



### Six of 17 Arrested in Canada's Antiterror Sweep Have Ties to Mosque Near Toronto



Reporters talked to people entering Al-Rahman Islamic Center for Islamic Education yesterday. Gayyum Abdul Jamal, 43, was among six regulars at the mosque who were arrested.

By ANTHONY DEPALMA  
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MISSISSAUGA, Ontario, June 4 — At least 6 of the 17 people arrested by Canadian authorities in a sweeping counterterrorism operation over the weekend regularly attended the same storefront mosque in this middle-class Toronto suburb of modest brick rental townhouses and well-kept lawns, fellow worshippers said Sunday.

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Omar Farouq, president of the International Muslims Organization of Toronto, at a mosque vandalized after this weekend's arrests.

Members at a mosque prayer meeting on Sunday said the six fellow worshippers who were arrested included the eldest, Gayyum Abdul Jamal, 43, described by several acquaintances as a school bus driver and an active member of the mosque who frequently led prayers, made fiery speeches and influenced young people who attended the services.

"He spent a lot of time with youth," said Faheem Bukhari, a director of the Mississauga Muslim Community Center who sometimes attended prayers at the mosque. "He'd take them for soccer or bowling, and talk to them."

Mr. Bukhari said Mr. Jamal never openly embraced violence or talked about Al Qaeda, but was "very vocal and I believe could incite these young kids for jihad."

Anser Farooq, the lawyer representing Mr. Jamal and three other people from the Islamic center, said Mr. Jamal was not a leader of that mosque. "He's one of about a half-dozen people who lead prayers at the mosque," he said. Mr. Jamal was not part of any conspiracy, Mr. Farooq said.

As the authorities in Canada and the United States continued to piece together details from the lengthy investigation, a mosque in Toronto was vandalized overnight. More than a dozen windows in the building were broken, two panels of the glass front door were smashed and several cars parked in the rear of the building were damaged. Islamic leaders who met with the Toronto police chief on Sunday demanded a thorough investigation of the vandalism. They also urged calm and expressed hope that the 17 people arrested Friday night would receive a fair hearing.

The joint counterterrorism action by hundreds of agents of the local police, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and Canada's spy agency, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, has led to little public disclosure about the underground workings of suspected domestic terrorist cells that authorities say were determined to use homemade bombs against targets in southern Ontario. But the lack of detail has started to raise questions about the credibility of the charges and the actions of the police.

While many Canadians expressed relief upon hearing the news that a potentially devastating attack had been averted, some in the Muslim community were skeptical about the lack of specific charges. The 12 adults were charged with offenses under the Criminal Code of Canada. Authorities did not identify the potential targets.

Since Sept. 11, several police investigations against Muslims here have unraveled after arrests were made, which has left a bitter legacy within the Muslim community.

"People are suspicious and there's anger," said Aly Hindy, imam at the Salaheddin Islamic Center in Scarborough, an eastern suburb of Toronto with a sizable Muslim community. "We are being targeted not because of what we've done, but because of who we are and what we believe in."

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police said Saturday that the group of men "took steps to acquire" three tons of ammonium nitrate and bomb-making electronic components. But they left unclear whether the men had actually taken delivery of the material and had it in their possession when arrested, leading some here to question police tactics.

Mr. Hindy expressed puzzlement over how and where the suspects could have hidden three tons of fertilizer. "These guys are living in townhouses and apartments, in the city," he said. "Maybe the police tried to frame them, I don't know."

Canadian authorities have refused to provide any details of the suspected plot, but they have said they believe that the group represented "a real and serious threat." The extent to which undercover agents had a role in the arrests is unclear.

The Globe and Mail newspaper reported Sunday on its Web site that the supposed conspiracy dated to March 2005 and that men and youths in the group might have undergone training at sites in Fort Erie, Ont., near the United States border, and in Barrie, north of Toronto.

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The 12 adults arrested range in age from 19 to 43. Most live in Toronto or in this suburb of more than 700,000 people just to the northwest of the city. Two who reside in Kingston, about 160 miles east of Toronto, did not appear in court because they have been serving time in a Kingston prison on weapons possession charges, the Toronto Star reported.

