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From: "Chris Doyle (CAABU)" <doylec@caabu.org>
To: "Chris Doyle (CAABU)" <doylec@caabu.org>
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A flurry of UK-based news dominates today's newspapers. The combined force and common thread of all three - Jack Straw's article on veiling, three nights of racial disturbances in Windsor over a planned mosque, and the Muslim policeman excused from duties at the Israeli embassy - will surely provoke sharp questions about the 'British model' of multiculturalism, and about where the boundary between religious and secular societal obligations lies. However, the debates these stories stir seem reheated and feel rather chewed over.

The main headline concerns an article by ex-Foreign Secretary Jack Straw, in which he argues that the "veil is a symbol of separation" (The Guardian) and that wearing the full niqab was 'bound to make "better, positive relations" between communities more difficult' (The Daily Telegraph). Straw's comments were attacked by the chairman of the Islamic Human Rights commission as showing "selective discrimination on the basis of religion" (The Independent). The Muslim Council of Britain said it was "up to individual Muslim women whether to wear the veil" (The Times). Controversy will always be in the eye of the beholder, but it seems plain that Straw, whose Blackburn constituency has a high Muslim population, has written in a careful, reasoned way. The tone of his statement on the niqab's effect on community relations is more tentative than polemical, "Would [a Muslim lady], however, think hard about what I said - in particular my concern that wearing the full veil was bound to make positive relations between the two communities more difficult."

In Windsor, police forestalled a fourth night of clashes between white and Muslim youths (The Daily Telegraph / The Independent / The Times). The tensions flared after "years of animosity between some residents [of Windsor] and Sandar Hussain, whom they accuse of trying to turn a corner of the mainly white area into a Muslim ghetto"; tensions were exacerbated by Hussain's application to turn a dairy into a mosque for 80 people (The Independent). On Wednesday night the dairy was petrol-bombed, with police discovering two more petrol-bombs (The Times). The disturbances appear to have racial overtones.

The Muslim policeman controversy rumbles on for a second day, with the newspapers emphasising either PC Alexander Omar Basha's request not to be posted to the Israeli embassy on personal and family safety grounds (The Times / The Independent), or bemoaning too much political correctness and too little sense of duty in the modern world (The Telegraph).

In brief: The Daily Telegraph devotes a full page to the Jack Straw

controversy - a Muslim lady explains why she wears the veil and there is some brief historical and Qu'ranic background to veiling; The former Fatah Palestinian Security Minister has accused Hamas of assassinating up to twenty political rivals (The Financial Times); and The Times spends some time with former Gaza Strip settlers who have relocated to the West Bank, and are more adamant than ever that they will never leave.

Have a good weekend.

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'I want to unveil my views on an important issue'

"It's really nice to meet you face to face, Mr Straw," said this pleasant lady in a broad Lancashire accent. She had come to my constituency advice bureau with a problem. I smiled back. "The chance would be a fine thing," I thought to myself but did not say out loud. The lady was wearing the full veil. Her eyes were uncovered but the rest of her face was in cloth."

Links to the full text of Jack Straw's controversial article:

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2006/10/06/nveils106.xml> (The Daily Telegraph)
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/story/0,,1889081,00.html> (The Guardian)

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The Daily Telegraph

News

Take off your veils, says Straw
Nick Bunyan and Graeme Wilson

"Jack Straw provoked anger yesterday by suggesting that community relations would be helped if Muslim women did not wear full veils. The Leader of the Commons disclosed that for the past year he had been asking women who visited his constituency office to remove their veils so that he could see them face-to-face. He always made sure that he was accompanied by a female member of staff and so far no constituent had refused to lift her veil."

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml;jsessionid=DDL SJ2VI4LAXJQFIQMGSFFWAVCBQWIV0?xml=/news/2006/10/06/nveils06.xml>

'I defend my right as a Muslim to wear a veil'

Ruqayyah Ghani

"... "I have not been forced to wear it by my family, in fact I am the only one in my family who chooses to wear one. They were as surprised as some outside the family when I decided to start covering my face. But they accept it..." "People see it as a symbol of repression, but that, along with the stereotype of the Muslim woman covered from head to toe needs to be done away with."

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2006/10/06/nveils206.xml>

What the Koran says
Anon.

