

Principled Khan shuns MP pay rise

TRANSPORT minister Sadiq Khan has urged fellow MPs to forgo their £1,000 pay rise.

The first Muslim cabinet minister said it was inappropriate to accept more money when other people were in difficulties.

In his regular newsletter to constituents, the Tooting MP said: "Like last year, I won't be accepting this pay rise, or an increase in my ministerial salary."

"At a time when many people in Tooting and throughout the country are having to accept pay freezes, I don't think it's appropriate for MPs to accept a pay rise."

"As a collective, MPs need to rebuild trust in the political system, and cut the cost of 'doing politics' - I don't think accepting a pay-rise at this moment in time would aid these causes at all," he added.

A minister of state's salary in April 2009 was £106,136.

Khan also called on the Independent Parliamentary Standards Committee not to "water down" its proposals on expenses reforms.

Some MP have complained that a tighter regime on expenses will make the role less attractive.

Prince not certain for Commonwealth

THE Prince of Wales may not be the Head of the Commonwealth when he becomes King after a report recommended a radical shake-up.

The Prince does not have an automatic right to succeed the Queen, and a survey of its 54 member states has found that the most popular alternative would be a rotating headship.

The authors said: "The allocation of this role will send a powerful message about the identity of the Commonwealth today."

The Commonwealth Conversation surveyed 6,200 people in seven Commonwealth countries, gathered 2,000 comments from its website and convened 11 expert groups.

Clarence House responded by highlighting the work the Prince has done in support of the organisation.

A Buckingham Palace spokesman said: "The role of Head of the Commonwealth is a matter for the Commonwealth."

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China plans rail link to Europe and Asia

TRAVELLERS to India and Pakistan could benefit from ambitious plans to build a high-speed rail network linking Beijing with London.

Passengers will be able to travel by train from King's Cross to Beijing in just two days on trains that travel almost as fast as aeroplanes under ambitious plans from China.

China is in negotiations to build a high-speed rail network to India and Europe within the next 10 years.

The network would carry passengers from London to Beijing and then to Singapore. It would also run to India and Pakistan, according to Wang Mengshu, a member of the Chinese Academy of Engineering and a senior consultant on China's domestic high-speed rail project.

A second project would see trains heading north through Russia to Germany, and a third line will connect Vietnam, Thailand, Burma and Malaysia.

"The best case scenario is that the three networks will be completed in a decade," said Mr Wang.

Action to stop traffic of girls

GOVERNMENT MEASURES TARGET ILLICIT TRADE

IMMIGRATION chief Phil Woolas has pledged the government will do more to stop women being trafficked as sex slaves.

The immigration minister told *Eastern Eye* he is determined to help women from the sub-continent being smuggled into Britain and then forced into prostitution.

The government launched its action plan last week to improve co-operation with foreign governments and sharing information about criminals.

Campaign groups claim a growing number of Asian women are being lured to Britain by gangs with promises of a better life.

The gangs then sell each girl to a pimp for up to £25,000. The pimp

by NADEEM BADSHAH

can make about £2,000 a week from forcing the victim into prostitution.

Woolas, the MP for Oldham East and Saddlehurst, told *EE*: "It is very difficult for me to talk about this as a parent and a human being, it's horrific."

"Often the victim is forced onto heroin to control them, and in the sex industry the victims are not criminals themselves."

"We have different agencies like police and immigration officers who do this work, they feel nauseated in seeing people trafficked for sex."

"Because of our links with India, Pakistan and Bangladesh we are sharing data and watch-lists so the prob-



APPALLED: Woolas thinks cross-country cooperation is key

lem isn't as great as in other areas.

"We have made huge advances in identity biometrics, visas and passports, foreign national ID cards and detecting fraudulent IDs."

The UK Border Agency (UKBA) stopped 67,000 passengers, who did not have the right travel documents, from boarding planes to the UK in 2008-09.

Also, 1,280 people have been arrested across the globe after the UKBA contacted police about suspected fraudulent visa applications.

Juliet Singer, CEO of the STOP Trafficking UK charity, said: "It is such an enormous problem. The UK still appears an easy option to the traffickers."

"Law enforcement agencies have

increased activity to prevent trafficking in all forms but especially sexual exploitation. There is measured success."

"Gatwick Airport is not so much a soft touch, but there are so many outlets that traffickers are using like smaller airports and ports."

The Conservatives have proposed having a border police force to protect airports and sea ports to crack-down on human trafficking.

Woolas said: "The police don't want it - it will diminish our cooperation and work with officers from local authorities. They will say it's not our job, but the job of the UK Border Police."

"It's a politician con trick - there are police working on the border."

CASTE DISCRIMINATION FINALLY RECOGNISED

ANTI-CASTE discrimination campaigners have welcomed the government's move to consider a clause in the Equalities Bill going through parliament outlawing the practice, writes Priyal Sanghavi.

Campaigning organisation Caste-watch UK has been doing much to raise awareness of the issue since 2003 but was partially rebuffed in November when the government said there was not enough evidence to act on.

Campaigners says there is evidence of caste-based discrimination in the UK and were determined not to give up on the cause.

Davinder Prasad, general secretary Castewatch UK pressed on and with the help of other organisations collected enough evidence for the government to have a change of heart.

Liberal Democrat peer Lord Avebury last week managed to get the government to agree to an amendment to the Bill.

Prasad told *Eastern Eye* this week: "We seek a change of social attitudes, at the same time we are not naïve enough to know that without a legal framework, changing hearts and minds will prove to be an impossible task."

Prasad welcomed the government's move but said there is still some work to be done making sure the clause passes into legislation. He said many Asians still face discrimination for their 'low-caste' origins and has applauded the move.

"It is a welcome sign that the government has listened to our arguments and have acted, although, in a limited way and have agreed to amend the Single Equality Bill."

"CasteWatchUK is keen to submit further evidence and continue to be a bulwark against caste-based discrimination." Lynne Featherstone, Liberal Democrat MP for Wood Green and Hornsey, told *EE* she was delighted with the result.



BEING HEARD: Anti-caste discrimination campaigners

"It has been a long battle with the government to make them realise that caste discrimination is as important as any other form of discrimination. The anti-caste discrimination groups have produced evidence to at last do what we needed to do."

The four-tier caste system in Hin-

duism divides society, with so-called Dalits (untouchables) at the bottom. They have been associated with having dark skin. They have been historically ill-treated and exploited.

The National Institute of Economic and Social Research has been commissioned to find more evidence and submit its findings in July.