Some Islamic community leaders in the Toronto area have raised concerns that the younger men may have been led to participate in a suspected plot by older, more radical Muslims, like Mr. Jamal.

"I do not think of him as an imam," said Tareeq Fatah, the communications director of the Muslim Canadian Congress. "People like him are freelancers. I don't fear imams. I fear freelancers who are creating a Islamist, supremacist cult."

The Islamic center that Mr. Jamal frequented was quiet Sunday. A class of Koran studies scheduled for midday was canceled. Situated in a small strip mall between the Hasty Market convenience store and the Café de Kahn, a Pakistani and Indian restaurant, the mosque is one of several Islamic centers that have sprung up in Mississauga in recent years. Neighbors said it had grown popular since it was founded about a decade ago. One said that on Friday nights the entrance was clogged with so many shoes that it was hard to walk on the sidewalk.

After midday prayer on Sunday, a group of about 10 men came out of the center and spoke to reporters gathered there. "There's no recruitment happening here," said one man, who gave his name as Sam LeI. He said the men from the mosque who were arrested were professionals and were not involved in terrorism. "This is a completely wrong allegation," he said.

At Mr. Jamal's home, a one-story rental unit in a large townhouse development nearby, a man who came to the door refused to answer questions. "Oh no, sorry," he said. A decal on the front door read "In the name of Allah we enter and in the name of Allah we leave and upon our Lord we place our trust."

Mr. Jamal, with short black hair and a short beard, was described by neighbors as a taciturn man who, in the four years or so he had lived in the townhouse, rarely spoke to anyone. "I have no complaints about him directly, but I can tell you he never fit in," said Jerry Tavares, who lives a few doors down. "But the thing that concerns me most is that he drives one of the school buses that take our kids to school." Heavily armed police raided the house on Friday night and took Mr. Jamal into custody. Neighbors said they saw the police removing computer equipment.

In other neighborhoods of Mississauga and the greater Toronto area, neighbors described the men who were arrested as serious professionals or confused youths who were not very likely to have been involved in a conspiracy. In a middle-class section of Toronto's east end, neighbors described another suspect, Steven Vikash Chand, 25, as a quiet man who, with several other Muslim men, kept odd hours.

"They sleep during the day and their activity is at night," said Jack Lovell, 56, who lives two doors down. "Absolutely no trouble whatsoever."

The arrests that shocked Canadians when they were announced Saturday morning did not appear to create much lingering fear. Roads near the Islamic center in Mississauga were closed Sunday morning for a road race. Downtown Toronto was shut down by a charity bicycle ride.

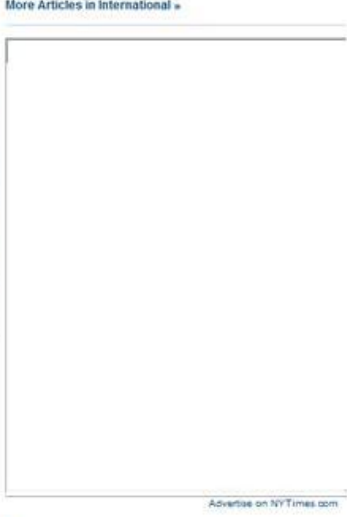
"Everybody is going about their normal business, which is the best way to combat terrorism," said Mayor David Miller. During the months-long investigation, the city added some security precautions, Mr. Miller said. But it has not beefed up security since the arrests.

In Muslim neighborhoods, news that the International Muslims Organization of Toronto, a mosque in the industrial neighborhood of Etobicoke, had been vandalized set off fears of a backlash. Toronto Police Chief Bill Blair met with Muslim community leaders, who expressed fears that the vandalism was linked to anti-Muslim resentment set off by the arrests.

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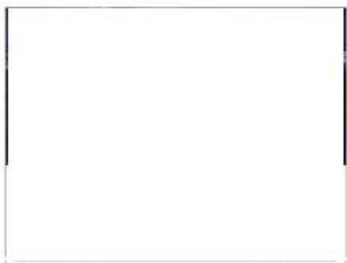


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