

Registration Amnesty for Pakistanis Sought; Foreign Minister Says U.S. Program Has Fueled Major Political Crisis Back Home

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Body

Pakistani Foreign Minister Khursid Mahmood Kasuri **said** today that he would appeal to the Bush administration next week to exempt **Pakistani** residents of the **United States** from a **program** to register thousands of **foreign** males from more than 20 Muslim countries suspected of harboring terrorists.

The move reflects the growing frustration at **home** and abroad with a new Justice Department initiative to photograph and fingerprint male citizens of 25 countries, including Iraq, Iran, Syria, Sudan, Libya, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. The **registration program**, which requires males from these countries without permanent immigration status and older than 16 to register with the Immigration and Naturalization Service, is part of an effort to better screen **foreign** visitors to determine if they are linked to terrorist activities.

Kasuri **said** he would raise the issue along with other matters when he meets Secretary of State Colin L. Powell, national security adviser Condoleezza Rice and members of Congress next week. Kasuri and his advisers **said** Pakistan would also ask Washington to resume arms sales to Pakistan, lift a travel advisory warning **U.S.** citizens not to visit Pakistan and increase market access in the **United States** for **Pakistani** textiles.

Kasuri **said** the **registration program** has **fueled** a **major political crisis back home**, where it has been used to criticize the government's support for the **U.S.**-led war on terrorism. Pakistan, a key ally in that struggle but also **home** to al Qaeda members, did not deserve to have its citizens subjected to the new procedures, he **said**.

"**Pakistanis** have been a respectful and peaceful community in the **United States**," Kasuri **said** in an interview today in New York, where he attended a Security Council meeting Monday on terrorism. "They support their families not only here, but also **back home** in Pakistan. These people are just not the stuff that terrorists are made of."

Kasuri **said** that although he sympathized with **U.S.** efforts to prevent terrorist attacks, he **said** the **program** should be applied with "consideration and flexibility" to **Pakistanis**. "If they have been here for 10 or 15 years and are peaceful citizens and they've got no criminal record, then we would ask the American administration to grant some sort of **amnesty**."

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Pakistani authorities say the program could have an impact on about half of the approximately 500,000 Pakistanis who live in the United States, including about 200,000 in and around New York City. There are also large Pakistani communities in Los Angeles, Chicago and Houston. Pakistanis are required to register with the INS by Feb. 21.

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