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RADIO 4

TRANSCRIPT OF "FILE ON 4"

CURRENT AFFAIRS GROUP

TRANSMISSION: Tuesday 20th July 2004 2000 - 2040

REPEAT: Sunday 25th July 2004 1700 - 1740

REPORTER: Zaiba Malik

PRODUCER: Jenny Chryss

EDITOR: David Ross

PROGRAMME NUMBER: 03VY3029LHO

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MALIK: Since 9/11, Britain’s mosques have come under close scrutiny. Fears that they have become hotbeds for militant Islamists have raised alarm. But while the focus has been on terrorism, other problems in mosques are being ignored.

MAN: I think he was about 8 or 10, something like that. Imam hit the kid with a stick, bamboo stick which is solid. The moment he was hit he was taken aback, and the tears came out on his face and he hit him again.

MALIK: Tonight File on 4 investigates allegations of physical and financial abuse. We reveal how children are being put at risk, how donations are not being accounted for, and how disputes are being resolved through violence. At a time when the government is proposing tighter controls for Imams, could the Muslim community be doing more to put its own house in order?

SIGNATURE TUNE

ACTUALITY OF CHILDREN READING KORAN

MAN: Spell it out, spell that word out. Five times

MALIK: Learning to read the Koran in Arabic is a core part of a Muslim child's education. Many attend mosques and their schools, known as madrassas, where they are taught the basic tenets of Islam. There is a strong emphasis on discipline, but sometimes this can go too far.

MAN: My brother was near enough in tears. He was saying that he was reading and he made a mistake and the teacher hit him, slapped him in the face, hit him on the head and also swore at him.

MALIK: And why did he say that happened?

MAN: Because he made a mistake while reading the Koran. When I got to the mosque my brother was outside, and I asked the teacher what had happened. He said, 'Your brother was rude, this is why we hit him.' And I told him ...

MALIK: So there was no denial that this had happened?

MAN: No, they admitted it. I said, 'You shouldn't have hit him.' So at that point I just told my brother, 'Okay, don't go back there.' He stopped going and my mother taught him in the house. I've actually not been back to that mosque either.

MALIK: The Muslim community in Scotland is small and tight-knit. The fear of retribution means that few are willing to talk openly about such abuse, let alone report it to the police. This man doesn't want to be identified.

MAN: I got a phone call to the house, and someone said to my mother, please tell your son to drop, not to go any further with anything.

MALIK: So there was pressure put on you?

MAN: Yes, not to pursue it. The pressure's actually coming from the leaders of the community. The leaders have said it's a community problem, we'll take care of it. The police said to me that we know what's going to happen. You are going to end up dropping it by the pressure of the community.

MALIK: What kind of pressure are you talking about?

MAN: It's a very small Asian community. You get blacklisted, let's say. You go down the street, people look at you and no one wants to talk to you. It's very hard for you to even go into a shop. I could have handled it. Because of the family and because my mother is a widow, it would be very very tough for her to stay in this area then. I've got two sisters and a brother over here that are both at school. And again, because of the children going to school, quite a lot of pressure builds up there as well.

MALIK: As few cases of abuse are reported to the police, it's impossible to gauge how extensive the problem in mosques and madrassas is. But within the confines of the building, away from prying eyes, there is often little attempt to conceal it.

ACTUALITY AT MEALTIME

MAN: Is the dinner ready yet?

WOMAN: Five minutes. I'll just lay the table now.

MALIK: This 68 year old man, who also doesn't want to be identified, was a regular worshipper in a London mosque. He was shocked when he witnessed a young boy being hit with a stick.

MAN: I went to the mosque one day for prayers. Imam was teaching Koran to some youngsters. This kid, who was born and brought up in this country, had difficulty in pronunciation – for example there is no such thing as [makes sound] in English, so he was saying 'Kalid' and he repeated three or four times and imam hit him with a stick. Bamboo stick, which is solid. The moment he was hit, he was taken aback, and the tears come out all on his face, and then he recited the Koran again and he made the same mistake, and he hit him again.

MALIK: And you saw this with your own eyes?

MAN: I was there. I was observing it. I was sitting about three feet away from the imam.

MALIK: What happened next has been enough to stop him from ever returning to that mosque.

