

Muslim gay marriage is thriving, says drag queen

Kaya Burgess
Religious Affairs Correspondent

There have been “countless” same-sex marriages between gay and lesbian Muslims, Britain’s first Muslim drag queen says.

According to Asifa Lahore, 34, the country has a “thriving” Muslim LGBT community.

Ms Lahore was brought up in west London by a devout Muslim family with a Pakistani background. She was born Asif Quraishi and married another gay man of Pakistani heritage in July 2014, months after same-sex marriages were permitted in March that year.

Ms Lahore appeared on Channel 4’s *Muslim Drag Queens* in 2015, billed as Britain’s first Muslim drag performer. She began the process of gender transition to become a woman this year.

She spoke to *The Times* about her same-sex wedding after Jahed Choudhury, 24, claimed last week that his wedding to Sean Rogan, 19, at a register office in Walsall last month was the first same-sex marriage in the UK involving a Muslim. “There are countless,” Ms Lahore said. “In the last three years I’ve been to dozens of gay Muslim, same-sex marriages. I attended one last Thursday, of two gay British Bangladeshi guys.

“In south Asian Muslim culture, marriage is very much a milestone. Even if you identify as LGBT, marriage plays a big part in your upbringing and your psyche and I think LGBT Muslims in Britain are taking real advantage of equal marriage.”

Ms Lahore estim-

Asifa Lahore says there are many more British Muslims “in the same boat” as her



ated that there were thousands of gay and transgender Muslims in Britain, some of whom have not felt able to come out.

She said of Mr Chaudhury’s belief that he was the first Muslim in a same-sex marriage: “I’m glad this young boy has declared so openly about his marriage, but want him to know there have been others before him and will be many more.”

As a young gay man, when known as Asif, she entered into a civil partnership with another gay man in 2009 in a large ceremony. The pair married five years later in 2014 in a smaller ceremony attended by close family and a few friends.

Ms Lahore said that in her youth, her family had taken her to see a GP and an imam to seek to address her sexuality and had tried to arrange a marriage with a Muslim woman. It was suggested that she could continue any gay relationships in secret “on the side”.

The young Asif refused and made a public commitment to her gay partner. The couple met while at university and are going through an “amicable” divorce, after Ms Lahore’s husband said that he would prefer not to be married to a woman after Ms Lahore’s transition.

Ms Lahore, who describes herself as an activist for LGBT Muslims, said: “We live in a country where we now have access to equal rights and they should be exercised. It would break my heart if there were LGBT Muslims out there who didn’t feel they were able to marry.

“Never feel like you’re on your own or that you’re the only one. There’s many more people in the exact same boat as you. Britain is a thriving country for the LGBT Muslim community.”



Irony of the Austen £10 quote adds extra value

Jane Austen would be the first to appreciate the subtle layers of irony prompted by the launch of a new £10 note bearing her image (Jack Malvern writes).

No sooner were details of the note revealed yesterday near her grave in Winchester Cathedral than critics were scoffing at the Bank of England for using a quotation that was not all it seemed.

The note, which will be universally acknowledged by retailers in September, features a line from *Pride and Prejudice* that appears to exhort people to read books: “I declare after all there is no enjoyment like reading!”

Fans of the author delighted in pointing out that the words were



The new £10 note featuring Jane Austen was launched yesterday, 200 years after her death. A statue was also erected in Basingstoke where she attended balls

spoken by Miss Bingley, a character who detests reading but pretends otherwise to impress Mr Darcy. How ironic, they crowed, that the bank had missed the irony.

Mark Carney, governor of the Bank of England, suggested that there was a further irony. The bank had always been aware of

the context of the quote and was using it to celebrate Austen’s mastery of irony.

“It captures much of her spirit,” he said. “You can read it straight — there’s no enjoyment like reading. But also, if you know the work, you can enjoy the irony of that; it draws out some of the aspects of her social satire. It works on many levels.”

Mr Carney said that £10 would have meant a lot to Austen. “Ten pounds was half the

allowance she received from her father when he was alive,” he said. “It was the amount paid by her publishers for her first novel, *Susan*, which became, with some rewording, *Northanger Abbey*.”

The new notes, the first to feature raised dots to aid visually impaired people, have also been criticised for using an “airbrushed” portrait executed after Austen’s death rather than the less flattering “Cassandra portrait” by her sister.

‘Human error’ causes collapse of police trial

Frances Gibb Legal Editor

The biggest police corruption trial collapsed because of “human errors by the police and Crown Prosecution Service rather than by a deliberate attempt to cover up any crime,” a review says.

More than £30 million was spent on an investigation into whether eight South Wales police officers and a number of other police staff had perverted the course of justice after the murder of Lynette White on Valentine’s Day in 1988, before it was aborted.

Three innocent men had been jailed before their convictions were quashed and the real killer was caught. The 2011 trial of the officers, who had all since left the force, was halted over fears that documents had been destroyed. The papers were eventually found but by then proceedings had stopped.

Richard Horwell, QC, who carried out the review, described the Cardiff Three convictions as “one of the worst miscarriages of justice... But my principal finding, from which much flows, is that bad faith played no part in the errors of either the police officers or the prosecution lawyers. It is human failings that brought about the collapse of the trial, not wickedness.”

Mr Horwell’s review was set up in 2015 by Theresa May, when she was home secretary, to find out why the trial of the officers and pending cases against other police staff collapsed.

The officers were alleged to have “moulded, manipulated, influenced and fabricated” evidence against five innocent men.

Mr Horwell said: “The evidence reveals a rather chaotic trail of poor management by police officers and the pros-

ecution lawyers, particularly the CPS. There were too many disclosure failings which by 28 November, 2011 had brought the prosecution case to a ‘knife’s edge’.”

The report says: “[The Cardiff Three] have always suspected that the trial collapsed due to yet further police corruption. Such suspicion is entirely understandable but has not been supported by the evidence.”

Kate Maynard, a solicitor who acted for two of the wrongly jailed men, said: “The failure of the CPS and the police to comply with disclosure requirements led to the travesty that, of the dozens of police officers and civilians investigated for offences ranging from false imprisonment to conspiracy to pervert the course of justice and perjury, only the bullied and vulnerable victims were ever held fully accountable.”

Tourists expected to make holiday road delays longer

Graeme Paton Transport Correspondent

Motorists have been told to avoid travelling during peak times on Friday when most schools break up for the summer and that they could face hours of traffic delays.

A study by Inrix, a traffic data company, said that congestion was expected to be worse than usual this summer because of large numbers of foreign tourists visiting the UK to take advantage of the weak pound and a rise in “staycations” among British families.

Parts of the M6 and M25 will be most congested between 11am and 6.30pm, researchers predicted. Drivers starting the 55-mile journey on the M6 northbound between Birmingham and Man-

chester can expect to be delayed more than one hour and 40 minutes. Journeys on a 35-mile stretch of the M25 between Heathrow and the M23 are expected to be delayed by 90 minutes.

Delays will be worsened by roadworks, but Highways England said that most work would take place overnight to minimise disruption.

The RAC estimated that 36.5 million “leisure journeys” would be made over a two-week period from the end of this week. Rod Dennis, its traffic spokesman, said: “This weekend will bring unwelcome customary chaos to Britain’s major roads. The best advice is always to try to travel when the vast majority of motorists aren’t: very early in the morning or late in the evening.”