

AMR News

D-L Course Developments

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AMR News

AMR News is published every three months (God Willing). The articles published in AN do not necessarily reflect the views of AMR as a body. Contributions from Members of the Association and others are welcome and should be sent to The Editor, by July 15th 2005.

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of Muslim
Researchers 2005

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AMR has been contacted by Pintar, a multi-media publishing agency which is researching the market for book and CD-ROM materials to assist in developing a curriculum framework which will assist in developing a global pool of teaching and learning materials using multimedia. The aim is to produce materials which can be used by individuals for a self-access Islamic teaching course and for schools wanting to teach a course which would lead to a formal qualification.

Writing to AMR, Pintar's representative in the UK says, "I have been made aware of AMR's experience in GCSE/AS Islam through its distance learning courses and your Education SIG. It would be most useful to bring together a group of authors / teachers of GCSE/AS level Islam to review the development of our curriculum framework and content to ensure we meet the requirements of UK students."

Pintar is a Malaysian-based agency and AMR is currently consulting with its tutors and other interested individuals in order to see how best this approach can be taken forward. A meeting is scheduled for early April with Pintar's UK representative, Richard Connor.

Meanwhile, interest in and demand for the GCSE DIY book written by Ruqaiyyah Waris Maqsood is increasing with schools and community centres increasingly making bulk orders. Distance-Learning Tutor, Ruqaiyyah also reports invitations to speak at various venues and this is eliciting added interest. For example, she was invited to Manchester Islamic High School for Girls. She describes it as being "A lovely day for me, most rewarding. I was delighted to be told that my book was the school textbook for their Islam studies for GCSE, and I think they will be getting in the DIY text as well. It also delighted me to discover that even some of the teachers there had grown up on my book, so this was wonderful feedback for me."

Excellent GCSE results using the GCSE DIY course have also been reported by schools - both Muslim independent and state - in locations as far apart as London and Cardiff, Luton and the North West. Significantly, reports Ruqaiyyah, boys are doing very well on the course as has been reported by Luton Sixth Form College, where students using the book have produced good results. In addition, via AMR, 40 copies of the GCSE DIY book is being ordered for Islamia Girls' School which will be adopting Ruqaiyyah's materials for teaching their GCSE course.

CALENDARS FESTIVAL

The National Maritime Museum (NMM) and the Royal Observatory Greenwich (ROG) held its Festival of Calendars on March 20th.

The event, which Dr. Usama Hasan of AMR/MCB amongst others contributed to planning, was held between 12.30 and 5.30 pm.

Visitors to the free festival were treated to lectures about how calendars of Islamic, Chinese and other more ancient traditions are/were calculated and

about geophysical phenomena such as the Equinox, which it so happened was on March 20th. There was a talk about moon sighting and a workshop on the moon phases. Also at the NMM were workshops where youngsters could make Astrolabes and Chinese calendars.

There was a special show looking at the stars that will be visible late how telling the time from the stars was done in the Middle Ages.

Story-telling and the folklore of calendars was another activity - one particularly enjoyed by younger visitors.

Unfortunately moon-watching through the world's largest refractor telescope at the ROG and the Spotting Sunspots activity, which were to be lead by Robert Massey, Public Astronomer and Richard Dunn, Curator of History of Navigation was frustrated by cloud cover. www.nmm.ac.uk

RE-UNION

Members of AMR who particularly love the Forest of Dean in Gloucestershire were disappointed to learn that yet again this year, we have missed out on a booking at the Wilderness Centre for the annual Reunion programme.

Alternative possibilities are being investigated including The Lake District, a return to Stubbers, or a 50 acre Muslim owned site in East Sussex which was formerly a Darul Uloom but in the process of being re-invented as an interfaith residential centre. A 'scouting' expedition to view the site is being organised by officers of AMR.

MUSIC CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS TO SOON SEE LIGHT

AMR hopes to be soon in a position to publish its proceedings of the Music and Education Conference held in May 2002.

Author Agreement signatures are awaited from just two of the contributors and once these are received, the proceedings, which was compiled by Dr. Diana Harris of the National Association of Music Educators, will be published.

The Conference which was held at the SOAS Brunei Gallery had looked at the challenges facing Music educators in British schools where some children of Muslim background are resistant to participating

in Music lessons for reasons which were often couched in religious terms. Children can be withdrawn from lessons, especially after year 7 or are not permitted to develop a talent they have with a particular instrument.

These views and their impact were viewed from philosophical and religious points of view as well as from the cultural and educational. Amongst the contributors to the Conference were Dr. Tariq Ramadan, Islamic scholar who is based in Switzerland and Dr. Diana Harris who has researched extensively on Muslim musical heritage and cultural attitudes towards it.

