

Dee Katwa @ RANDOM



Contact: Dhiren on 07970 911 386 or dee@katwas.com

Earn while you burn hours online

Thirty-five per cent of employees in the UK abuse their internet privileges, spending almost two hours of the working day on social networking sites. This month bosses at Birmingham City Council, the nation's largest local authority, have imposed a 'Facebook ban' after a shock study found highly paid officials were wasting hundreds of hours by chatting to friends when they should have been working. And how some advisers at the council earned up to £2,000 per day.

A surveillance exercise showed Facebook to be the fourth most popular website for employees, with 610 hours of browsing time in a month. The BBC website topped the list, with 912 hours. Two google sites were in second place. Other popular viewing included Sky Sports, Heart FM, wiki-media and auctioneering site eBay.

Now the council's entire workforce has been barred from using social networking sites. The study also identified council staff who use the internet most. Among them were several senior officials who have their own Facebook accounts, including corporate governance director Mirza



Top lawyer Mirza Ahmad

Ahmad. Mr Ahmad has posted a picture of himself receiving the Public Sector Excellence Awards in the Muslim Power 100 survey. He also uses his Facebook page to publish a fulsome appreciation of fellow Muslim colleagues and friends. In addition,



Director of Communications Debra Davis

Mr Ahmad almost always issues his own press releases. For example, a fortnight ago he distributed a new release which began: "I have been confirmed as corporate director of governance and I will remain Birmingham City Council's top lawyer and monitoring officer." A day later, an almost identical official news release was issued by the council's press office. The council's director of communications, Debra Davis, also has her own Facebook page as does corporate website officer Simon Gray. Now, new IT

surveillance equipment is being used to detect browsing on Blackberries "to ensure compliance with city council policies, according to the survey."

Personal internet use at work costs the UK economy £10.6 billion a year. And it is believed that a company can lose up to 15 per cent of its profits because of net abuse.

In the last 12 months consultants employed by Birmingham City Council were paid a staggering £67 million by Birmingham taxpayers. Now bosses at the local authority have ordered a clampdown on the use of outside consultants to reduce costs. The charges, which range from £200 per day for technical computer support up to £2,000 per day for top legal advice, have been defended as a drop in the ocean compared to the city's £3 billion budget. Birmingham City Council employs 52,473 staff of which 22.2 per cent are from ethnic minority communities.

MEP seeks friends at time of need

Neena Gill, who represents the West Midlands in the European parliament, seems to be ultra-busy thesedays. She's really going for it, as never seen before, trying to drum up maximum support, particularly that of prominent Asians in the region. Last Thursday the MEP hosted an inaugural *West Midlands Annual Asian Governmental Dinner*. Held in Birmingham, the round-table function was attended by over 800



MEP Neena Gill

people including Jacqui Smith, the Home Secretary and few of her

political cronies including Tom Watson and Khalid Mahmood, MPs for West Bromwich East and Perry Barr, respectively. Ms Smith, reading from a script, slipped in a few words of humour, "I want to see Tom and Khalid as celebrity participants on *Strictly Come Bollywood*." Laid out on each table were copies of 12-page glossy A4 souvenirs. In it, a goodwill message from Neena, featuring her with PM Gordhan

Brown, in which she writes: "As your MEP I fight to give a voice to those that can't make theirs heard, making sure that I represent all the different voices and communities that make up our dynamic region." What a powerful message, timely too, considering the European elections are just round the corner - June 4. Let's hope Neena keeps to her word, if she is triumphant in the elections.

All pupils must learn English

Birmingham has topped the list of multilingual primary schools, with 60 schools having 70 per cent of pupils who do not speak English as their mother tongue. But schools in the city have defended their multilingual pupils. Among them Anthony Flynn, head of 700-pupil Montgomery School in Sparkbrook, said critics had got priorities wrong. "Our pupils are willing, able, and wanting to learn. They come from cultures where education is valued, and we have excellent parental support. We should be looking at how to reach out to disenfranchised white youths on tough inner-city estates, rather than engaging in this debate that smacks of racial elements." Tower Hamlets in London has 43 such schools while Bradford has 41.

Confusion over road signs

New road signs and place names in Birmingham will no longer have apostrophes, city leaders have decided. The ruling cabinet agreed they should be dropped completely from all new signs because they believe most people are confused by them. But the controversial move has been condemned by grammar experts who say it sets a "terrible example" to school children being taught correct punctuation.

Window of faith

A stained glass window celebrating Birmingham's different faiths has been donated to a city hospital. The specially commissioned £20,000 window, named *The Creation*, has been designed and crafted by local artist Anita Patel. The window has been placed in the centre of Heartlands Hospital, acting as an area for prayer and reflection. It has been achieved through donations from friends and relatives of patients.

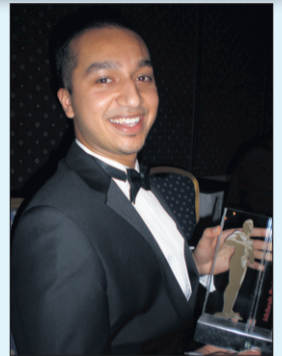
Graffiti artist gets award

A Birmingham artist who has created powerful spray-paint messages of peace, unity and hope has scooped the Art Council's diversity award. Winner Mohammed Ali, 30, from Kings Heath, was seen on ITV's *South Bank Show* last Wednesday picking up his accolade. He said: "Awards are never something that I set out for when I started getting in to graffiti about 20 years ago but if this can help me to connect with more communities then I'm delighted."

News in Brief

Top title for Kawsar

Three cheers for 23-year-old Kawsar Miah, pictured, who was crowned Young Entrepreneur of the Year at the Midlands Business Awards held at the Hilton Metropole Hotel in Birmingham last Friday. "I am truly honoured to have won this award," said the Nottingham-based managing director of Digicom Solutions, a wholesale specialist in electronic goods. Kawsar, one of eight siblings, founded the firm in 2006. He was a finalist in three of ten award categories.



Officers commit offences

During the last four years a total 142 crimes were committed by officers from West Midlands Police Force. Their offences included kerb crawling, fraud, speeding, being drunk and disorderly and assault. The shock revelations came to light following a request by the *Sunday Mercury* under the Freedom of Information Act. The Force employs 624 ethnic minority officers out of a total 8,412 - 7.4 per cent of the total.

Newsman taken off air

BBC Midlands Today newsreader Ashley Blake, pictured, has been taken off air after being charged with offences after allegedly being involved in a brawl. Violence broke out at the end of a party early on Sunday to celebrate the 18th birthday of a member of staff at a Sutton Coldfield restaurant, which the 39-year-old presenter runs with girlfriend Jessica Hayes. Former Watchdog and Holiday reporter Blake has met with BBC bosses and been taken off air until court proceedings have been concluded.



GP not forthcoming

A hospital registrar accused of killing a patient by injecting her with adrenaline opted not to give evidence at her trial. A jury at Birmingham Crown Court was told by counsel acting for Dr Priya Ramnath, who is accused of killing Patricia Leighton in 1998, that she would not be called as a witness. Ramnath, 40, pictured, is alleged to have gone against the advice of three colleagues at Stafford District General Hospital before injecting adrenaline into Mrs Leighton. The case continues.



Rise in Muslim prisoners

The Muslim population at a Midland jail has almost doubled in just two years. Latest figures show that the number of criminals at HMP Long Lartin in Worcestershire who list their religion as Islamic has soared from 65 to 120 - more than a third of the total 436 inmates. The prison was unable to provide statistics on the percentage of prisoners who had converted from other faiths.