

## Pakistani gets five years for blades in carry-on at D/FW

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FORT WORTH \_ Federal prosecutors believe that security screeners at Dallas/Fort Worth Airport foiled a Pakistani national's attempt last March to evade and test airport security for potential terrorist aims.

Authorities found 32 double-edged razor blades tucked in a coiled belt inside a cardboard box in Fazal Karim's carry-on luggage March 5, 2003.

A few months later, a federal jury convicted Karim of carrying and attempting to carry concealed dangerous weapons in air transportation and of making false statements about his immigration status. Karim, who is a Canadian citizen, was an undocumented immigrant at the time of his arrest.

On Monday, U.S. District Judge Terry Means of Fort Worth sentenced Karim to 63 months in prison and ordered that he be turned over to immigration authorities for deportation after completing his sentence. Means also ordered Karim to pay a \$20,000 fine.

The judge rejected a maximum sentence of 30 years requested by Assistant U.S. Attorney Fred Schattman, who argued that Karim carried out a test run to aid terrorism.

At a hearing in November, a federal agent testified that the names and phone numbers of the current directors of the civil aviation systems in Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates were found in Karim's address book \_ 10 years after he worked as a computer programmer for the Pakistan Civil Aviation Authority.

"It was indicative of his familiarity with air transportation security systems," Schattman said. "We believe he was testing security measures."

Karim, 37, has steadfastly denied that he had any criminal intentions or terrorist ties. In a brief statement to the judge, he accepted responsibility for making a false statement about his immigration status, but added: "I did not test any security whatsoever. I did not have any intention to harm anybody in this country or anywhere else."

A spokesman for the Council on American-Islamic Relations said in an earlier interview that Karim's prosecution fit a pattern of singling out travelers from predominantly Muslim nations after the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001. Karim's defense attorney agreed.

"I don't believe the government would have taken the position that it took if Mr. Karim were not Muslim," said defense attorney Marlo Cadeddu of Dallas, who represented Karim in the sentencing phase of his case.

Cadeddu said she was grateful that Means did not impose the maximum sentence, but she had hoped for a more lenient sentence of between eight and 14 months.

"I don't believe the government proved that Mr. Karim recklessly disregarded the safety of human life," she said.

In announcing his sentence, Means told Karim, "This is not meant to make you an example."

Means said he sought to hand down a sentence that would accomplish punishment and deterrence and fit the offense.

The judge said he had reviewed a support letter with 60 signatures from Karim's Islamic community in Houston. A letter from Madrasah Islamiah described Karim as a family man of good character and good morals, who was very active and well-liked in the community.

Means reminded Karim that he had entered the country illegally.

Karim's prosecution and sentence unraveled the life he built in Houston for his wife, Asia Karim, and their three young children. The couple ran three cellphone stores.

His wife and children are now living with relatives in Pakistan, Cadeddu said, after they were initially deported to Canada, where his wife could not find work.

When Karim returned to Texas last March, he had a one-way, \$3,069 ticket from Karachi to Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, then

Paris to D/FW and finally to Houston.

In a jailhouse interview last summer, Karim said he was exhausted and sick after a 37-hour trip returning from the hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia that Muslims are expected to complete at least once in a lifetime.

"I don't know what's going on; I was scared," Karim said about why he lied to immigration officials that he was a tourist visiting friends in Houston. Karim insisted he never looked inside the cardboard box and did not know it contained the razor blades.

But Karim first attracted the attention of security screeners at D/FW by his suspicious behavior and then kept changing his story under questioning, Schattman said.

Security officers first noticed that Karim appeared to distance himself from his carry-on bag. After placing the bag on the conveyor belt leading to an X-ray machine, Karim did not walk through the adjacent magnetometer but selected one farther away.

He offered FBI agents three different explanations for the blades, Schattman said. First, Karim said he used the blades to shave the bottom of his full beard. Then he said they were for a friend in Houston. Finally, he said he did not know the blades were in the bag.

Transportation Security Administration officials told prosecutors that it was the only case on record where double-edged razor blades were confiscated from a passenger and screeners could not find a razor in the luggage.

Schattman rejected any notions that Karim was targeted because of his Muslim background.

"This case was prosecuted because Mr. Karim was a foreign national who was in the country illegally and attempted to evade and test the air security system," Schattman said.