MAN: The second time he hit him, I just could not hold myself. I went up to him and I said, 'Do you realise you're not supposed to hit children in this country? It's illegal to hit children.' Without saying anything he pulled me by the neck and threw me down on the floor, and while I was falling he hit me. I was shaking so much that I was almost shivering. I couldn't believe that a man of my age was being hit in the mosque. To me that was a disgrace to the religion as well as to the mosque.

MALIK: Unlike many other major religions, there is no one governing body in Islam which sets out a code of practice for mosques and their imams. In the absence of such guidelines, each mosque is left to regulate itself. But self-regulation has its faults. The imam is held in such high esteem that worshippers are reluctant to make any allegations against him. Imam Abduljalil Sajid, a consultant to the government on Islamic affairs and a scholar, says it's an unsatisfactory situation.

SAJID: I think a whole culture of secrecy exists, and I do agree that the Muslim community is a self-reliance community and there is no state protection or state regulation, people will make their own rules and their own laws, and some become dictatorship within their own domain and some become abusive of the power under their control, vulnerable children and others. That's a possibility.

MALIK: Do you think that amongst the Muslim community there's a tendency to put the imam on a pedestal, where he is beyond any criticism, beyond any transparency?

SAJID: Well I think there is justification in that, because imam is the highest, most respected institution in Muslim society. Not only leader of the community, but religiously most knowledgeable and become spokesperson on behalf of the community. He deserves that respect, he deserves that protection. But if a few are misusing that position, then the community must have checks and balances to address that issue.

MALIK: There are thought to be over two thousand imams in Britain, of which only about 10% have been trained here. The lack of training colleges, coupled with an increasing number of mosques, means that there's a shortage of qualified imams, so many mosques are turning to their homelands to find preachers. But Dr Mahmood Chandia from the Lancashire Council of Mosques, and an academic in Islam, says that this recruitment policy has brought with it problems.

CHANDIA: Historically, most of the people who have been involved in the mosque sector have been coming from South Asia, where it was an accepted form of discipline to smack the child. To some extent this culture was imported to Britain. This is not a good practice and it has been stamped out.

MALIK: It hasn't been stamped out completely though.

CHANDIA: There have been isolated cases and we have dealt very thoroughly with these isolated cases. There is – and we have recommended – a total ban on smacking within the mosque sector, and we have made this very clearly to all those people who, whether they tutor at mosques or whether they are engaged in a voluntary capacity at mosques, that there should be a total ban on smacking and this should not be accepted in any way at all.

MALIK: But are you still not seeing imams who have come from South Asia who still see that as accepted practice, even though it's illegal here?

CHANDIA: We have to accept that there are cases where we have had imams or tutors smacking or chastising children in a way that we have not recommended, and we are dealing with these cases.

MALIK: Concerns about imams from abroad has prompted the government to take action. Traditionally there has been a reluctance to lay down restrictions for religious communities. But the Home Office is in the process of introducing tougher entry tests for foreign imams. The Muslim Council of Britain – an umbrella organisation representing Muslim interests – has been privy to the government's consultation process. Ibrahim Mogra, who chairs the Mosque and Community Affairs section of the Council, thinks the possible restrictions are too harsh.

MOGRA: If they are talking about imposing a language test on imams, I think that will be very unfair. So far, from what we hear is that this is starting with the imams and maybe in time to come it might cover others, but what we are saying is, why should it start with one particular community? Why don't we start with all?

MALIK: With an increasing number of the younger generations going to mosques who maybe don't understand their mother tongues then English will obviously be their first language, so doesn't it make absolute sense that there should be a language requirement test?

MOGRA: That's another misreading of the situation on the ground. You find that the majority of the congregation are not young people, they are the elderly. There are areas where we definitely need English to be used, and there are places where perhaps English is not even needed because the congregation can get by without English. What we're saying to the government is yes, let's have a requirement of English, but at a lower level, from a range of 0 to 9 they're looking at level 6 for imams to come in, where GPs and doctors in the country require a level 7. That is too high and we have tried to negotiate with the Home Office to see if they will bring it down perhaps to level 4.

MALIK: And will they?

MOGRA: The vibes that I was getting in that meeting were it seemed that they had already made their mind up on level 6, and that would be a very unfortunate thing to happen. I think it will have a huge impact on the possibility of imams coming from abroad to work in this country. I think 98% to 99% of them will not make it through.

MALIK: The government proposals have yet to be approved. Current Home Office policy means that it's relatively easy for ministers of religion, including imams, to preach here. They just have to show documentary evidence of an offer of employment and sponsorship by a British mosque. Despite the close contact that many imams have whilst teaching children, there is no formal vetting system to ensure that those coming from abroad do not have convictions.

