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Details Emerge About Suspects in Canada Bomb Plot

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MISSISSAUGA, Canada, June 4 — Several of the people arrested by Canadian authorities in a huge counterterrorism sweep over the weekend regularly attended the same storefront mosque in a middle-class neighborhood of modest brick rental townhouses and well-kept lawns.



Steve Russell/Toronto Star, via Associated Press
A police officer stood guard in Pickering, Ontario, on Friday.

The eldest of the 17 Canadian residents arrested in the sweep, Qayyum Abdul Jamal, 43, was described by his lawyer as an active member of the mosque, the Al-Rahman Islamic Center for Islamic Education, though not its leader.

"He's on the board, he's there regularly, but he's not an imam," said Anser Farooq, the lawyer representing Mr. Jamal and three other people from this Toronto suburb who were arrested Friday night and who also attended the same mosque. "He's one of about a half dozen people who lead prayers at the mosque."

Authorities in Canada and the United States continued today to piece together information from the lengthy investigation that culminated in one of the largest counterterrorism strikes in North America since the Sept. 11 attacks.

Canadian officials said the arrests foiled a series of planned terrorist attacks in southern Ontario. None of the targets were identified, but Canadian authorities said the Toronto city subway system had not been among them.

Police and intelligence officials made the arrests late Friday night and early Saturday morning after the group accepted

delivery of three tons of ammonium nitrate, a common fertilizer than can be explosive if combined with fuel oil.

The same type of fertilizer was used in the 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City that killed 168 people. In that explosion, one ton of ammonium nitrate was used to make the bomb.

American officials in Washington and New York said they had been aware of the investigation and were informed of the arrests. American counterterrorism officials believe that some of the Canadians arrested might have had limited contact with two men from Georgia who were arrested earlier this year and charged with supporting terrorism or providing false information.

At a news conference on Saturday, Luc Portelance, the assistance director for operations at the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, said the men "appear to have become adherents of a violent ideology inspired by Al Qaeda." But Canadian officials said there is no evidence linking the two groups.

Islamic community leaders in the Toronto area were surprised by the arrests and raised concerns that some of the younger men picked up in the sweep may have been led to participate in a suspected plot by older, more radical Muslims, like Mr. Jamal.

"I do not think of him as an imam," Tareeq Fatah, the communications director of the Muslim Canadian Congress, said. "People like him are freelancers. I don't fear imams. I fear freelancers who are creating a Islamacist, supremacist cult."

The Al-Rahman Islamic Center for Islamic Education that Mr. Jamal frequented was locked and quiet this morning. A class on the Koran that was scheduled for midday today was canceled. Located in a small strip mall between the Hasty Market and the Café de Kahn, the mosque is one of several Islamic centers that have sprung up in Mississauga in recent years.

Neighbors said the Islamic Center had grown very popular in the last few years. One neighbor said that on Friday nights there are so many pairs of shoes lined up outside the entrance that it is difficult to walk on the sidewalk to get into the stores in the strip mall.

Inside the center, bookshelves line one wall. Announcements posted on bulletin boards at the entrance announce regular prayer times, household items for sale and the center's financial report.

A back door, marked "Sister's Entrance," was locked. Alongside the door were several prayer mats and carpets that had been left out in the heavy rain that soaked the area on Saturday.

At Mr. Jamal's home, only a few minutes from the mosque, a man who came to the door refused to answer any questions. "Oh no, sorry," he said and shut the door. A decal attached to the door read, "In the name of Allah we enter and in the name of Allah we leave and upon our Lord we place our trust."

Inside a black Acura sedan in the driveway was a book: "A brief Illustrated Guide to Understanding Islam."

Neighbors described Mr. Jamal as a taciturn man who, in the four years or so he has lived in the townhouse complex, rarely spoke to anyone. The unit he rents is accessible to the handicapped, but neighbors said no one there uses a wheelchair.

Heavily armed police swarmed around the house on Friday night and took Mr. Jamal into custody. Neighbors said police also were seen taking out computer equipment.

The arrests that seemed to shock Canadians when they were announced by the Royal Canadian Mounted police on Saturday morning did not appear to create much lingering fear in the Toronto area outside the neighborhoods where the raids took place. The roads near the Islamic Center in Mississauga was closed this morning for a road race. And downtown Toronto was shut down by a charity bicycle ride.

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