

Less Welcome: In Pakistani Areas Of New York City, A Lingering Fear --- Arrests, Deportations Spread Alarm Among Immigrants; Some Flee North to Canada --- A Child Drops 'Mohammed'

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NEW YORK -- At Public School 217, classmates were teasing Iraj Shaheen. "You are from a terrorist country," one little girl told the eight-year-old boy last fall.

Iraj's father, Afzal Shaheen, had come to the U.S. from Pakistan 12 years earlier. He owned an electronics store in the Midwood section of Brooklyn that employed five people. But Mr. Shaheen was seeing sales slump as some of his fellow Pakistani immigrants, who make up the bulk of the store's customers, left the country in the wake of Sept. 11.

Mr. Shaheen, 42, worried that he would be deported. He had entered the country on a tourist visa that expired in 1990. He says he had always intended to seek legal status but hadn't made it a priority.

"I considered the U.S. my homeland," Mr. Shaheen says. "We worked hard and were paying our taxes." But in May, he and his wife and three children moved to Toronto, leaving the store in the care of his brother.

Here in the boroughs of Queens and Brooklyn, the country's largest Pakistani-immigrant community has been deeply shaken in the 14 months since the attacks. Terrorism fears have led to the arrest, jailing and deportation of residents. Anxiety about U.S. government scrutiny has seeped into the daily lives of once-optimistic merchants and professionals. Some families, like the Shaheens, have left for Canada or Pakistan.

A good measure of the unease among the more than 150,000 Pakistanis in New York stems from immigrants' failure to secure legal residency. Still, the government's pursuit of terrorism's tendrils has had a tremendous and little-seen cost. Many families who were leading productive lives, some who are here legally and some who aren't, have now seen those lives turned upside down.

"DON'T CALL ME MOHAMMED," the Pakistani child said.

In the days after Sept. 11, the boy, a schoolmate of Iraj Shaheen at P.S. 217, told fellow students not to use the name that many Pakistani males attach to their given names in tribute to the Muslim prophet. School officials and teachers say it was a common reaction among the 1,300 mostly Pakistani students at the elementary school.

The boy, who asked to be called "Aslam" instead, has since moved back to Pakistan with his family, says the school's principal, Mary Buckley Teatum. P.S. 217 has lost about 50 Pakistani students in the past year, a higher attrition rate than usual, Ms. Teatum says. Their families moved away, afraid they might be targeted by authorities looking for terrorists or jailed by the Immigration and Naturalization Service, the principal says. Some feared their children would be harassed at school.

P.S. 217, a five-story, red-brick building, is nestled in the middle of the heavily Pakistani Midwood neighborhood. A few blocks away, Coney Island Avenue is crowded with bins of Pakistani music tapes and racks of the colorful hijab scarves which women use to cover their heads. Shop windows are marked with Urdu letters, and the aroma of curry wafts from small restaurants. Foot traffic has dissipated along the usually

thronged strip since Sept. 11, especially at night, when most Pakistanis now stay home.

Nasreen Syed, a classroom aide at P.S. 217 who is fluent in English and Urdu, keeps her own two youngest children, ages 12 and 8, from playing in front of their home nearby. She fears what strangers might say or do to them. "I know what's going on outside," Mrs. Syed says. "I read the newspapers. I watch the news."

Mrs. Syed, 41, says she and her husband, Mansoor, had a good life in Pakistan, where he was a physician. But they came to the U.S. in 1996 "for our [two] daughters and our son, so they could have a better education and a better life," she says. The couple recently were sworn in as U.S. citizens.

In the past year, Mrs. Syed has traded in her billowing shalwar kameez dress-and-pants ensembles for mainstream American skirts. She still wears her hijab scarf but in a way that only partially covers the back of her head, so she isn't as conspicuously Muslim.

She has tried, without success, to discourage her 16-year-old daughter, Maryam, from wearing a hijab. But the 11th grader at Midwood High School says it's part of her identity. "It feels weird when you're, like, going to school and wearing it for so many years, and then one day you just take it off," Maryam says. "It just didn't feel right to me. What are you, scared?" The teenager says she hasn't encountered hostility at school.

EVEN MORE SKITTISH than Maryam's mother are parents of young men.

Queens is home to many Pakistanis who have been in the U.S. for decades. One is Farzana, a 49-year-old mother of two sons. She says she has been a U.S. citizen for 13 years and normally considers herself outspoken, but she declines to provide her full name for fear of attracting government attention. Sitting in the Kabab King Palace restaurant in the Jackson Heights neighborhood one evening, she describes her struggle to constrain the activities of her American-born boys, who are 19 and 21, both in college.