ACTUALITY AT FAIZ-UL QURAN MOSQUE

MALIK: At the Faiz-ul Quran mosque in Birmingham, children recite from the Koran. Mohammed Rashid is the chairman and he has recently brought in a new employee from Pakistan to teach them.

What kind of process do you have before you actually decide which teachers to employ?

RASHID: We have communication back home with the people and the priests are educated by Pakistan committee in our area, and those teachers are qualified and known by the community that we're from.

MALIK: So the checks are mainly done by word of mouth in Pakistan?

RASHID: No. We know each other. We have certificates of imams which are educated in the madrassas and We have references, we are satisfied with that reference.

MALIK: You're happy that those checks are enough?

RASHID: In my opinion, when you know the person, you know the person's history, you know their family and you know they are educated by a certain madrassa and their reputation and any personal communication, it's as safe as it possibly can be really.

MALIK: But the checks are far from foolproof. In October 2002, a preacher from the Faiz-ul Quran mosque was accused of sexually abusing a young girl while teaching her religious lessons at her home. He disappeared shortly after the allegations were made, and before West Midlands Police could question him. It's thought that he may have fled back to Pakistan, although the police won't comment on the allegations. It's a subject that Mohammed Rashid is reluctant to discuss.

From your own experience, you know that a mulvi who was teaching at your particular madrassa, there were allegations that he had physically abused a young girl in her house.

RASHID: Nothing to do with us, nothing happened in our area.

MALIK: But there were allegations against an imam who was based at your madrassa, who had direct contact with children.

RASHID: Well we never known about it. We never were told of the accusation. We have heard about some people doing wrong, some activity, but that particular you're talking about, we're not involved in it.

MALIK: But he taught at the madrassa. How can you deal with this effectively if you're not prepared to talk about it?

RASHID: Course I am prepared to talk about it. I am saying to you simply that we are not burying our head in the sand. We have taken preventive actions. We employ imams with great care. If I had any evidence we were involved in it, we would report it because we meet regularly with our local police, we have a good relationship with the local police.

MALIK: Without an effective monitoring system, imams with criminal records can easily enter the country. But the safeguards against convicted imams already in Britain are not much better. There is no legal obligation on mosques to run criminal record checks on their employees. Anybody can work at or set up a mosque or madrassa. For the Islamic scholar, Imam Abduljalil Sajid, the safety of the pupils can not be left to chance.

SAJID: No checks is being made upon them, on their criminal record, or even dealing with the cruelty with children or abuse of the children. That is a serious matter in my opinion, because mosques should be free from these people, because we citizens cannot check that. That's why we must have regulation so that all people who have been given jobs within the mosque culture – paid or unpaid – must be checked for their criminal record.

MALIK: But at the moment there are no guarantees when a parent sends their children to a madrassa that the person who is having contact, direct contact in madrassas with children, hasn't had any previous convictions for child abuse or sexual abuse.

SAJID: No. There's no way one can find out today any mosque that anyone has been checked of their criminal record, or if they have been convicted for child abuse, for example. There is no way any mosque authorities could ever know that.

MALIK: Doesn't that worry you?

SAJID: It worries us all.

MALIK: But it's not a worry to Ibrahim Mogra of the Muslim Council of Britain, who feels that the system of informal checks, with the emphasis on personal networks, is effective.

MOGRA: There is no way that Islam can tolerate or condone the abuse of children or of anyone. But what we're talking about is an exercise which is optional.

MALIK: It's optional, yes, but we have come across one case where a mosque employed a man and they thought that they knew him very well, and then there were allegations of child sex abuse against him.

MOGRA: Well they thought they knew him well. I'm talking about knowing people personally ...

MALIK: They said they knew him personally.

MOGRA: Well then he has misled them and he has really let them down. If that is the case, then the government needs to start looking at making this a legal requirement right across the board, not just for imams but right across.

MALIK: So you agree that relying on that informal network is not always a guarantee?

MOGRA: Well for me it's been an excellent experience. Ten years running where we've had anything between thirty to forty staff, five hundred children, and thanks to God everything has been beautiful.

ACTUALITY OF CHILDREN

MALIK: In Lancashire alone, an estimated 20,000 children attend mosques and madrassas like this one. The potential for abuse is high. The tendency to deal with allegations internally within the mosque is, according to Sergeant John Rigby, one of the reasons that convictions are rare. He works at the Minorities Team at Lancashire Constabulary and has regular dealings with the mosques in the area.