"Islamic rulings on dress are primarily drawn from the Koran, which tells followers to ensure that women are clothed modestly in public. One verse states: "O Prophet, tell your wives and daughters and the believing women to draw their outer garments around them when they go out or are among men."

However, the issue is complicated by the fact that Muslims are given further guidance on religious law by three other sources."

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2006/10/06/nveils306.xml>

Embassy row Pc married by radical cleric

Duncan Gardham and John Steele

"A Muslim police officer who asked to be excused from guarding the Israeli embassy was married by the radical cleric Omar Bakri Mohammed, The Daily Telegraph has learned. Pc Alexander Omar-Basha's father-in-law is related to Bakri, who performed an Islamic ceremony at the family home in north London."

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2006/10/06/npc06.xml>

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Windsor suffers fourth night of racial clashes

Stewart Payne

"A fourth night of clashes sparked by a minor altercation outside a Muslim-owned dairy in Windsor was averted last night by police. Three police riot vans swooped on a 40-strong mob of hooded youths who had gathered outside the Medina dairy.

As a stand-off developed between the teenagers and Muslim workers at the gates of the depot around 30 officers moved in to diffuse a fourth night of disorder."

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2006/10/06/nwindsor06.xml>

Israel keeps US waiting on plan to ease Gaza's agony

Tim Butcher

"Condoleezza Rice left Israel yesterday after winning only lukewarm support for a plan to ease the humanitarian crisis in Gaza by improving access for commercial trucks.

As the American secretary of state flew on to Baghdad for surprise talks with the Iraqi government, Israel said it agreed only in principle to her plan and expected more time to consider the details."

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2006/10/06/wmideast06.xml>

Corpse 'unlikely' to be al-Qa'eda chief

Oliver Poole

"The American military is conducting DNA tests on a dead militant but says it is 'highly unlikely' that he was the new leader of al-Qa'eda in Iraq.

The man was among four killed on an al-Qa'eda 'safe house' in Anbar province on Tuesday."

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2006/10/06/wirq06.xml>

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Editorial Leader

Straw leads where the Met fears to follow

"...His remarks have, inevitably, provoked a furore in the Muslim community. Sheik Ibrahim Nogra of the Muslim Council of Britain accused him of "denying" Muslim women the freedom to wear a veil, when Mr Straw is, of course, doing no such thing. What he is doing is - at long last - provoking a debate about a subject of genuine concern..."

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/opinion/main.jhtml?xml=/opinion/2006/10/06/dl0601.xml&sSheet=/opinion/2006/10/06/ixopinion.html>

Letters

Consequences of tailoring the duties of a Muslim policeman
(Six indignant letters concerning the Muslim PC who was excused from duties at the Israeli embassy)

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/opinion/main.jhtml?menuId=1588&menuItem=-1&view=DISPLAYCONTENT&grid=P8&targetRule=0> - head1

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The Financial Times

News

Police step up monitoring after three nights of clashes in Windsor
Jimmy Burns

"Police are monitoring urban areas with mixed racial and religious communities after three nights of clashes between white youths and Muslims in Windsor and fears of an upsurge in social tension during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan."

<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/604a474c-54d6-11db-901f-0000779e2340.html>

Hamas accused of assassinating Fatah rivals
Sharmila Devi

"Mohammed Dahlan, a former Fatah security minister and Gaza Strip strongman, yesterday accused the Palestinian Authority's ruling Hamas movement of assassinating political rivals.

His claim came after clashes between the two Palestinian groups that left at least 13 people dead. Fatah ran the PA until January elections that saw political power shift to Hamas. Condoleezza Rice, US secretary of state, ended her visit to the region by appealing for an end to the factional violence."

<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0f4e905e-54d7-11db-901f-0000779e2340.html>

Rice in Iraq visit

Anon.

"Condoleezza Rice, US secretary of state, made a surprise visit to Iraq on Thursday, pressing the country's leaders to move more quickly to deal with sectarian violence."

<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/4e36d418-5476-11db-901f-0000779e2340.html>

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The Guardian

News

Take off the veil, says Straw - to immediate anger from Muslims
Matthew Taylor and Vikram Dodd

"The row over whether Muslim women should wear veils intensified today

when Jack Straw said he would rather they were not worn at all. The Commons leader insisted that he did not want to be "prescriptive" of Muslim women's dress but said the increasing trend towards covering facial features was "bound to make better, positive relations between the two communities more difficult".

