

The perpetrators of 9/11 have not just killed innocents, but have started the process where civil liberties are now being killed in the US, and each Muslim taken as a suspect

9/11
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THE phrase "So much has changed since September 11," has acquired cliché status. And yet, like all clichés, it is annoyingly true. Prior to 9/11, the American landscape was sporting more minarets than it ever had, and Islamic schools attached to the mosques bustled with activity.

If a Muslim was harassed, one had to just call CAIR and they'd take care of everything. To the extent that, after education from CAIR, Nike decided to withdraw a shoe that it had already marketed, for the word "air" on the back of the shoe looked as though "Allah" had been written instead. The Eid stamp designed by an American Muslim postal

employee was inaugurated in September 2001, just prior to the 9/11 attack. There was general acceptance of the sizable number of six million as the Muslim population of American. And, like a giant that can only make slow moves, America was beginning to recognize its Muslims as a productive, disciplined and moral minority.

Like all minorities, Muslims tend to conglomerate in the same neighbourhoods and socialized with ethnically similar people. We were able to pledge allegiance to the same flag and at the same time maintain our religious and cultural heritage. We essentially patented the phrase the "Mosaic of America" — a unified whole of

American mosaic



have committed this slaughter of innocents, as well as braving the initial backlash against them, Muslim Americans did venture

out and most in their own ways tried to dispel the misconceptions about Islam.

The American government supposedly caught snoozing — for apparently there was intelligence information prior to 9/11 that should have been followed up on — decided after the event to turn on the heat. Operation TIPS (Terrorism Information and Prevention System) was introduced by Attorney General Ashcroft in January 2002, and to be operational in the fall of this year, about now I guess. To think that my mailman, who waves and smiles and ensures the \$50 yearly Christmas gift that I give him, will be snooping and reporting “all suspicious activity” is enough to make me want to cut off that tip!

The Florida fiasco of Aiman Gheyth, Kambiz Butt and Omer Choudhry, discussing bringing a car down to Florida while at a restaurant and being reported by waitress Eunice Stone as planning as terrorist attack, is the USA Patriot Act at work. The young men were detained for 17 hours, Interstate 75 was closed down and the hospitals where they were to do their internships told them to go elsewhere.

A local TV station wanted to interview me after this incident with the premise of the interview being whether Muslims should now be afraid. Muslims should be concerned, Muslims should censor their speech, Muslims should do shoulder checks in dark alleys, Muslims should be responsible in their emails avoiding key words, for the Carnivore software

is geared to pick up those emails where these are used. And once you are on the list, it is a lifetime commitment.

As far as I am concerned, I am essentially out of luck. You name it and I am on it — lists, herbivores, carnivores, global positioning satellites, and now even the mailman! Darn! And to add insult to an injury, if I was picked up on suspicion of suspicious activity, I would not get the Miranda rights read to me — no charges. I am guilty and until the machinery of the government processes my case, I could be menopausal!

My mother wanted to write a letter to the editor after an infuriating dose of television, and I suggested that since my neck was already exposed, why don't I write the letter for we should just use one neck per family, or one neck per town. Why waste the resources of the governmental monitoring agencies and why sacrifice more necks than we need to. Jokes and hysteria aside, this is the reality on the ground, to use another Bushism. We were accused of not socializing and jumping in the melting pot, and now when we just sit and discuss our plans for bringing a car down to Florida, we are thrown in jail and accused of planning to bring another tower down.

I am reminded of the Gulag Archipelago written by Alexander Solzhenitsyn, where family members spied on one another and the KGB deported people to Siberia. Till now in Ashcroftian America, we have friends and neighbours, office

colleagues, mail men and truck drivers. Will Ashcroft recruit my children next? I do understand the government's responsibility, as well as the embarrassment of possibly having shirked it. I agree that Muslims should have interacted more with their neighbours. I also concede that in most other countries of the world, especially the Muslim world, free speech is essentially a Latin concept, and incarceration and elimination the norm. And, yet, to paint all Americans with the Osama bin Laden brush is inane. The perpetrators of 9/11 have not just killed innocents but have started the process where civil liberties are now being killed.

This is indeed a watershed moment in the history of the world. The Bush government needs to maintain perspective and not go overboard, for in that process we will hit at the very foundation of this nation: democracy, free speech and civil liberties.

To my brethren in Islam, I will say that we must follow the Sunnah of the Prophet (PBUH), and tread the path of moderation and place all our faith in Allah. Interact with neighbours, distribute copies of the Quran, have interfaith dialogue, present Islam in your children's schools, but don't run off at the mouth. And, please, in public places avoid all mention of terrorism, explosives, bomb, blast, etc. You never know a Eunice Stone may be glued to the booth next to you and, of course, she'll squeal.