

After fighting deportation for five years, green cards for Amin brothers

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Body

For **five years**, San Jose **brothers** Hassan and Ahmad **Amin** battled a **deportation** order to their native Pakistan **after** getting caught up in a controversial national security dragnet following the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

But last month, they once again stood before a judge and finally received the news that freed them from an immigration ordeal that threatened to separate them from the mother who brought her sons here a decade ago: They became legal permanent residents.

"I never want to see another courtroom again," Hassan **Amin** declared. "No more court dates!"

The **Amin brothers** were among 14,000 men and boys from mostly Arab and Muslim countries who were ordered **deported** in the **years after** the 2001 terror attacks as part of a government plan to track the movement of foreigners. More than 80,000 reported to local immigration offices to register; hundreds were detained and thousands more were ordered **deported**, mostly for minor visa violations.

Today, thousands are still facing **deportation, years after** the program was abruptly halted by the government. The Amins, however, won their **fight** to stay with their mother, a legal resident, thanks to the persistence of an attorney who has been critical of the tracking program.

"It's such a relief," said Ahmad **Amin**, who this semester started studying finance at San Jose State University.

Within days of getting approved for **green cards**, the **brothers** applied for Social Security **cards**. Soon, they'll be applying for driver's licenses. Now that he's got a work permit, Hassan **Amin** has gone job hunting.

After graduating with a finance degree last **year**, he was unable to take a job while the **deportation** case was pending.

Mercury News stories in 2003 and 2006 detailed the plight of the **Amin brothers**, both from San Jose, whose young lives were upended by the national security program meant to catch terrorists.

The **Amin brothers**, who had pending **green card** applications through their mother now a U.S. citizen were ordered **deported** because they had overstayed their visitors' visas **after** arriving in the United States in 1998.

Their lawyer argued they had a right to be in the country because their mother had acquired a **green card** while the **brothers** were minors. But their efforts to remain were thwarted in 2003 when they reported to the San Jose immigration office for special registration. An immigration official ordered the **brothers deported**.

Hassan **Amin**, 19 at the time, was detained overnight in the Yuba County Jail. Like a criminal parolee, Ahmad **Amin**, then 17, was required to report monthly to an immigration officer.

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There's anecdotal evidence from immigration lawyers that many who registered, like the **Amin brothers**, resolved their immigration cases. Others have been **deported**, and others left on their own.

The number of people still **fighting deportation** is unknown, but James Zogby, president of the Arab American Institute, estimates there are thousands.

"How many are caught in this hellish situation, this limbo of fear?" said Zogby, whose Washington group has been negotiating with the Department of Homeland Security to help resolve the special registration cases. "There's no clarity."

Homeland Security officials did not have numbers on the status of those facing **deportation** as a result of special registration. The government ended the program late in 2003, a **year after** it began, replacing it with a program that requires visitors from certain countries to be fingerprinted and photographed at airports.

"I'm glad it's over," said Imran Mughal, a **brother** of the Amins who is U.S. citizen. "Now they can look forward to new challenges."

On a recent trip to San Francisco, the **Amin brothers** presented small cakes and a box of dried fruit mixed with rosewater-scented sugar bits to Banafsheh Akhlaghi, the immigration attorney who **fought** for the **brothers**. They also handed her a small red bag and a **card** from their mother, Tahira Manzur.

"This is too much," she said. "Am I going to cry when I read this?"

Learning of the **brothers**' case outraged Akhlaghi, an outspoken critic of government national security measures **after** Sept. 11. She joined a chorus of national critics from the American Civil Liberties Union, the American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee and a host of immigrant advocacy groups in denouncing the special registration program because, they said, it targeted Arabs and Muslims.

"It was just a way to legalize racial profiling," said Samina Faheem, founding executive director of the American Muslim Voice, a Fremont non-profit that started a national hot line for special registration cases.

Hundreds of Pakistanis from the Bay Area and elsewhere were **deported after** registering, Faheem said. Some left voluntarily.

For **five years**, Manzur has worried only about one thing: Will her sons be **deported** to Pakistan?

"Now," she said, "what am I going to worry about?"

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Graphic

Brothers Hassan, 25, left and Ahmad **Amin**, 23, pose for a portrait in Santa Clara, Sept. 3, 2008. Originally from Pakistan, the Ahmad **brothers** have been trying for **years** to get their **green cards** and have finally succeeded. (David M. Barreda/Mercury News)

Brothers Hassan, 25, left and Ahmad **Amin**, 23, pose for a portrait in Santa Clara, Sept. 3, 2008. Originally from Pakistan, the Ahmad **brothers** have been trying for **years** to get their **green cards** and have finally succeeded. (David M. Barreda/Mercury News)

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