

FOR NOW, THE FEDERALES CAN SEE THEY'RE STUDENTS, NOT TERRORISTS.

San Jose Mercury News (California)

September 23, 2003 Tuesday MORNING FINAL EDITION

Copyright 2003 San Jose Mercury News All Rights Reserved

Section: EDITORIAL; Pg. 7B

Length: 561 words

Byline: JOE RODRIGUEZ, column

Body

Leaders of this war on terrorism can't find Osama Bin Laden or weapons of mass destruction, but they sure know how to tackle a high school football player.

Ahmad Amin, an 18-year-old Pakistani and tight end for the Cupertino High School Pioneers, was slapped with a deportation order recently from the federales. His older brother, Hassan, received a deportation order, too, only his came with a night in a county jail.

Their crime? Bad advice from an immigration lawyer a few years ago led to the expiration of their visitors visas. Even though they had applied for green cards, even though they had voluntarily registered after Sept. 11, 2001, even though their eldest brother is a U.S-born citizen, they couldn't catch a break from the hard-liners at the new Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

You never know. Any terrorist can hide under a football helmet.

"I just want to graduate from high school," Amin said at the time. "My dream is for this to be over."

And so it may.

Apparently, a dose of common sense surfaced at the Department of Homeland Security. The department has delayed the deportations, which will allow the Hassan brothers to apply for temporary visas. It means Ahmad can go back to high school and his brother can return to junior college without fear, at least for now.

"Maybe I can think about a university," Hassan said.

There may be a happy ending after all, but that's more relief than something to cheer about. Had the story of the Hassan brothers not appeared in the San Jose Mercury News, the boys might have been next in line for a one-way ticket to Pakistan.

Before Sept. 11, 2001, visa expirations rarely led to quick deportations, especially for law-abiding immigrants with relatives who have legal status here. These matters were taken care of administratively. All that changed after 9/11.

Once the visa of an Arab, Muslim or Middle Eastern man expires -- for whatever reason -- he becomes an instant suspect and target of post-attack paranoia.

About 13,000 primarily Arab and Middle Eastern men and boys face deportation after voluntarily registering with immigration officials, a program created by Homeland Security after learning that the 9/11 terrorists had held valid visas. Once deported, they are permanently barred from returning.

FOR NOW, THE FEDERALES CAN SEE THEY'RE STUDENTS, NOT TERRORISTS.

The war on terrorism is looking more like a war on immigrants. We might as well have the Statue of Liberty dump the torch and hold up a pair of handcuffs.

Soon after 9/11 and passage of the Patriot Act, the government rounded up more than 700 immigrants, held them in secret, and then deported scores of them on visa violations, none with links to terrorism. Then the FBI knocked on 8,000 doors for "voluntary" interrogations.

Last December, the agency formerly known as the Immigration and Naturalization Service jailed hundreds of Arab and Middle Eastern men in the Los Angeles area because it couldn't process the rush of immigrants meeting the reporting deadline. The agency admitted to bungling the process only after being accused of ethnic cleansing.

Now we have a high school student-athlete and his brother under watch. Their lives have been upended and the ideals of freedom and inclusion have been sacked.

I don't know what's scarier, immigration enforcement with unbridled power or immigration enforcement with half a brain.

Notes

JOE RODRIGUE is a Mercury News columnist.

Graphic

Photos (2);

PHOTO: SUSANNA FROHMAN -- MERCURY NEWS PHOTOGRAPHS

Ahmad Amin, a Cupertino High School senior, runs through a drill with the football team. He plays tight end.

PHOTO: SUSANNA FROHMAN -- MERCURY NEWS PHOTOGRAPHS

Hassan Amin and his mother, Tahira Manzur, watch Pakistani television in their San Jose apartment.

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Subject: PASSPORTS & VISAS (92%); IMMIGRATION (90%); TERRORISM (90%); SPECIAL INVESTIGATIVE FORCES (90%); NATIONAL SECURITY (89%); WAR ON TERROR (89%); SEPTEMBER 11 ATTACK (89%); **TERRORIST** ORGANIZATIONS (78%); HIGH SCHOOL SPORTS (78%); AL-QAEDA (78%); US PATRIOT ACT (78%); COMMUNITY COLLEGES (77%); SCHOOL SPORTS (77%); LAW ENFORCEMENT (76%); US FEDERAL GOVERNMENT (75%); WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION (73%); MUSLIMS & ISLAM (72%); LAWYERS (72%); CORRECTIONS (71%)

Company: SAN JOSE MERCURY NEWS INC (53%)

Organization: US DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY (55%); US DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY (55%)

FOR NOW, THE FEDERALES CAN SEE THEY'RE STUDENTS, NOT TERRORISTS.

Industry: HIGH SCHOOL SPORTS (78%); COMMUNITY COLLEGES (77%); WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION (73%); LAWYERS (72%)

Person: OSAMA BIN LADEN (58%)

Geographic: MIDDLE EAST (92%); PAKISTAN (79%); UNITED STATES (79%)

Load-Date: August 16, 2005

End of Document