

Community Affairs

Muslim school renovation on hold after government dallies

A decision on the future of Bolton Muslim Girls School were delayed for at least two months after the Government delayed making a decision — for the second time.

Bolton's education bosses had hoped to hear in December whether they had been successful in their bid to be a part of a multimillion building programme

to rebuild two secondary and three primary schools.

Bolton Council executive member of children's services, Cllr Nick Peel, said: "This delay means

that children are having to continue to work in sub-standard conditions.

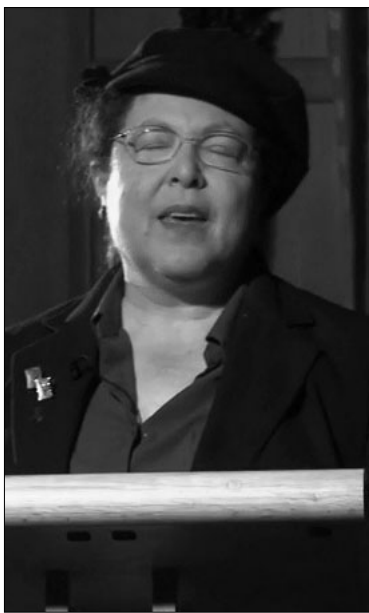
Under BSE, the schools would not have been built yet, but the plans would have been displayed and there would be an excitement and morale would have been raised.

"The quality of teaching and learning is very important, but the

environment does make a huge difference."

Bolton Muslim Girls School and Westhoughton High School were put forward because of their "inherent condition and suitability issues". It was said they needed "major investment" and "new facilities". Bolton Muslim Girls School does not have a canteen, playing fields or sports facilities.

London central mosque to host interfaith event



Religious leaders will come together for an event in London promoting world interfaith harmony.

Panellists will talk on the subject of forgiveness, compassion and oneness at the free event at London Central Mosque.

Speakers include Rabbi Jackie Tabick, chairman of the World Congress of Faiths, Reverend Peter Owen Jones, known for his BBC programme Around The World In 80 Faiths; and Imam Abduljalil Sajid, chairman of the Muslim Council for Religious and Racial Harmony UK and president of Religions for Peace UK.

Also on the panel will be Buddhist Yann Lovelock Ajit Singh MBE representing the Sikh faith and Kiran Bali MBE, who will represent the Hindu faith and is also chief executive of United Religions Initiative, UK.

The event is being co-ordinated by Dr Richard Boeke, chairman of the British Chapter of the International Association For Religious Freedom.

It takes place on Wednesday, February 1 from 12.30pm until 5pm at the mosque on Park Road.

Cameron and Colonialism

In a 'pot calls the kettle black' moment, David Cameron on the record last week levelled accusations of colonialism against the Argentinians. In a statement made at a briefing session on the future security of the Falkland Islands he is reported to have said: "What the Argentinians have been saying recently, I would argue, is actually far more like colonialism because these people want to remain British and the Argentinians want them to do something else"

Aside from the fact that it was colonialist Britain that waged war, under Thatcher, in order to retain its control over the South American Falkland Islands in the 1980s, many of us will recall Cameron's muscular liberalism speech a few months ago. In this he called upon British Muslims to integrate and adopt British values. Ironically, Cameron now

staunchly defends the rights of British immigrants to the Falkland Islands, to remain segregated from the local community.

If Cameron believes that his demands of British Muslims were fair, then he should expect that Brits overseas also be forced to 'integrate' with their host cultures. Or perhaps Cameron wants us to believe that British values are superior to all other values and that other cultures and traditions are somehow inherently backwards by comparison. Put together Cameron's words should deeply trouble the British public. As Cameron edges closer and closer to fascism through rhetoric, Britain may want to reflect upon what exactly its values are and where its leaders are taking it - Justice and tolerance seeming increasingly elusive under the Tory government.



British government drags its heels over Extradition Treaty

Since 2003, under British extradition law, you can be arrested by the British Police subject to a US extradition warrant, not told why and put into prison for years on end without charge or trial. London's Evening Standard newspaper last week reported that home secretary Theresa May, is preparing to reject reviews of this unjust legislature on the grounds that 'concerns about flaws are misplaced' and that changing it would have very little effect.

British Lawyers and grass-roots campaigners have been exercising their democratic right to protest about this legislation, yet the government has been slow to respond.

The issue was put under the spotlight recently when over 140,000 people signed a petition calling for Babar Ahmad, a British Muslim who has been imprisoned without charge or trial for eight years, to be allowed a court case. This led to a House of Commons forum on the wider issue of extradition. Many cases of abuse under this legislation were discussed and the



overwhelming majority of members of parliament spoke out in favour of changes to the current extradition treaty. Whilst the legislature was put in place to deal with suspected terrorists, not only have people accused of other crimes been subjected to it, but guilt is not established

before defendants are shipped off to the United States.

Other such cases include that of Talha Ahsan and Gary Mackinnon who both suffer from forms of Autism and who are awaiting extradition to the US, despite concerns that extradition will jeopardise a fair trial due to

their mental health. Defendants sent across to America may face detention in super-max prisons, where they are kept in solitary confinement for 23 out of 24 hours in the day, are kept under constant surveillance in rooms with metal or concrete furniture and have limited time in which to exercise. Pre-trial detention can be lengthy and at best affect defendants mood and motivation. At worst, these conditions have been described as 'torture under international law' by a New York Bar association study.

Following the house of commons debate on 5th December, the British government have fallen silent and Babar Ahmad's case has remained low profile. It is up to defenders of justice and freedom, to prevent this issue from being sidelined and maintain pressure on the government to respond as a civilised democracy should.

If government wants its citizens to believe in the power of democracy it needs to respond quickly and fairly and end the suffering of many caught in this unjust legal web. Every day that the accused languish in prisons without trial adds further to the shame that those in power must be made to feel.