

# Muslim profiling now routine in US

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**WASHINGTON:** The profiling of people with Muslim names now appears to be routine at American airports and other points of entry into the country.

A Muslim name almost invariably triggers a match of some sort in the massive databases that the giant Department of Homeland Security maintains. Once that happens, the person is asked to step aside for additional screening that can take hours. People have missed flights and have been even turned back. The profiling takes place regardless of the fact whether the person so chosen is an American citizen or holds a Green Card, or permanent legal residence. A person who triggers a match or a near-match in the database and is cleared after questioning and further checks, has to go through the same drill next time he lands at an American airport or turns up at a land border crossing. The officers are not empowered to let him through despite the fact that he has already been cleared as "clean."

A Pakistani, who holds a Green Card and has lived and worked in America almost his entire life has brought up this annoying and humiliating experience of being profiled in an op-ed article in Tuesday's Washington Post.

Omar Khan is the son of former Pakistani diplomat Najmul Saqib Khan. He grew up here - his father was at one time Pakistan's Consul General in New York - and went to Stanford,

one of the top American universities. He is married to an American and he works for an international consulting firm, a job that requires him to travel abroad 15 to 20 times a year.

Omar Khan writes that when he returned from Canada in October 2004, he was taken aside for "secondary inspection" which took so long that he missed his connecting flight "Apparently airline databases respond only to names. In parts of the world, Omar Khan is as common a name as John Smith. Although I have an uncommon middle name, Saqib, the database isn't that sophisticated. Still, stopping every Omar Khan doesn't seem very efficient to me.

I am a consultant, and I think in terms of effectiveness and efficiency."

Omar Khan was told by the airport official that he should expect to spend two to three hours each time attempting to get back into the country of which he is a legal resident. "This struck me as insane. How are we made safer by repeated security checks because of an indiscriminate emphasis on generic names?" he asks. The "pig-headedness" of the Homeland Security system lies in its refusal to mark a person once cleared into the date base as "cleared" so that he does not have to be put through the grinder every time he lands in the country. Next time Omar Khan returned to the US, as predicted, there had been no update to the database. It took more

than two hours again. "The exasperated immigration officers told me that they had to process the same people, even if they could verify that they had already done so, because they weren't allowed to use their judgment. One of their own supervisors had been detained for more than three hours, even after showing his credentials," Omar Khan writes.

He suggests that checking the same people on the same route each week is a "sheer waste of resources." He further suggests that US database management should allow classification by more than first and last name. Anyone can figure out a way of listing a cleared person's passport or Green Card number for immediate future clearance.

He points out that non-residents coming into the United States are photographed and fingerprinted, a 30-second process. "It would be simple to do the same for those pulled aside for secondary inspection, even citizens or residents (if there are civil liberties concerns, people could be offered this choice). That way, the next time, each person's photo and fingerprint, correlated if necessary with ID, would show that he or she previously had been cleared. Limited resources could be better deployed. When our ports are not fully protected, our borders are inadequately guarded, and only a portion of imported cargo is X-rayed, it seems to me we have higher priorities than processing the same people repeatedly." **KHALID HASAN**