which have been at the forefront of raising awareness about the needs of Muslim prisoners, and in the provision of Imams to prisons. Prison Imams will be nominated by a nominating authority, The Welfare of Muslim Inmates, which is at present chaired by Professor Noibi, who is a member of the Central Working Committee of the MCB. Supporting this excellent work MCB and Lord Nazir Ahmed made representation to the Home Office for a fully paid Muslims adviser.

The scale of the work facing Maqsood Ahmed was made startling clear days before the official announcement, when the appointment was leaked to *The Times* newspaper. The article began with an alarmist headline: "Britain facing Asian crime wave" (3rd September 1999), and then continued to present the situation of Muslim prisoners in racial terms with no attempt to corroborate statistics. *The New Statesman* (13th September 1999), "We should not expect Muslims to be specially law-abiding" also illustrated how the point of a Muslim adviser to prisons had been completely missed by many, "Now we hear that a Muslim counsellor [sic] for those in prison is to be appointed. To do what? Not to look after spiritual needs, because they will be dealt with, where necessary, by the imam, just as the padre will deal with committed Christians. Will

these counsellors [sic] be armed with the Koran, pointing out that the way of the transgressor is exceedingly difficult? That Muslims are so special a social type that to commit a crime is the ultimate defiance of Allah? This seems to be religious fanaticism at its worse."

Combating such ignorance will be hard work for the new adviser, as will the fostering of an understanding of religious diversity. The responses to the appointment graphically highlight the need for such advisers in a variety of services not just the prisons, in order to combat such Islamophobia.

## MCB on the Net

<http://www.mcb.org.uk>

### Affiliating to the MCB

The MCB is a representative body of established national and regional organisations as well as local mosques, Islamic centres and specialist institutions. It has over 250 affiliates, plus individuals committed to helping the work of MCB. These organisations and individuals come from diverse and varied specialities and interests: mosques, charities, the medical, educational, social and legal fields, business - the list could go on. They are united in their commitment to seeking the common good. **If you would like to join in this work and this commitment then please contact the MCB for further information and an affiliation form.**

### Good Practice Projects

There is so much good work going on in the Muslim Community - local people carrying out the vital, grass roots work. Often this work and these people are known only to those locally and those that they help. This work is an inspiration to us all and the MCB would like to know more. So, do you know of any good practice projects going on near you? We would like to here about them. Please contact the MCB by e-mail or by telephone.

### SPONSORS

MCB acknowledges with gratitude the sponsorship of this newsletter by the following:

- ◆ Gani & Co., London Property Management.
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- ◆ Islamic Cultral Centre and Central Mosque, London.
- ◆ Iqra Trust, London Educational and prison welfare services
- ◆ A Muslim Businessman, London (wishing to remain anonymous)

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