

New York teenager deported to Bangladesh

FBI held girl as “suicide bomber” suspect

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Tashnuba Hayder, a 16-year-old girl from New York City’s borough of Queens, was deported last month to Bangladesh—a country that she does not know—after being held for several weeks by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The FBI suspected Tashnuba, the daughter of Muslim immigrant parents who has lived in the United States since she was in kindergarten, of being a suicide bomber.

In a report based largely on interviews with Tashnuba and her family, the *New York Times* June 17 presented chilling details of this case of police-state intimidation and anti-Muslim persecution. FBI agents posing as youth counselors descended upon the girl in her bedroom last March, rifling through Tashnuba’s diary and school papers. The agents pounced on a diagram prepared for a home-school assignment on religion with the word “suicide” highlighted, claiming it was evidence of the teenager’s interest in blowing herself up.

Tashnuba apparently came to the FBI’s attention as a result of government spying on an Internet chat room where speeches of Sheik Omar Bakri Muhammed, a London-based Islamic cleric, were posted. The sheik is said to encourage support for the Iraqi insurgency and “global jihad,” though he denies recruiting anyone to become a suicide bomber. And Tashnuba has insisted that her exchanges in the chat room were on other topics, such as the nature of a utopian state under Islamic law.

Nevertheless, Tashnuba, together with another Muslim girl, Adama Bah, native of Guinea, were hauled away to a maximum-security juvenile detention center in rural Pennsylvania. There, she was strip-searched and aggressively interrogated by the FBI Joint Terrorism Task Force for two weeks without the presence of lawyers, or her frantic parents being

informed of her whereabouts.

Adama was later released under a gag order, but Tashnuba was freed only on the condition that she immediately leave the US for Bangladesh. She has not been to that country since she was a toddler, does not speak the language, and barely knows the relatives with whom she now lives, four to a room.

“I feel like I’m on a different planet,” the adolescent told the *Times* in Dhaka. “It just hit me. How everything happened—it’s like, ‘Oh, my God.’”

The *Times* describes the spirited and articulate 16-year old showing considerable courage in her confrontation with agent Foria Younis, a 37-year-old secular Muslim woman of Pakistani descent described as a “gun-toting, door-kicking member of the FBI’s counter-terrorist squad,” in a profile by the *Daily Telegraph* of London.

“They tried to twist my mind,” Tashnuba said. “They had their little tactics—start with nice questions, try to get more severe. In the end, when I did cry they were, like, mocking me.”

“The FBI tried to say I didn’t have a life—like, I wasn’t the typical teenager,” Tashnuba bitterly told the *Times*. “They thought I was anti-American because I didn’t want to compromise, but in my high school ethics class we had communists, Democrats, Republicans, Gothics—all types. In all our classes, we were told, ‘You speak up, you give your opinion, and you defend it.’”

The *Times* reports: “A government psychiatrist concluded that she was neither suicidal nor homicidal, and recommended her release. But the agents, Tashnuba said, kept ‘trying to link me to the psychological state.’ They zeroed in on the single artificial rose in her bedroom (her little sister’s); a psychology course (required by her correspondence

program), and an essay she wrote about the Department of Homeland Security (assigned as a writing evaluation by her tutor).

“The tutor, Asmaa Samad, recalled the essay as innocuous: ‘It said nothing derogative, nothing unpatriotic.’ Tashnuba said agents seized on one part. ‘I wrote, ‘I feel like Muslims are being targeted, they’re being outcasted more.’” And she defended the right of Muslims to fight religious persecution.

Lacking any credible evidence of terrorist activity, the FBI instead seized on Tashnuba’s immigration status—her parents’ application for asylum has languished for a decade—as grounds for holding and effectively deporting her, allowing them to bypass criminal and juvenile proceedings.

Although the *New York Times* lends dubious credibility to the FBI’s assertion that it genuinely considered Tashnuba as an imminent threat to the security of the United States, the case is has unraveled as quickly as most of the FBI’s other terrorism busts.

The FBI has come up empty handed in virtually every terrorist plot it claims to have uncovered since the September 11, 2001 attacks. Some of the cases are wildly improbable and, if they ever get to court, have been thrown out. For instance, the case against four Arab immigrants alleged to be “sleeper cell” in Dearborn, Michigan ended in debacle in 2004. The prosecution’s key evidence consisted of an amateur film made on a school trip and a doodle of the Middle East.

As usual, the *Times*’ criticism of the FBI is focused on mismanagement. Mike German, an agent who left the bureau a year ago after a long career and has publicly complained that FBI management problems impeded terror investigations after 9/11, is quoted as saying, “If all these chat rooms are being monitored, and we’re running down all these people because of what they’re saying in chat rooms, then these are resources we’re not using on real threats.”

But, as the WSWs recently pointed out, the FBI is not the Keystone Cops, bumbling off in all the wrong directions. The detention of Tashnuba Hayder reflects a definite policy aimed at intimidating domestic opposition and stoking anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant suspicions in order to justify the arrogation of police-state powers under the USA Patriot Act.

Just two days before the *Times* ran its story, the so-

called “library provision” of the Patriot Act—which allows federal investigators access to the records of libraries and bookstores, including Internet usage on public computers—was blocked in the House by a vote of 238-to-187. This vote may still be overturned by presidential veto, and rest of the Patriot Act was passed.

Additionally it was published on June 23 that both the Social Security Administration and Internal Revenue Service had made their records containing detailed personal information of US citizens available to federal terrorism investigators.

As popular opposition grows to these measures, the case of Tashnuba Hayder is an ominous warning that techniques such as those used in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, where prisoners—including minors—are held indefinitely as “enemy combatants” and refused due process, can be introduced within the United States itself.



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