

THE MUSLIM COUNCIL OF BRITAIN

A step towards greater consultation, cooperation and coordination on Muslim Affairs in the UK.

The Muslim Council of Britain Weekly E-Newsletter

18 Rabee` al-Awwal 1423 Friday 31 May 2002

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Reports and Committee updates

Meeting with the Foreign Secretary

The Foreign Secretary Jack Straw met with members of the British Muslim, Hindu and Sikh communities on Thursday May 29th to brief them on his recent visit to both India and Pakistan.

The Secretary General Iqbal Sacranie stressed that 'the only real solution for the long-running Kashmir conflict is to honour the wishes of the people of Jammu and Kashmir about their future through a 'free and impartial plebiscite'.

British Muslims that attended the meeting included Shamsuddin Agha, President of the Indian Muslim Federation, Ibrahim Master, Chairman of the Lancashire Council of Mosques and Mr Zina of the Indian Muslim Council.

MCB CWC Meeting

The MCB's new Central Working Committee will meet on Saturday June 1st at the Islamic Cultural Centre, London. Members will gather to appoint coopted members, elect assistant secretaries and a deputy treasurer, as well as review the MCB's committee structure.

Home Office Meeting

MCB Secretary General Iqbal Sacranie, Chair of the International Affairs Committee Tanzeem Wasti, and Councillor Afzal Khan, Chair of the Kashmiri and Pakistani Forum, met with Home Secretary David Blunkett on Wednesday May 29th to discuss relations between the Indian and Pakistani communities in the UK given rising tensions between the two states in the sub-continent.

The Secretary General of the MCB assured the Home Secretary that although the conflict was of concern to all communities it was not a conflict between them.

Leaders of the Sikh and Hindu communities in the UK were also present at the meeting.

Israel/ Palestine: The Way Forward

Treasurer Ali Omar Hermes attended a debate hosted by The Guardian Newspaper on 'Israel/ Palestine: The Way Forward' on Wednesday May 29th.

The Palestinian Minister of Culture and Information, Yasser Abed Rabbo and Yossi Beilin, architect of the Oslo Peace Accords, joined journalist Jonathan Freedland to discuss the prospects for peace in the Middle East.

Meeting with Peter Hain MP

A delegation from the MCB led by Secretary General Iqbal Sacranie met with the Minister for Europe Peter Hain on Monday May 20th. The delegation raised the issue of integration with the Minister in light of his comments regarding the resistance of Muslims to integrate into British society.

'British Muslims have made rapid progress integrating into the wider society in one generation', said the MCB Secretary General. 'We support this ongoing process and where the progress in any faith community is slow - and this is not an issue confined to Muslims alone - we need to

collectively address any concerns. At the same time, however, it is also important for the government to be seen to be responding to Muslim concerns about inclusiveness, especially when it comes to providing legal protection against religious discrimination', he added.

Members of the delegation included: Ali Omar Ermes, Tanzeem Wasti, Shibani Akbar, Sibtain Panjwani and Inayat Bunglawala.

Genocide of Muslims in Gujarat

Dr Abdul Bari, the Deputy Secretary-General of the MCB spoke at the headquarters of the Indian Muslim Federation in Leytonstone, East London on the 'Genocide of Muslims in Gujarat, India' on Sunday May 19th.

The meeting also heard from, Dr Gautam Appa of the London School of Economics, who had recently returned following a visit to the region, Imam Abdul Quayaum (East London mosque), Miah Monirul Islam (President of the Bangladeshi Catering Association) and Hafiz Hasan Ali (Islamic School, Kilburn).

Imam Abdul Qayum in his speech, called upon members of all the communities and nationalities to rise against this injustice and exercise their democratic right of peaceful protest. Dr Bari pointed out that the MCB had already raised this issue at the highest level of the British Government and was working closely with other organisations, including Indian Muslim Federation, to support the British Muslim victims of the Gujarat crisis.

Media Committee

Letter to the BBC

Inayat Bunglawala, Secretary of the Media committee wrote on Thursday May 23rd to the Director of Editorial Policy at the BBC, Mr Stephen Whittle, to complain of the use of the term 'Islamic terrorist' on BBC news broadcasts on Kashmir. He also complained of the BBC News reporter's inadequate account of the historical events that have been the root cause of Pakistan and India's dispute over Kashmir.