PROBLEMATISING MUSLIM WOMEN

How do young Muslim women in Britain today negotiate between families and traditional value systems and the demands and enticements of modern British life?

Are Muslim women in Britain adequately protected by law or are they more likely to fall victim to violence and exclusion?

Is it more difficult for young women from Muslim backgrounds to proceed into Higher Education and rewarding careers than it is for their non-Muslim counterparts?

You don't have to be involved in the Social Sciences to be aware of the continued fascination with and problematisation of Muslim women's experiences by Establishment, the media and academia. Not a week passes without some story negatively reflecting on Islam and the Muslim community in terms of Muslim women. Even examples of Muslim women confounding stereotypes by risking the full glare of media attention to assert rights to dress in a particular way - whatever the rights and wrongs of the particular case - are problematised to reflect negatively on the place of women in the community. The spectacle of chador-wearing Iraqi women MPs taking part in the election campaign in Iraq and winning seats is problematised. Stories of Muslim women's achievement and success in contrast is given no attention whatsoever.

These thoughts came to mind when the Centre for Democracy at the University of Westminster organised a seminar in early March entitled "Muslim Women: Challenge and Opportunity" and invited the participation of Muslim Women's Helpline. The questions posed included the ones outlined above.

Asked to address these questions, we immediately found ourselves questioning some of the assumptions implicit in the questions: What is meant and understood by the phrase 'traditional value systems'. And how do competing value systems engage and contest in the plurality of indigenous and other value systems in Britain - some of which are supported by Establishment power structures whilst others are not? What is 'modern British life'? What are the 'demands' it makes? Why the assumption that it should be seen as 'enticing'? Who says so and for whom is it true? What is a 'rewarding career'? Who defines what it is? What is the baseline for comparing Muslim women and non-Muslim women's access/success in any field, not least in Higher Education?

More fundamentally: 'Who does the term 'Muslim woman' apply to? The answer to this is not straightforward. When the Muslim Women's Helpline started in 1987, the Muslims were invisible - subsumed in the category of 'Asian' even though many Muslims were not Asian at all. Then as the Muslim identity came to the fore and everyone struggled to get a handle on it in the absence of census information, Pakistani and Bangladeshi Muslims - simply because they are the largest ethnically identifiable sub-group, came to be homogenised with all Muslims. Unemployment, deprivation, low academic achievement, forced-marriage, all these problems and others were homogenised to the Muslim community in general to such an extent that it is easy to forget that Muslims comprise diverse

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Finding a Cure in Illness

Hashim Reza

Stress related mental health problems are on the increase in all societies in our world. A vast majority of those suffering from these problems are women. The situation becomes considerably more complex amongst ethnic minorities living in the West. Several surveys suggest that ethnic populations in the UK have a considerably higher burden of psychiatric disorders but do not engage well with the services provided through NHS.

All systems of healthcare are struggling to determine a reliable method of identifying and managing common mental health problems. The role and limits of medication in their treatment has been subject of controversy. Against this background of depressing facts, there is one ray of hope arising out of recent research studies. It has been shown in communities as diverse as Seattle in USA, Karachi in Pakistan and Manchester in UK that ordinary people can train to become counsellors for their communities aiding in promoting mental health well-being through preventative work.

Dr Hashim Reza, Consultant Psychiatrist in Oxleas NHS Trust and AMR President, spoke on a successful project from Karachi which had piloted just such a project.

Participants in the Forum heard that in just 27 sessions, mostly of 45 minutes duration, women from a slum district were trained to become counsellors promoting mental health well-being amongst their peers. They were then able to help their community deal with common mental health problems.

The question posed was whether this model could rolled out here?

Dr. Hashim introduced his subject by indicating the high prevalence of anxiety and depression in all social groups. It is believed 1:8 people suffer mental health problems and women are twice as likely as men to suffer from depression.

He said that in a situation of persistent inequalities in disease burden as well as problems in access to health care, plus concern with over-medication of minority community sufferers, there was a need for

initiatives and self-help groups in various communities.

He then went on to describe the project. It is called 'Addressing Anxiety and Depression: An Introductory training Guide for Community Women'.

An initial group of 21 women (out of 72 volunteers) trained in 6 weeks (2 training days/week each day 4+ hours' duration). Each trained counsellor saw 8-10 women for 8 weekly sessions, mostly in the service user's home. There was close supervision: individual and in groups.

The training has been modified in the light of feedback from participants. Sessions included establishment of a learning environment, communication and listening skills, mental health including aspects of family functioning, physical and mental health well-being, anxiety and depression and stress and anger management.