"They are the age everyone is looking for," she says, referring to the Federal Bureau of Investigation's openly stated campaign to question Muslim men between 18 and 33. About 1,200 men have been detained as part of sweeps related to Sept. 11, and of those, some 500 deported, according to federal authorities. Many Pakistani immigrants point out that the U.S. has called their homeland an ally in the war on terrorism, even though Pakistan has also harbored numerous anti-American militants.

The woman's older boy recently had a job raising money for his college in the Midwest. One man he called taunted him about his name, she says. "Is that Muslim?" the man asked. "Why don't you see the light and become a Christian?" The boy responded, "Sir, I don't need your donation" and refused it, a move that almost led to his being fired, his mother says.

Farzana, dressed in a burnt-orange sari, says she tells her sons to travel with non-Muslim friends. Her sons tease her about her fears, saying, "Mom, I'm growing a beard," or "Mom, the FBI called me." Farzana tries to laugh along, but she is terrified that federal agents are in fact watching. "I'm pretty sure they check our e-mail, our phone," she says, although she doesn't offer any evidence of this.

AFZAL SHAHEEN, the Midwood electronics-store owner who moved his family to Toronto, says: "I get calls from friends in New York every day who are thinking of coming. They want to know how the situation is. Is there work here? Will they be more safe?" He says he tells them, "Stay in the U.S. if you can, but if you can't, come here and the country will be welcoming to you."

Naeem Ahmed, vice consul at the Pakistani consulate in Toronto, says his office has seen a sharp increase in requests for immigration assistance from Pakistanis who have lived in the U.S. but now want Canadian passports. "Since Sept. 11, because of harassment and all, they are thinking about coming here," he says. Canada has more-permissive immigration laws and is generally perceived by Pakistanis as more-welcoming to outsiders, Mr. Ahmed adds. The Canadian government has said this year it needs more immigrants to meet the country's labor needs.

Mr. Shaheen in 1998 was granted legal residency in Canada after traveling there for years for personal and business reasons. But despite his fondness for Toronto and its large Pakistani community, he says he didn't want to leave the U.S., where, before the Sept. 11 attacks, he had successfully done business and felt comfortable. He says he had intended to seek an "investor-immigrant visa" and build a home on Long Island in New York. The investor visa allows immigrants to gain legal residency by starting U.S. businesses that create jobs. Before Sept. 11, though, he hadn't acted on this plan.

Now, Mr. Shaheen says he is putting down roots in Toronto and planning to open a new electronics store there. Young Iraj, however, asks his parents regularly whether they can move back to Brooklyn. He tells them he misses his school and his old friends.

Mr. Shaheen had a brush with U.S. authorities in July. He had returned to his Brooklyn apartment to retrieve belongings. Two men identifying themselves as New York police showed up, he says. They asked why his son, Iraj, had stopped attending P.S. 217. He told them the boy was in Canada and wasn't coming back. He showed the men his Canadian residency card.

Three days later, at 6 a.m., INS officers arrived at the apartment with a deportation order for Mr. Shaheen, he says. By then, he had returned to Canada. His brother, who is running the electronics store and living in the apartment, spoke with the agents and displayed papers showing that his own request for permanent U.S. residence is pending and he is in the country legally, Mr. Shaheen says.

An INS spokesman declines to discuss Mr. Shaheen's case in particular but says that if he has moved to Canada permanently, that would meet the requirements of a deportation order.

Lately, Mr. Shaheen's brother, who asked that his name not be used, has urged Mr. Shaheen to sell the store in Midwood, so that he, too, can move to Canada. Mr. Shaheen says his brother told him: "I cannot live in fear like this. I'm afraid when the wind blows at the door that it is the authorities coming to get me."

LIVING IN THE BASEMENT of his sister's stucco home in the Holliswood section of Queens, Usman Rana, a 39-year-old software engineer, wonders if he might have an easier time making it in another country.

When he came here from his native Pakistan in 1998, Pakistani programmers seemed to have their pick of jobs. He landed a position with DockMaster Software Systems, a Lake Worth, Fla., maker of software for marine facilities. The company raised his annual pay to about \$45,000 when another firm tried to hire him away. He and his wife, Saba, enjoyed Florida, where the hot weather reminded them of Pakistan. They took up tennis and went on boat rides, snapping photos of yachts and mansions along the Intracoastal Waterway.

Mr. Rana and his co-workers listened on the radio together as the Twin Towers collapsed. He previously hadn't felt uncomfortable as the office's only Muslim, but on Sept. 12, he began to worry. Later that week, he recalls that his boss, Clifford Ponce, asked him, "Is everybody treating you good?" and suggested that Mr. Rana take a day off.