Stephen Whittle wrote to the MCB on Tuesday May 28th to apologise for the Corporation's use of the term 'Islamic Terrorist' in recent reports on the Kashmir crisis. Mr Whittle acknowledged that it was not BBC policy to refer to Kashmiri separatists as such and assured the MCB that the error would not be repeated.

Muslim Participation on Question Time

The Media committee wrote to the Deputy Director of Programmes at the BBC, Mr Bailey, on Tuesday May 21st, to raise its concerns over insufficient Muslim participation on both the panel and the audience in recent editions of Question Time. The MCB stressed that it was important that the BBC attempt to fairly represent all sections of British society.

BBC Newsnight Questioned about Lack of Balance on India/ Pakistan The Media committee contacted the producers of BBC Newsnight to express their discontent over the unbalanced account of recent tensions between India and Pakistan that featured in the May 21st edition of the programme. The MCB urged the Newsnight team to give the Pakistani viewpoint equal coverage in their reports on rising tensions between the neighbouring states.

London Task Group

The London Civic Forum held its Annual General Meeting on Tuesday May 28th. Dr Abdul Bari, Deputy Secretary General of the MCB attended along with Ajmal Masroor and Chairman of the

London Task Group, Dr Abdul Raheem Khan. Minister for London Nick Raynsford, delivered the keynote speech

Interfaith

Ayub Laher, of the Jamiat-e-Ulema, Britain, on behalf of the MCB, attended a European Interfaith Conference hosted by the Association of British Muslims, The Queens Federation of Churches (of New York), The European Human Rights Office of the Church of Scientology and the Foundation for Religious Tolerance UK on Saturday May 25th.

The conference entitled 'Filling the Moral Vacuum' was attended by religious, academic and human rights figures to discuss the issue of declining moral values and how to deal with this problem.

International Affairs Committee

Chair of the International Affairs committee Tanzeem Wasti attended the BBC World Service briefing on 'Afghanistan - The Next Steps'. The briefing was chaired by Robin Lustig, presenter of the World Service's Talking Point and Newshour programmes. Panellists included Meena Baktash (Producer, World Service Persian Service) Jonathan Marcus (World Service Defence Correspondent), Barnaby Mason (World Service Diplomatic Correspondent) and Baqer Moin (Editor of the Pashto and Persian Service).

The briefing discussed emerging political, diplomatic and military issues.

Social Policy, Welfare and Regeneration Committee

Shiban Akbar, Acting Chair of the SPWRC, attended a seminar on forced marriages convened by the Foreign and Commonwealth office on Monday May 20th.

Commenting on the launch of 'Dealing with Cases of Forced Marriage, Guidelines for Police', Ms Akbar stated that 'We appreciate the initiative taken by the Home Office, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the ACPO in launching Guidelines for Police on forced marriages. It shows their concern and resolve to tackle this issue.' Ms Akbar noted however, that the booklet failed to include a single Muslim organisation in its list of National Support Agencies and that the use of Muslim cases highlighting the problems faced by those forced into marriages misleadingly gave the impression that this was something experienced by members of the Muslim community alone.

Research & Documentation Committee

Dr J Sherif attended a meeting at the Office for National Statistics on Monday May 27th, with staff of the Ethnicity & Identity Unit. ReDoc represents the MCB on the Religious Affiliation Group, an interfaith alliance with an interest in Census issues, chaired by Professor Leslie Francis. The meeting discussed census output and coding rules for the religion question.

Events

Islamic Relief will be holding a charity dinner at Khan's restaurant in Bayswater on Saturday June 1st to raise emergency funds for Palestine. The dinner begins at 5.30pm and includes a presentation of Islamic Relief's projects worldwide. To attend please contact Islamic Relief on

0870 444 3135.

Being British and Feeling Muslim: Challenges to Police Understanding

The Metropolitan Police Authority, with the assistance of the MCB, have organised a residential conference from 7-9th June 2002 at Cumberland Lodge, Windsor to provide a forum for interested parties to discuss issues relating to community liaison.

The conference hopes to deal with misconceptions and stereotypes in the Muslim community and the police force; how best to tackle them and how to build a more inclusive society where respect and tolerance permit cultural diversity whilst promoting social integration.

Former Secretary General Yousuf Bhailok, Chair of the London Task Group Dr Abdur Raheem Khan and Acting Chair of the Social Policy, Welfare and Regeneration Committee, Shiban Akbar, will contribute their experience and perceptions to the forum.