<http://politics.guardian.co.uk/homeaffairs/story/0,,1889173,00.html>

Comment

Bush and Blair are deceiving the desperate people of Darfur

Jonathan Steele

"...Hundreds of thousands of displaced villagers who sit in miserable camps across Darfur are under the impression that European soldiers will soon be riding over the hill to save them.

After spending hours talking to homeless families and their community leaders, I can report that the demand for the UN to send troops to Darfur is overwhelming. The Arab-dominated government in Khartoum has orchestrated demonstrations in the capital denouncing US and UK interventionism, and warning of "another Iraq". The Arab press hammers the same theme, which may well resonate among its readers.

In Darfur's camps, however, the mood is different..."

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/story/0,,1888715,00.html>

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The Independent

News

Straw: I feel uncomfortable with women wearing veils

Nigel Morris

"Jack Straw has been accused of discrimination against Muslim women after disclosing he asks them to remove veils in meetings so they can speak "face to face".

The former Foreign Secretary, who has also served as Home Secretary, claimed that wearing a full veil, which he described as a "visible statement of separation and difference", made it harder to bring communities together."

<http://news.independent.co.uk/uk/politics/article1813594.ece>

Violence flares between youths in Windsor over plan to build mosque

Matthew Beard

"Race relations in Windsor are under increasing strain following three nights of violence sparked by plans to build a mosque in a predominantly white suburb.

Fighting between white and Asian youths culminated in a petrol bomb attack on Wednesday night on a dairy owned by the Muslim businessman whose plans for an Islamic centre have proved bitterly divisive in the Berkshire town."

http://news.independent.co.uk/uk/this_britain/article1813595.ece

Muslim PC excused from embassy duty

Jason Bennetto

"Scotland Yard has defended a decision to excuse a Muslim police officer from guarding the Israeli embassy arguing that it was about "safety and

risk", not "political correctness". Reports that Pc Alexander Omar Basha had been told not to work outside the embassy in central London caused a furore yesterday and led to an internal review by the Metropolitan police."

<http://news.independent.co.uk/uk/crime/article1813584.ece>

Rice offers Abbas plan to ease blockade of Gaza

Eric Silver

"Israel and the Palestinian Authority are studying an American plan to ease the blockade on the Gaza Strip and strengthen Mahmoud Abbas, the moderate President, in his power struggle with Hamas.

During talks this week with Mr Abbas and Israeli ministers, Condoleezza Rice, the Secretary of State, pressed for an early agreement to open the Karni freight crossing through which Palestinian agricultural exports pass on their way from Gaza to European markets via the Israeli port of Ashdod."

http://news.independent.co.uk/world/middle_east/article1813570.ece

Editorial Leader

Islamophobia - We are repeating the mistakes of the past

"...The notion that Muslims represent a potential threat is as unreasonable as it is unjust. The overwhelming majority of Muslims in Britain are peaceful and responsible members of society. A new mosque should be regarded as no more of a threat than a new church or synagogue. And a planning application for a mosque should be judged by precisely the same criteria as an application for other public buildings..."

http://comment.independent.co.uk/leading_articles/article1813550.ece

Comment

The best demonstration of the Muslim case would be a great march denouncing violence

Dominic Lawson

"...It is true that the Muslim Council of Britain issued a statement of absolute condemnation of the 7/7 bombings, as one would expect. Nowadays, unfortunately, words matter less than images, and in not fully realising this, the MCB missed a big opportunity to salvage something precious from the wreckage. At the time, a number of British Muslims wrote to the MCB suggesting a mass march be organised to condemn the actions and views of the bombers, to demonstrate on the biggest scale possible the views of the law-abiding majority..."

http://comment.independent.co.uk/columnists_a_1/dominic_lawson/article1813549.ece

Letters

Censored by fear of a Muslim backlash

(Four letters concerning the relationship between Muslims and freedom of speech in liberal Western democracies)

<http://comment.independent.co.uk/letters/article1813552.ece>

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The Times

News

Cameron dilutes call for inclusive Muslim schools

Greg Hurst

"David Cameron risks causing a row within his party over faith schools by deciding not to support a call for Muslim schools to be required to accept non-Muslim children.

