

## Montreal's Muslim community rallies after terror charges

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Khurram Sher and Misbahuddin Ahmed, two of the men charged in an Ottawa terror plot, are cousins by marriage, and the tightly-knit Montreal Muslim community they lived in is now shutting down to protect them.

In the online forum montrealmuslims.ca, an administrator posted a message Friday urging its members not to talk about "Khurram and Misbah," publicly or privately, because it is "more than likely that some people are under surveillance and anything could be used against the defendants."

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It's not the first time members of the community worried that they were under the eye of the government. Three years ago, on the same website, several people posted messages on a forum about concerns that the FBI were tapping their phones. A man who posted under the name Khurram was one of them, giving guidance to other worried members.

"Cellphones are much easier to listen into, a very common technique employed by CSIS/FBI etc.," the poster wrote. "Home lines can be tapped but you should hear a clicking noise – inform Bell Canada right away. They can check if it is tapped or not."

Dr. Sher, Mr. Ahmed and a third man, Ottawa resident Hiva Alizadeh, were arrested in a series of raids after a year-long investigation by Canada's spy agency and the RCMP. The three have been charged with conspiracy to facilitate an act of terrorism. Mr. Alizadeh has also been charged with funding terrorism and possession of an explosive device.

Dr. Sher is being held in isolation at the Ottawa Carleton Detention Centre. His lawyer, Anser Farooq, who represented members of the Toronto 18, said Dr. Sher was remaining positive, despite his situation. But his family was having a much harder time, Mr. Farooq said.

"It's hard for everybody," Mr. Farooq said. "It's really difficult."

Dr. Sher is married with three young daughters. His wife, Sheeba Shukoor, was interviewed earlier in the year by Radio-Canada about her decision to stop wearing a niqab. In the interview, Ms. Shukoor, 25, says she chose on her own, for religious and spiritual reasons, to wear the religious head-covering in the first place. But she had recently abandoned it at the request of Dr. Sher. He was ill-at-ease with the niqab because he worried people would think he forced her to wear it, she said.

In the interview, she said her marriage was "semi-arranged" – the two families contacted each other, but the pair had a chance to sit down and talk, in the presence of a chaperone, to see if they would make a good match.

Faisal Shahabuddin, 38, says he's known Dr. Sher since they were both young children in Montreal. They played ball-hockey together, and in 2009 travelled to Malton, Ont., to take part in the Salaam Cup, described on the tournament's website as "the Ultimate Muslim Ball Hockey Tournament."

It was at a ball-hockey game that Dr. Sher opened up about his 2005 trip to Pakistan to help with earthquake relief. Mr. Shahabuddin said Dr. Sher was saddened by the devastation and suffering he saw in the country, but was inspired by the people he met.

"He said the people were very nice, that even if they had nothing they wanted to help you," Mr. Shahabuddin said. "They were very satisfied with the little things over there – they're not very materialistic."

Mr. Shahabuddin also played hockey with Mr. Ahmed, one of the other men accused. He says Mr. Ahmed is more serious than Dr. Sher, but is very nice – dedicated to his faith and to sports.

Mr. Ahmed took a couple of courses at Concordia University but never graduated, a spokesperson for the university confirmed. Because of confidentiality agreements, the school could not detail what Mr. Ahmed studied or when.

Mr. Shahabuddin said generosity is a defining trait of Dr. Sher, and said that his friend has also volunteered for a month in a hospital in Israel and used to work regularly at a Montreal soup kitchen.

He was also generous with his friends and loved ones, Mr. Shahabuddin said. On the day Dr. Sher left for London, Ont., he left a gift on Mr. Shahabuddin's doorstep: a Dallas Cowboys football jersey.

"He knows I like them," Mr. Shahabuddin said.

Lawyers for the accused say they hope to set a bail hearing for their clients as soon as possible. "We're hoping to get [Dr. Sher] back reunited with his family as soon as possible," Mr. Farooq said. "And then get him vindicated."

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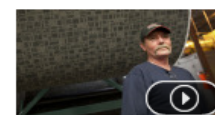
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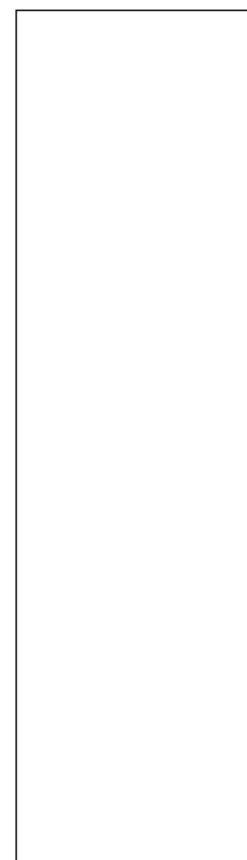
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