



Focus *on* NABA

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The
National
Association
of
British
Arabs

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*For all Arabs
and
supporters of Arabs*

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Welcome to NABA's First Newsletter

There is no doubt that it comes at a time of great worry and distress for Britain's Arab community given the unstable situation in the Arab world and the repercussions we are facing here whether on the religious or ethnic front.

Despite this NABA has continued to strive throughout the past year to work towards its objectives and I believe that we have had some success in this (you can judge for yourselves by reading our 'Achievements' section on page 3). What is more encouraging is that from these successes more doors have opened up to us and we now have discussions and meetings scheduled with governmental and non-governmental agencies, the police and other bodies at which we can press our case for British Arabs.

It is in our nature to want instant results to our problems, but long-term achievements can only be won by sustained hard work. We will be successful in the long-term but we need your continued support.

NABA represents Arabs and Arabic speaking people in Britain whatever their ethnic, religious or political background.

NABA stands firmly on humanitarian issues relating to Arabs worldwide.

NABA is national, representing Arabs throughout Britain.

NABA encourages a European stand on Arab issues and the formation of Euro Arabs.

I would therefore ask you all to go back to your friends, your communities, your fellow Arabs and show them what we are doing, what we are achieving.

Join us today for a better tomorrow.

Dr Ismail Jalili
NABA's Chairman

THE BRITISH ARAB *The Voice of Britain's Arab community*

The UK today is home to a multi-racial, multi-cultural and multi-faith community and the added feature of inter-ethnic marriage makes racial classification progressively more complex. Included in this rich mosaic are British Arabs citizens – perhaps 500,000 of them – originating from a wide spectrum of Arab countries; Iraq, Palestine, Egypt, Yemen, Morocco, Sudan, Somali, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, etc. In fact, and this is frequently overlooked – or possibly deliberately ignored – Arabs are arguably the longest-resident, non-European ethnic group in the British Isles (that is apart from those brought during the period of the slave-trade). Their presence is largely a consequence of Britain's colonial past.

19th century Yemeni seamen called *Lascars* sailed with British ships and many stayed to work in the docks and related industries, or the burgeoning rail network. London's East End, Tyneside, Liverpool and Cardiff became centres of small Arab communities. By 1948 there were nearly a thousand Arabs in Tyneside, some marrying local women, thus giving birth to the hybrid British-Arab identity that many native-born British-Arabs, especially those of mixed ancestry, are now establishing. In the 1950s, many of these migrated to Birmingham and Sheffield. A number of Somalis from British Somaliland also settled in the same areas as a result of serving on British ships. Frequently overlooked, but vitally important, the traditional trading skills of Syrians and Lebanese brought them to 'Cottonopolis' – Manchester. The famous Arab historian Albert Hourani was born there.

British Arabs – continued from page 1

Modern Arab Presence

Large-scale Arab immigration began after 1945, with the Palestinians; followed by Egyptians and Sudanese coming for professional advancement, and the 1960s saw Moroccans seeking a better life or more political liberty than was found at home. Political repression in the home countries has continued to be a major reason for Arab immigration, bringing in the decades spanning the 1960s to the 1990s, Iraqis, Egyptians, Sudanese, Algerians, Somalis and some Gulf Arabs. Greater London is the main centre for British Arabs, with about 300,00 in the Capital. There are also traditional areas of Arab settlement, such as Sheffield, where many Yemenis moved to work in the steel industry. Many Arab immigrants, whether coming for economic, professional, or political reasons, always had the hope of returning home one day. However, it has become increasingly clear that the 'hope' of return was actually the 'myth' of return. 'Home' is now Britain.

BRITISH-ARAB CULTURE

Preserving Arab culture in Britain is no easy task, given that there are few Arab community centres, and such are very far apart. The lack, until recently, of community representation also hindered this. The ethnic diversity of the community has also been an obstacle. Can this be overcome?

The formation of NABA and the 'Arab Communities Forum' provides an answer to this. It is vital to organise united British-Arab cultural events of all kinds to preserve the Arab identity in the UK, and to ensure it does not fragment. Furthermore, the native-born generation must play its part, applying Western cultural forms in music and literature, poetry, etc. to traditional Arab music and expression.

This behoves community leaders to reach out to their youth and encourage them in this endeavour and to stage events that show not just that British-Arab youth have retained their Arab identity, but are also sitting comfortably with British culture. This is vital, if those who have grown up in Britain are not to forget their Arab heritage as an irrelevant migrant hangover. People outside the community will also be interested to witness the emergence of a hybrid British-Arab culture. This in itself will encourage the integration of the communities.

For news of cultural/academic/community events, visit our website. This is routinely updated with news of a variety of events and lectures.