A senior Tory peer is planning to propose a new legal duty on faith schools to admit a proportion of children of different faiths, echoing a call by Mr Cameron in his conference speech. But the Tory leader argues that it is an issue of "social responsibility" for Muslim schools to address rather than be coerced about."

<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,17129-2391304.html>

Straw asks Muslims to lift their veils

Philip Webster and Russell Jenkins

"Jack Straw has disclosed that he asks Muslim women who hold constituency meetings with him to remove their veils so that they can truly talk "face to face".

Mr Straw, the Leader of the Commons, said that the wearing of full veils was making "better, positive relations" between communities "more difficult". Concealing a face was "a visible statement of separation and of difference", Mr Straw wrote in the Lancashire Telegraph."

<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,17129-2391577.html>

Embassy PC moved 'to safeguard family'

Daniel McGrory

"Scotland Yard commanders insisted last night that the decision to remove a Muslim policeman from guard duty at the Israeli Embassy was taken to protect the safety of his family and was "not about political correctness".

Senior officers moved swiftly to defuse the furore over PC Alexander Omar Basha, who is attached to the Diplomatic Protection Group, after reports that he had been excused from guarding Israeli diplomats on "moral grounds"."

<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,2-2391571.html>

Three men arrested over Muslim dairy firebomb

Joanna Bale

"Extra police officers were drafted into Windsor last night after three nights of violent clashes over plans to build a mosque in the royal town.

Dozens of riot police have already been called in after gangs of youths armed with knives, baseball bats, iron bars and hammers fought pitched battles in a street near the proposed site."

<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,29389-2391358.html>

Evicted settlers on defiant mission to build a new home

Ian MacKinnon

"The settlers who aimed to claim the whole Land of Israel for Jews had to be dragged by troops from their homes in Gaza 13 months ago amid bitter recriminations.

But now, a year on, 20 families that were thrown out of the Mediterranean beachfront community of Shirat Hayam are set to try again with a controversial new settlement on a West Bank hilltop steeped in Biblical resonance...The Israeli Peace Now settlement monitoring group said this week that settlers used the war against Hezbollah as cover to expand 31 illegal outposts..."

<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,3-2391313.html>

UN force faces battle to secure peace

Stephen Farrell

"They are better armed than before but some doubt the ability of Unifil soldiers to contain Hezbollah...Nightfall on the main highway from Bint Jbail to Beirut and scores of Hezbollah activists fan out across the Tarmac using darkness to shield their training manoeuvres. The southbound carriageway is in darkness since Israel bombed it two months ago. So, turning destruction into opportunity, Hezbollah has converted the Tarmac into a makeshift parade ground..."

<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,3-2390789.html>

Comment

Arab nations should stop mocking and start helping

Bronwen Maddox's World Briefing

"...Rice said that the US wanted a "new configuration" with Arab allies to revive the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. The US has its eye on the Gulf Co-operation Council - Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates - plus Egypt and Jordan.

In the absence of a Palestinian government, let alone one that would actually talk to Israel, this aspiration doesn't mean a lot. But the US is right that more active Arab involvement is necessary if a peace process is to take shape again..."

<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,3-2390824.html>

Obituaries

Jock Duncan

District commissioner in Sudan which he left with sadness at independence for a successful career in the Diplomatic Service. He was later appoint Ambassador to Morocco

"Fifty years ago Jock Duncan watched the British and Egyptian flags lowered for the last time in Sudan when it gained independence. He was among the last of a small cadre of the Sudan Political Service who ruled over this vast and troubled territory until 1956.

It had been a remarkable and somewhat improbable business: just 140 men administering a country that stretches across a million square miles.

Duncan was the last man to go..."

<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,60-2390804.html>

Chris Doyle

Director

CAABU (Council for Arab-British Understanding)

"Islamic Science and the Making of the European Renaissance" A lecture by Professor George Saliba - 19 October - for details:

<http://www.caabu.org/index.asp?homepage=events&article=events&detail=geo>

rge_saliba

Why not sponsor me this Sunday to help Palestinian and Lebanese children?

<http://www.justgiving.com/chrisdoyle>

see the CAABU section on the current Israel-Lebanon conflict

http://www.caabu.org/index.asp?homepage=key_issues&article=israel_lebanon&detail=crisis_july2006

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1 Gough Square, London, EC4A 3DE

Tel: 020 7832 1310

Fax: 020 7832 1329

www.caabu.org

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