RIGBY: In my experience, the Asian community is a very very close-knit community. You will have different pockets throughout the town, where they know people, they may even be related to them, and whatever happens to one particular family, it doesn't take long for people within the same street or the area to find out what has actually happened. So it does put off a lot of parents, because they may feel that if they do report the matter, people may well want to know what is happening and perhaps may influence them. The offenders themselves may well be a family member. So there is a great deal of influence and that can be construed as being intimidatory as well.

MALIK: And how many convictions have you been able to obtain?

RIGBY: The convictions are very very low. In the past five years that I've been involved, you're only talking of one or two.

MALIK: As low as that?

RIGBY: As low as that. In the area we're talking of.

MALIK: Realising that the courts are not the most effective way to deal with allegations of abuse, the authorities have taken action. A unique multi-agency approach, incorporating the police, social services and the Lancashire Council of Mosques has been set up. Dr Mahmood Chandia from the Council believes that prevention through criminal record checks is better than cure through the courts.

CHANDIA: We are a registered CRB clearance body. We have numerous mosques who contact us to have their imam or their tutors or administrators – people who will come in direct contact with children – to have clearance from the CRB body, and the system is working quite effectively at the moment.

MALIK: So the CRB checks are run on all mosques and madrassas in Lancashire?

CHANDIA: At present it is the decision of the mosque committee to come forward to us. Once a year mosques can bring forward their documentation for CRB clearances, so all mosques have had the opportunity to have their tutors or administrators registered. We have had 125 take-ups just on the CRB clearances.

MALIK: But there are more than 125 mosques and madrassas in Lancashire?

CHANDIA: Well we have 70 organisations who are affiliated to us, and all those madrassas who are affiliated to us have been taking this up.

MALIK: The absence of a child protection policy in mosques and madrassas can have serious implications for the worshippers' safety. Weak financial and management controls can also hit their pockets. One of the five pillars of Islam states that Muslims must donate to charity, of which the mosque is a major recipient. With most donations given in cash, financial accountability and transparency are crucial. For many mosques there is no organisation to ensure that their finances are kept in order. But for those that are registered as charities, the regulatory body, the Charity Commission, provides vital checks and balances, such as a constitution, a board of trustees, and an elected committee.

ACTUALITY AT ISLAMIC CENTRE

MALIK: This large detached property in Upton Park, East London is the Islamic Centre. It's a mosque that doubles up as a madrassa. There are two entrances – one for women and one for men. At prayer times this normally quiet residential street is awash with worshippers of all ages. In March 2000, the Charity Commission began an investigation after allegations of financial impropriety.

GILLESPIE: There were allegations there that planning permission hadn't been properly obtained for some extension work in the mosque, but also that the work itself had been given improperly to one of the trustees to undertake.

MALIK: Simon Gillespie is the Director of Operations at the Commission, which undertook a two-year inquiry into the Upton Park mosque. Its findings were damning.

READER IN STUDIO: The charity trustees had failed to protect the charity's funds or act in the best interest of the charity by authorising £35,000 worth of building work without seeking the appropriate planning permission or independent professional advice. The contract for the building work had been awarded to a member of the management committee serving at that time.

MALIK: Closer scrutiny of the mosque's financial affairs revealed more deep-rooted problems that flew in the face of the requirements for transparency and accountability.

READER IN STUDIO: There appeared to be no properly appointed trustee body, as no elections had been held for thirteen years. This was in contravention of the charity's constitution, which provided for the election of a management committee every three years.

MALIK: The report also stated that the charity was late in filing its accounts, and those that were submitted had not been correctly audited. Solicitor Stephen Walker is all too aware of the perils of an informal management structure. He represented the congregation of a mosque a few miles away in Bow in 2000, where the Charity Commission criticised the trustees for losing control of the mosque.

WALKER: The problem is that in quite a lot of mosques you don't have formal constitutions. You don't have trustees set up, you don't have a scheme of management. There are no checks and balances. The absence of a formal constitution and the informality of the accounting can create the danger where abuses can happen.

MALIK: Kurshid Ahmed, a member of the Commission for Racial Equality, with special responsibility for the Muslim community, agrees that financial self-regulation in mosques is failing. He advocates a more hands-on role by the Charity Commission.