If you want to include your club, society, or association, we will be happy to do this for you. Just write to us on www.naba.org.uk

THE FUTURE FOR BRITISH ARABS

British Arabs are a racially and religiously diverse community and the situation is more complex with the burgeoning second generation who are sometimes of mixed heritage.

Among the Muslims, there are both Sunnis and Shia, the latter mainly Iraqis and Lebanese. The principal of the Muslim College in London is Dr Zaki Badawi, of Egyptian origin, and the publisher of Britain's leading Muslim magazine *Q-News* is Fuad Nahdi, of Yemeni heritage. The chairman of September's huge anti-war/pro-Palestine rally was Anas al-Takriti, a leading figure in the Muslim Association of Britain.

About 30% are Christians, mainly Egyptians and Lebanese, and include Eastern Orthodox, Copt Catholic and Evangelical Protestants. The only Arab pastor in the Church of Scotland is Rev. Samuel Hosain, author of an excellent pamphlet entitled *Israel Reassessed*. According to Father Bishoy Makar of St. Mark's Coptic Church in London, there are 17 Coptic churches in the British Isles, with about 15,000 families.

British Arabs are equally diverse in terms of work. There are labourers and shopkeepers, but also an abnormally large number of professionals, especially doctors. Sir Magdi Yaqub, the renowned surgeon, Zeinab Badawi, the famous TV journalist, and Eugene Cottran, Britain's only Palestinian judge, and the Sawalha family of actors demonstrate the wide range of skills in the ranks of this very able community. The wife of George Galloway MP is an Arab.

The challenge for British Arabs is to make their mark in Britain as a *community*, rather than just individual attainment, especially in politics where there are no Arab Parliamentarians and few local councillors. They must fight the all-pervasive anti-Arab racism that goes unchecked, especially in the media, and strengthen the community by uniting above its regional/ethnic and religious differences. Finally, their task is to establish a unique hybrid British-Arab identity for the British-born generation, preserving the best of Arab heritage, whilst combining this with British culture to give birth to an exciting and dynamic British-Arab identity. British-Arabs can play a unique role in creating understanding between the UK and the Arab world: there is enough ability in their ranks to act as such a bridge – and now there is sufficient will to match it.

Dr Anthony McRoy

You can support the association in many ways, however little time you can spare.

(Please ask for details)

NABA ACHIEVEMENTS

In the West, power often works through lobbying, and for this organisation is vital. The organisation and mobilisation of British Arabs is essential, and mobilisation involves lobbying to empower the community. Since the establishment of NABA and the Arab Communities Forum, a few significant steps have been achieved:

- **Commission for Racial Equality** Meeting already held to discuss official action against Anti-Arabism and a report has been sent to them from NABA (this can be viewed on our website).
- **The Minority Rights Group**, which earlier this year produced a report on British Muslims, was approached by NABA/ACF, and they have expressed interest in considering the production of a report about British Arabs.
- **Contacts have been made with the Office of Population Census** about determining the true number of Arabs in the UK. As you know from the irritating Ethnic Monitoring forms which we all have to complete from time to time, where we are reduced to ticking 'other', there is a real need for Arab to be recognised as a separate grouping and we are also discussing the possibilities of introducing this on the next census.
- **Bradford Chamber of Commerce & Industry** sent a delegate to Tel Aviv recently to promote trade with Israeli. After protests and vigorous lobbying by NABA and other groups, where we emphasised how distressing we found this attempt to drum up trade with Israel, and indeed the illegality of trade in products grown on expropriated land, they apologised and issued this statement:
'I confirm that Bradford Chamber of Commerce & Industry has no plans or intentions, either now or in the future, to organise a trade mission to Israel, nor to directly promote any business with Israel or Israeli companies.
I reiterate that we regret any offence caused and hope that this brings the matter to a satisfactory conclusion. Thanks for your co-operation. Best wishes, Mike Cartwright Communications Department Bradford Chamber of Commerce & Industry
The contribution of NABA was crucial in this case, and was recognised by Lord Ahmed of Rotherham, who played a major role in the lobbying process.
- **Football:** The Israeli national soccer team had sought a venue to play a European fixture in the UK, and approached Watford FC to hire their stadium. We spent a considerable amount of time in talks with Watford FC, the Police and the Football Association explaining that this would not only be totally inappropriate but would also cause great concern if the club were to agree. After much discussion they agreed that they will not host this event despite being in severe financial circumstances and the revenues they would have received. Watford FC issued this statement:
'After being approached to host Israel's home European Championship matches at Vicarage Road, Watford have officially written to the Israeli FA to turn down the request.'
- **Meetings with the Football Association** to promote 'Arabs in football' and 'kicking out anti-Arab racism' from soccer are under consideration. Meeting already held with Queens Park Rangers.
- **Meetings with Metropolitan and Watford Police** to discuss issues on issues of anti-Arab hate crimes and other matters of concern. Meeting already held with Metropolitan Police.
- **Home Office** We have been invited by the Home Office to hold a meeting about the domestic concerns of British Arabs, especially discrimination.
- **Greater London Authority** Meeting held to discuss the concerns of London Arabs.
- **Political Parties** Meetings with the main parties are under discussion and one party has already arranged a meeting with us.
- **Welsh Office** NABA contacted Welsh Assembly Minister for Open Government Carwyn Jones to protest his visit to the Israeli government. As a result, NABA invited to approach the Minister to discuss the concerns of Arabs in Wales.
- **Television** The lack of British Arabs on TV series, current affairs programmes, as presenters and actors, and the absence of British Arab programmes such as those addressing other minority groups has been raised with terrestrial TV companies who have invited responses from us, meetings are proposed to remedy this situation.