Upon his return, his boss summoned him again -- to fire him. "You didn't do your job properly," Mr. Rana recalls Mr. Ponce saying. "Is this due to Sept. 11?" Mr. Rana asked. Mr. Ponce said no.

Mr. Ponce, director of development at DockMaster, says in an interview that Mr. Rana's firing had "no relationship" to Sept. 11 and was solely related to his performance. He says he doesn't recall telling Mr. Rana to take a day off. Mr. Ponce says that on a personal level, he was "sorry" to let Mr. Rana go and has since provided him with "a good recommendation."

The Ranas moved to New York, where Ms. Rana took a job with the city's finance department. They moved in with Mr. Rana's sister. He pursued several jobs, but Sept. 11 kept coming up in interviews, he says. He eventually got a \$55,000-a-year programming job with a Long Island manufacturer of aviation microelectronics.

It bothers Mr. Rana that now he often is searched before boarding a flight. Among westerners, he is hesitant to say his first name, which sounds like "Osama."

One day, a Pakistani friend in Oregon told him he had been visited by the FBI. The friend had gone to a department store to have his daughter's passport photo taken. When he returned home, FBI agents were waiting to question him. Mr. Rana's friend suspected that a store clerk had reported him as suspicious.

"Before, it was like freedom, no worries," Mr. Rana says. "I used to go out at night with my cousins [in Florida] as late as midnight. After Sept. 11, we never went out." Only recently did he venture into Manhattan, taking his wife to dinner in Times Square with his sister and her husband. Mr. Rana says he felt oddly out of place.

His sister, Rahila Malik, a 44-year-old mother of two, says her brother's experience, along with continued reports of immigrant detentions, sadden her: "You're a part of something, and, all of a sudden, something happened, and you are not part of it. It's a strange feeling."

AHSANULLAH "BOBBY" KHAN also feels that disconnect.

The personal financial adviser says he is currently working as a volunteer with 45 Pakistani-immigrant families in New York and New Jersey whose male relatives have been arrested. He visits the men in jail and attends several court hearings a week.

A prominent figure in the Pakistani-immigrant community, he says he began getting collect calls from area jails soon after last year's attacks. Young Pakistani men told him: "We are not being helped. Nobody is visiting us. Nobody is following our arrests." That fall, Mr. Khan helped start the Coney Island Project, a collective of Christian, Muslim, Jewish and nondenominational groups that assists Pakistanis and other immigrants in New York.

Working from the project's one-room office, he steers families of detainees to low-cost attorneys and helps them navigate Byzantine jail bureaucracies. He also helps organize protests outside jails and "Know Your Rights" seminars.

In his native Pakistan, Mr. Khan was a student-opposition leader who agitated against Gen. Zia ul Haq, who ruled Pakistan from 1977 to 1988, mostly under martial law. Mr. Khan moved to Washington in 1995 to cover U.S.-Pakistan relations for a Pakistani newspaper. The paper went out of business shortly after he arrived, and he moved to New York, where he started selling life insurance in the Pakistani-immigrant community. His then-

employer filed immigration papers that helped him become a U.S. citizen.

About two weeks ago, Mr. Khan took a medical leave from his job at the Brooklyn branch of Principal Financial Group Inc., a financial-services company based in Des Moines, Iowa. He says he is being treated for stress, related to the competing demands of his job and volunteer work, as well as tension at the Principal Financial Group office. Some colleagues, he says, have cracked jokes within his earshot about Pakistani employees being terrorists. He says he has complained to superiors, but to no avail. Mr. Khan says he felt even more embattled when three Pakistani colleagues were fired recently.

Principal Financial Group, in a statement, says it has been trying to contact Mr. Khan "to more thoroughly address his concerns" but that he hasn't responded. Beyond that, the company declines to discuss his situation. "We absolutely do not tolerate any discriminatory behavior," the statement adds. A company spokeswoman separately says the three other men were fired for regulatory violations.

Mr. Khan says he frets about more than his job. He lies awake nights worrying that one day the authorities might knock on his door. "If they come after me, they are going to take my wife, too, because she is working on this issue with me," he says. "So my small daughter will have no one to take care of her."

He also mourns what he considers the passivity of most Pakistani immigrants. "People in the community are saying, 'Don't do or say anything. Don't make trouble.' I say, 'These are your rights. Talk about your rights.' "

On the one-year anniversary of the attacks, he joined a peace march through Midwood. Amid dozens of U.S. flags and signs proclaiming Pakistanis' love of New York and America, Mr. Khan carried a handmade sign reading, "Bury Imperialist War Fascism Racism Sexism Now."