AHMED: There is very little competence in many of these committees to regulate themselves in line with the charities legislation of this country, and therefore most of them fall foul of the regulations, and unless the Charity Commission intervene, you are not going to get a proper adherence to constitutions and regulations. So unfortunately sometimes it's unavoidable. But the movement itself means that the Charity Commission have to be very sensitive in dealing with these kinds of issues.

MALIK: With the inability of the Upton Park mosque to look after its own financial affairs, the monitoring role of the Charity Commission became more imperative. But two years after the Commission's critical report, which emphasised the need for charities to submit their accounts accurately and punctually, Simon Gillespie admits that not all the problems have been resolved.

GILLESPIE: The fact that the accounts are overdue doesn't necessarily mean to say there's not effective monitoring. There are 186,000-odd registered charities in England and Wales. I would be incredibly surprised if all of them complied all of the time. The issue about Upton Park is that we are chasing up to get the accounts ...

MALIK: But there are also mosques that haven't filed any accounts for eight years – since 1996!

GILLESPIE: Yes, indeed and ...

MALIK: That's not effective monitoring.

GILLESPIE: Well it is effective monitoring to the extent that if we don't hear from an organisation, then we do contact them to find out what's going on. You have to bear in mind that the primary responsibility for running charities is of the trustees of those charities themselves. Now I don't want to sound complacent, because clearly the situation is unsatisfactory. But nobody else concerned with the mosque had brought it to our attention. If they had done so, then we would have taken action.

MALIK: With limited resources, the Charity Commission cannot always be relied on to effectively oversee mosques. But there is no other independent, external

MALIK cont: body to mediate when disputes occur. So when power struggles arise with different factions fighting to gain control of the mosque, worshippers are left to their own devices to sort out the mess. What should be a place of worship can start to resemble a battleground.

ACTUALITY OF FRIDAY PRAYERS

MALIK: At the Shahjalal mosque in central Newcastle, Friday prayers are taking place. Over three hundred worshippers are packed into the two-storey building. This is one of a handful of mosques in the city, and was set up by the small Bangladeshi community. For many years peace reigned here – until the arrival of a preacher.

ACTUALITY OF OMAR BAKRI VIDEO

MAN ON VIDEO: ... my life, my death, my action, my protection.....

MALIK: Omar Bakri, the spiritual leader of the militant Islamic group, al-Mujaharoon, caused consternation when he accepted an invitation to give a sermon in 2002 by the then president of the mosque, Syed Ali. The imam at the mosque, Hammidah Rahman, claims that Syed Ali never consulted the congregation about his plan, which they strongly objected to. Insult was added to injury when the day selected for Omar Bakri's sermon was a holy night in the Islamic calendar.

RAHMAN (VIA INTERPRETER): ... is a very special night.

MALIK: For Muslims?

RAHMAN (VIA INTERPRETER): For the Muslim, that night is very special for every Muslim to pray all night, and Mr Ali had invited that person on that night, and including the imam and the other community from all over the north east objected to it, not to get him here on that night.

MALIK: Why wasn't there a lot of support for Omar Bakri to give his speech here?

RAHMAN (VIA INTERPRETER): Omar Bakri is a political leader. Also in Islam there are the various sects of Islam, and the sect he is following, we are not following the same, so he is like an extremist type.

MALIK: According to Syed Ali's Islamic beliefs, there is no distinction between a moderate and a militant Muslim, and so inviting Omar Bakri to the mosque should not have caused any offence.

Can you tell me about the time that you invited Omar Bakri to come and speak at the mosque?
Why did you do that?

ALI: Because one of our members elect this group, and he was saying one day that Omar Bakri gives nice lectures, so we said okay, we'll bring him.

MALIK: But there were already objections, from what I understand were the majority of the people, the majority of the mosque, and you were actually the driving force yourself in bringing Omar Bakri to the mosque on a very special Islamic night as well.

ALI: There was only about thirty people complained, and they had been to the police station saying that Omar Bakri is a terrorist and I am a terrorist supporter, so anyhow this has to be stopped.

MALIK: Are you a supporter of al-Mujaharoon?

ALI: Sorry?

MALIK: Do you support al-Mujaharoon?

ALI: No, I don't. I don't support al-Mujaharoon, but I like them.

MALIK: So you agree with their version of Islam?

ALI: I agree what they're calling for is right.