None of these achievements would have been possible apart from the existence of NABA/ACF. Organisation and lobbying are empowering the British Arab community, winning protection from harassment, and aiding Arabs in the Middle East.

BOOK REVIEWS

(All books supplied by One World Publishers)

The Wisdom of the Arabs, Compiled by Suheil Bushrui

This delightful little book explores a feature of Arab culture too often ignored in the West – the cultural contributions of the Arabs in terms of wisdom. Under heading of religion, virtue, self-restraint, daily life, leadership and art and learning, the book draws on Arab folk tradition and literature, such as ‘Arabian Nights’, The Qur’an and Hadith to the more modern poetry of Kahlil Gibran. Of particular note is the section ‘The Arabs’: from the Hadith we learn ‘Arab identity is in the tongue; whoever speaks Arabic is an Arab’; Umar ibn Al-Khattab tells us ‘The Arabic language creates a balanced mind and enriches human values’; Al-Tawhidi declares: ‘The Arabs have bravery, hospitable reception, fidelity, gallantry, generosity, responsibility to obligation, oratory and a gift for explanation.’ An ideal gift for a special occasion.

September 11: Religious Perspectives on the Causes and Consequences, edited by Ian Markham and Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi’.

Jointly authored by a Christian theologian and a Muslim Palestinian, this book is a compendium of articles by scholars in the field of religion and social sciences into the background of 9/11. Its main theme is to provide complementary *religious* perceptions, but that should not deter the secular reader from exploring this interesting and informative book. Among the issues examined are those of how a free society should respond to terrorism, as in the article by Heidi Hadsell ‘Internal Security and Civil Liberties: Moral Dilemmas and Debates’. The article by Heidi Gehman, ‘The Terrorist Attack on America’ is especially good, emphasising that ‘Many Muslims feel that their own governments are controlled...by U.S. foreign policy...’, p. 15, and then comments on the role of the US-Israeli alliance. Another instructive article is that by Ibrahim Abu-Rabi’, ‘A Critical assessment of Modern Islamic History’, which observes that Palestine is ‘the most central question facing the contemporary Arab world.’ p. 40. If only President Bush would take this to heart.

The Mantle of the Prophet: Religion and Politics in Iran, Roy Mottahedeh

Based on first-hand accounts of eyewitnesses, this book examines the background to the Iranian revolution. Although Iran is not Arab, the fact that Islam and later its Shi’ite version were both introduced to Iran by Arabs, the impact of the Revolution is reviving Islamism in Arab countries, and the common causes of anti-Western radicalism in Iran and the Arab world. We learn that the Arab immigrants to Iran after the conquest extended ‘irrigation, grow cash crops, and thereby establish the town of Qom...’, the major Iranian holy city, p. 21. Another Arab contribution to the events of 1979 occurred about twenty years previously, with the events of the Algerian war of independence: ‘They had all followed the Algerian war with close and concerned attention’, p. 113, especially an incident when French troops deliberately burned alive hundreds of Algerian men, women and children sheltering in a cave. One especially interesting section is on the CIA coup against Premier Mossadegh in 1953, p.129ff, an event little-known in the West, which occurred after he nationalised the Anglo-Iran Oil Company (now BP). The themes of the rest of the book are well-known, especially how the Americans fawned on the tyrant Shah they had imposed on Iran and refused to listen to objections – something that will resonate with Arabs everywhere.

A Concise Encyclopaedia of Islam, Gordon Newby

The title leaves us with little to say except that with the explosion of interest in Islam since 9/11, Westerners are increasingly exposed to Arabic religious terminology and Islamic concepts in their daily media, some of which can be obscure. It refers to both ideas and personalities, such as ‘dar al-ahad’ (realm of treaty) and the ‘Ikhwan’, making them accessible and simple to the Western reader. Whilst scholars would use more extensive volumes, this is ideal reference for the average layman.

N.A.B.A.