He said the key outcomes was that counsellors can be trained in a short period of time and the counselling offered by these women was effective in reducing burden of anxiety and depression.

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The Ongoing Effects of the Tsunami in Aceh ***Report by S. Sheriff***

AMR's Forum meeting held on March 12th featured a co-presentation by Imtiaz Palekar and Nizma Schofield of Indonesian Children's Relief (ICR).

Hot off the press from a recent visit to Indonesia, they shared their Field Report from the visit to NANGROE ACEH DARUS-SALAM. The visit was conducted from 29 January to 5 February.

They first shared with the group a background to the disaster. Imtiaz reminded us that the worst affected area had been the object of ICR work since 2002 due to the needs of children displaced and traumatised by civil strife in Aceh. The Indian Ocean Tsunami then ripped through many of Aceh's heavily populated coastal areas on 26 December 2004. At least 121,548 victims have so far been reported killed and at least another 114,000 are listed missing.

They then went on to describe the disasters' effects. More than 400,000 people were displaced and up to a 1000 bodies are still being recovered *daily* from the wreckage which still is being cleared in Aceh.

The aim of the field trip said Imtiaz was to assess the needs first hand and to initiate a programme of medium and long-term support and development for the needy children in the affected areas. ICR per-
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formed this task over a sustained period of four weeks in association with partners both local and international that were conducting disaster relief in Aceh and other effected areas in Indonesia.

He stressed the importance of the work ICR does with local partners organisations and the liaison it does with international players such as UNICEF, Islamic Relief and others.

Imtiaz really brought home the scale and poignancy of the disaster in several vignettes, many of which were illustrated by power point video and still images. "On our way to the Posko, approximately 15-min drive from the airport, we encountered a mass grave-site, which on investigation was still busy as people were still finding and burying bodies in large pit almost 8 weeks after the disaster. We witnessed a number of trucks (dumper trucks) full of corpses being unceremoniously dumped into pre-prepared pits and buried using a mechanical digger. This was ICR's team first real encounter of real extent of the disaster. As we witnessed this event we all pondered how terrible it must have been at the start of the disaster."

Though all roads are now passable and so relief is getting through, Imtiaz and Nizma stressed that

there were vivid reminders of the power and scale of what happened everywhere: mangled wreckage, trucks and cars strewn around like toys, pools of stagnant sea water in former agricultural land, the constant smell of death.

Though access in urban areas is possible, to more remote areas where not as much aid has got through requires helicopters. Imtiaz and Nizma described a visit to Lhoong. They visited an Islamic Boarding School called; Dayah Darul Muta'allimin' in Blang Bintang, Aceh. It has 97 children/teenage boys as Tsunami victim. A number of Tsunami victims provided vivid accounts of their experience. One boy, Wahyudi, aged 10, described how as the wave struck and swept him away, he managed to cling to a coconut tree for survival whilst reciting *kalimah* (Islamic witness statement). It was observed that many of the children are still withdrawn and traumatised by their experiences.

The purpose of the visit was not just to interview the children but to assess and then plan for their needs to be met. Specifically the lack of educational places at Government schools due to shortage of teachers and the influx of children from other areas. After a number of meetings, a consortium

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was agreed with local and partner groups to work on a short-term programme to locally educate the children of the camp with ICR helping to co-ordinate the project using the ICR Indonesian representatives.

A constant refrain heard by ICR representatives was, said Nizma, "Please send us Muslim doctors, psychologists and teachers".

The recognition of the need for psychological and emotional support for the Tsunami victims as well as the need for the children to be given routine and a return to stable educational input was stressed. Those teachers who had survived the Tsunami commented that some of the children especially the orphans showed signs of trauma and required ongoing care.

This was especially the case if they were being forced by Government agencies to relocate to new areas (camps) to get aid. Many of the children wanted to remain with friends and familiar faces near their homes and schools.

Imtiaz and Nizma outlined some of the projects their organisation was engaged with to meet the needs of the victims and said they would welcome support and input from members of the British community to meet the huge need that had been identified.

They are involved in creating a database of orphan profiles. Psychological support is provided through arranging fun events for orphan children in their schools and distributing gift parcels. Though monetary donations are best and

goods can be bought cheaply in Indonesia and this will help kick start the local economy, there is a need for educational toys, puzzles and games to stimulate children who have been traumatised. Gifts of kind of this nature would be welcome, they said. Children also have to be educated through to adulthood and ICR's existing orphan sponsorship project (it costs 100.00 pounds to support an orphan in Aceh for a year / 33p a day) will its hoped be expanded to meet the needs that have been highlighted by ICR's field trip to the region.