MALIK: The arrival of Omar Bakri sparked a power struggle between Syed Ali and the committee members. As the two jostled for control of the mosque, allegations of fraud and child abuse were thrown around. In an attempt to stop the mud-slinging and placate the situation, mediators were appointed. Their first step was to suspend the committee, including Syed Ali, and call for elections. But it was a move that just added to the conflict. Verbal abuse escalated into serious threats, at which stage the police, under DI Max Black, were called in.

BLACK: There had been a lot of tension in the mosque and immediately outside the mosque, and in fact on one or two occasions we had uniform officers policing the area quite close to the mosque to provide reassurance really to members at the mosque that we were available to calm anything down.

MALIK: So you were aware of the tension that was building up?

BLACK: Yes, there had been a lot of tensions which were reported to us and we were in dialogue with the operators of the mosque, and there was concern that the tensions would actually spill into disorder inside and outside the mosque.

MALIK: But the situation came to a head when the very person brought in to resolve the dispute – the mediator Afsaur Khan – became a target. On 6th June 2003 he blocked plans by Syed Ali to hold a meeting at the mosque, stating that it could not be used for political purposes. Later that day, on a busy road just around the corner from the mosque, Afsaur Khan and his son were attacked by a group of around twenty men.

ACTUALITY IN STREET

MALIK: So, Mr Khan, this is the spot where the attack actually happened on you and your son.

KHAN: Yes. There was maybe twenty, thirty people, they had lots of weapons, you know. Suddenly they attacked me, I was bleeding, my clothes were heavily bled, you know, all the clothes were full of blood. As soon as he stabbed me three times, I ...

MALIK: Where did he stab you?

KHAN: In my eyebrow, two in the eyebrow, one in forehead. They attacked my son as well, and he was in the middle of the road. They hit him with an iron bar. He tried to run away, and when he was trying to run away they hit him in his back, on the backside of the head.

MALIK: The police arrested a number of men, including Syed Ali. Although initially charged with wounding, he was convicted of affray. Syed Ali no longer prays at the Shahjalal mosque. He is trying to set up a new mosque in Newcastle with funding from Saudi Arabia. He claims he is an innocent man.

ALI: We had to go to court. They gave us an offer on the day, if we'd take affray they will stop the trial, otherwise the trial will go on. I'm not ready to have a criminal record at all, but the problem is that I don't want a lengthy process going on.

MALIK: So you did it to save court time?

ALI: I did it to save court time and to save hassle, because I haven't got enough time for this. It's already been over one and a half year.

MALIK: So you never lifted a finger against Mr Khan or his son?

ALI: No.

MALIK: But you saw the violence?

ALI: I was there, there was violence, there were people, lots of people fighting each other.

MALIK: And did you try and stop it?

ALI: How can I stop it, because this is a mass of people fighting together.

MALIK: Do you think that using physical violence was the correct way to try and end this dispute?

ALI: No.

MALIK: Do you regret that happening?

ALI: Of course.

MALIK: The failure of mosques to regulate themselves when an internal dispute arises can sometimes have devastating consequences.

EXTRACT FROM "CRIMEWATCH", BBC 1, 27th November 2002

NICK ROSS: Three weeks ago, Salik Choudury was stabbed to death on his doorstep in Forest Gate, East London, in front of his 7 year old daughter

CHOUDHURY: He was one of the main founders of the mosque. His mosque was his passion. He was very proud of its development and the way it was moving forward. And it was his way of doing something for the Muslims in this community really. It was his way of putting something back into society.

MALIK: The Forest Gate mosque in East London was set up in the early 1990s by Rehana Choudhury's father, Salik Choudhury and his friends. Initially they raised enough funds for just one property, but as more and more donations were received, they were able to buy the two adjacent buildings. For years the mosque was governed peacefully. But in the summer of 2002 a power struggle developed. This man, a friend of Salik Choudhury and a regular worshipper at the mosque, doesn't want to be identified.

MAN: Out of the blue, you know, people were just coming, they wanted to take over the mosque.

MALIK: Were they local people?

MAN: Some of them local, and some people came from Camden Town.

MALIK: But from other parts of London?

MAN: Yeah, well, parts of London.

MALIK: And how big was this group? How many people were there?

MAN: On the election day, the group was about 100 or 150 people there on the election day.

MALIK: What was their intention, do you think?

MAN: They wanted to kick us out, they wanted to take over all the mosque.

MALIK: Why?

MAN: I don't know.

