

Judge rejects explosives trial panel challenge

By Malcolm Pithers

A judge yesterday refused to discharge 75 jurors in Leeds but agreed to an unusual merger of two jury panels so that a jury can be selected to try 12 Asian youths who are accused of conspiring to make explosives.

The case against the 12, all from Bradford, is likely to begin next Tuesday in Leeds Crown Court.

Judge Christopher Beaumont had listened to applications from defence counsel, the main one of which was that a new jury panel should be chosen so that there could be a possibility of Asians serving on the jury.

The defence barristers had wrongly understood that the catchment area for Leeds Crown Court juries included Bradford.

But yesterday Judge Beaumont ruled that he would not discharge the present panel. He said that he had been asked by the defence to discharge the present jury and "direct or request" the administration to issue further jury summonses to an area wholly or partly restricted to Bradford.

Judge Beaumont said: "I

doubt whether I have the power to do this. If I did I would not exercise it in favour of the defendants."

But the judge said he would release, not discharge, the present panel until next Tuesday, when they could be joined with a fresh panel of around 75 people.

The judge's ruling may have gone some way to appease the defence lawyers although there is to be further legal discussion this week on the possibility of a new venue for the trial.

Earlier, in argument trying to persuade the judge to discharge the present jury panel, two barristers referred to the racial implications of the forthcoming trial.

Mr Edmund Alexander said that the case had a high political content with severe racial overtones.

Mr Sighbat Kadri, the only Asian barrister appearing for the defendants, referred to the "years" of racial violence against the Asian community in Bradford. He said he would be able to produce evidence which would prove beyond all reasonable doubt that this had taken place. The hearing continues today.