To support or find out more about ICR, please visit: www.icr.org or ring 07092 029 113. *Sponsorship leaflets are enclosed with this newsletter.*

pics

BFIIN AWARD

Long-standing AMR member, Swadeka Ahsun, was nominated for the British Female Inventors & Innovators Network (BFIIN) 2005. She was one of only forty nominees for the annual award which promotes women's achievement.

A Gala dinner was held on the 16th and 17th February 2005 in SE London. The BFIIN Event consists of an Exhibition, Conference and Celebratory Awards Ceremony aiming to promote exceptionally creative, inventive and innovative woman across Britain.

Swadeka, who was nominated because of her creative talents in the Fine Arts and who has exhibited at the invitation of the British Council, also exhibited at the event and received special recognition for her achievements.

The Gala dinner attracted some 600 guests of whom many were celebrity participants.

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YOU
RENEWED?
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your fees
promptly**

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NEWS ROUND-UP

AGC Member Dr. Imtiaz Ahmad spoke at the service to mark the licensing of the newly appointed Reverend to the University of Cambridge on Thursday 17th February. The Reverend requested a reading from Isaiah VI which calls for divine guidance and for complementary recitation of *ayahs* of the *Qur'an* along the same lines.

Imtiaz has also reported that another BBC Assistant Producer has asked for a meeting with her to discuss further ideas for new programmes which aim to "bring Islam to the fore-front". A recent episode of *What the Ancients Did For Us* featured Islamic

contributions to world civilisation.

In another development, Indonesian relief organisation, ICR, has expressed interest in adopting the *'Addressing Anxiety and Depression: An Introductory training Guide for Community Women'* resource to develop services for bereaved and traumatised Tsunami survivors in Banda Aceh. Imtiaz Palekar, ICR's Vice-Chair said this sort of community based project was just what was needed to mobilise people who would otherwise be listless, withdrawn and dependent on others to alleviate their despair.

PROBLEMATISING MUSLIM WOMEN

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races, nationalities and cultures - many of which are on the indices of the highest achievement and greatest integration in society.

More fundamental than this is the question of why it is always the case, or so it seems that there is focus on MUSLIM women. Why is it ALWAYS Muslims? We could not think of conferences or seminars subjecting Black women, Hindu women, Jewish women and particularly, now that they have had their *'Satanic Verses'* confrontation with the liberal Establishment, the Sikhs to such a piercing and never-ending scrutiny?

Whose political and social agenda such a focus serves should also, we thought, be in our minds. A subsidiary aspect of our concerns about this is the fact that the focus on women in isolation and out of context, has taken away attention from the problems and needs of men - problems which are as acute in the mainstream community as they are in BME communities. Though there is a perception that men have the power in many communities, this has not prevented them from experiencing problems which have largely gone unaddressed.

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Dates For Your Diary

Sunday 10th April - 11 am, Visit to the *Turks Exhibition* at The Royal Academy, Burlington House, Piccadilly, London W1.

Saturday 23rd April - AMR Council meeting.

Sunday 24th April - 11.15 am - 3.30 pm, *Family Fun Day*. Croydon High School, includes men's swimming 11.30 am, women's swimming 12.30 pm, indoor sports and lunch. *Contact: KamaalSheikh@hotmail.com*

A workshop on moon-phases was one of the features of the Festival of Calendars held at the National Maritime Museum

GOVERNING COUNCIL:
Hashim Reza, Imtiaz K Ahmad, Mohammad Dhalech, Sameera T Ahmed, Farzin Deravi, Usama Hasan, Tippu Sultan Sheriff, Mohammad Tabarra.

OTHER OFFICES:
 Sarah Sheriff (*Executive Officer*), Tippu Sheriff (*Acting Chair, EdSoc*), Imtiaz Ahmad (*Chair, Science & Technology Society*), Sameera Ahmed (*Chair, Humanities Society*)

"Recommended Site-Seeing"

AMR's Turkish-Irish IT expert, Seref O'Holik, cherry-picks some of the most interesting websites he has recently visited:

🔗 **Turks Exhibition**
www.turks.org.uk

🔗 **Indonesian Children's Relief**
www.icruk.org

🔗 **Make downloading quicker, easier with this no strings-attached internet freebie:**
www.stardownloader.com

🔗 **Science reference website which you can keep on your hard-drive. At 54MB in size, you must have Broadband to attempt the download.**
www.tcaep.co.uk

🔗 **Blair telling (other) porkies? Check all electioneering 'facts'**
www.channel4.com/news/factcheck/