MALIK: Do you think it was about power? Do you think it was ...?

MAN: Power, yes. They always tried to make trouble, you know, inside the mosque.

MALIK: Over the next few months the mosque was vandalised and property belonging to the committee members was damaged. The incidents were reported to the police, but worse was yet to come.

MAN: He got a letter, and I got two or three letters, threatening letters, we gave them to the police.

MALIK: What did the letters say?

MAN: The letters telling us, if you go to Bangladesh or something like this, we'll pay someone £5,000 or £6,000 and kill you ...

MALIK: These were obviously death threats?

MAN: Yes, death threats. This was a death threat, yes. One is posted through the door and one is by post ...

MALIK: Both you and Mr Choudhury both received death threats?

MAN: Both received death threats, yes.

MALIK: And at the time did you both suspect who was responsible for these death threats?

MAN: Yes. I told the police ...

MALIK: Did you give the police names of who ...?

MAN: Yes, I gave them the name.

MALIK: Salik Choudhury did not tell his family about the threats. He rarely spoke to them about issues at the mosque. On November 3rd, 2002, as the family sat in the living room of their terraced house, Salik Choudhury was stabbed as he answered a knock at the door.

CHOUDHURY: Because it was dark, we had our curtains drawn at the time, none of us saw it except my younger sister, who was 7. Only when my dad screamed out, we all sort of ran to him.

MALIK: Was your father still conscious immediately after the stabbing?

CHOUDHURY: Yes, he was still conscious. My uncle and everyone arrived, because they live two doors away, and then we brought him into this room. We repeatedly called the ambulance and it was about 20 minutes they took to come. But for something like that to happen, it's just devastating. It feels like a nightmare.

MALIK: Salik Choudhury was stabbed in the stomach and died a few hours later. His murder led to a climate of fear at the mosque, and worshippers stopped attending. There were strong suspicions that the murder was linked to the trouble at the mosque. DCI Keith Garnish is in charge of the investigation.

GARNISH: Obviously we're now approaching this November two years, and we've developed a number of lines of inquiry. We've conducted a number of interviews with different people, we've conducted a full forensic examination of the scene, but we are now still at the stage, we don't know why Mr Choudhury was killed, and we're not in a position to charge anyone with his murder at this present time – which is disappointing.

MALIK: The arrests that you made, was there any link with the mosque itself.

GARNISH: A number of the people had connections to the mosque, yes, and were local to that area.

MALIK: But they were released?

GARNISH: Yes. They were interviewed over a considerable period of time, and having reviewed the evidence and the situation, there was not sufficient evidence or any evidence to charge them at this time. But our inquiries continue.

MALIK: Kurshid Ahmed from the Commission for Racial Equality has had firsthand experience of trying to mediate in internal disputes in mosques. He's adamant that these disputes cannot be resolved through the current method of self-regulation, and that it's time to introduce a more centralised and formal system.

AHMED: From my own experience in Birmingham and elsewhere, I don't think that problems that arise can be sorted out internally. I wish they could be. I think it's important that there is some independent arbitration available when there are issues which, if they persisted, could lead to a lot of damage being done to the mosques.

MALIK: But who should be that independent arbitrator?

AHMED: Well I think it's for the community to determine themselves how they should regulate or have some sort of an internal regulation. If they can't come up with a mechanism themselves, then it would have to be imposed from external sources.

MALIK: But self-regulation hasn't worked so far, so why should it in the future?

AHMED: I don't think self-regulation has even been attempted so far. I think the need for it is now being more critically highlighted. I think this highlighting of this particular need and the attention that is being paid to governance issues in the mosques will lead to more self-regulation.

MALIK: But with the emphasis on terrorism, some say that not enough attention has been paid to the issue of governance in mosques. Even amongst the Muslim community there is no consensus. Ibrahim Mogra, from the Muslim Council of Britain, is reluctant to change the status quo, where mosques are responsible for their own affairs. Although other major religions may have an external regulatory body, he's not convinced that the step is appropriate for British Islam.

MOGRA: It's something that we should certainly consider, but it's not something that we can sort of come to a decision straightaway. It has to be deliberated. We have a huge diverse Muslim community in this country, people with different ideas, different methods, different systems. Islam in itself has got such a diverse set of practices. All that needs to be taken into account. If it was pretty straightforward we could just put everyone in a straitjacket, but it's not as easy as that.

MALIK: But the Church of England manages.

